

**THE APPLICABILITY OF THE TRANSLATABILITY
AND INTERPRETATION THEORY OF SANNEH AND
BEDIAKO: THE CASE OF THE EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN NAMIBIA, IN NORTHERN
NAMIBIA.**

**BY
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March 2010**

DECLARATION

I, Martin Ngodji, hereby declare that this whole thesis, unless otherwise specifically shown to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

Signature: _____

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) particularly to the pastors and theologians, in their struggle of making the biblical message relevant and acceptable to all God's people in the world.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ATR	African Traditional Religion
BC	Before Christ/ Before Common Era
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
BSSA	Bible Society of South Africa
EASA	ELCIN AIDS Action
ELCF	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland
ELCIN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELOC	Evangelical Lutheran Church Ovambo-Kavango
EYHPP	ELCIN Youth HIV Prevention Project
FELM	Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
FMS	Finnish Missionary Society
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
IRV	Antiretroviral
KJV	King James Version
PLAN	People Liberation Army of Namibia
PLWHA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
RMS	Rhenish Missionary Society
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
TEV	Today's English Version
UBS	United Bible Societies

ABSTRACT

This thesis contends that the translatability and interpretation theories are what allow the Bible and its message to be accepted by and relevant to all people in the world, including those in the northern belt of Namibia, among Ovawambo and Okavango communities. This thesis deals with the applicability of the translatability theories in the process of the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Rukwangali, a project undertaken by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).

The thesis starts with the introduction, which shows how the work was carried out, and its objectives are described in chapter one. Chapter two deals with the translatability and interpretation theories of the Bible as represented by Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako. Lamin Sanneh (1989) and Kwame Bediako (1997) speak of the translatability theory of the Bible and of Christianity as a whole, which allows everyone to speak of the wonderful work of God in his/her own tongue. Translatability is the theoretical framework of this thesis. The theory aims at translating the Bible from one language to another, and goes further to include the social sphere of the person. The translatability theory is what makes the translation process in any vernacular language relevant and acceptable. The translatability theory not only includes the language, but also the cultural aspects of the people.

Chapters three and four form the historical background of the origin of the Ovawambo and Okavango people, their culture and belief and practice. One cannot make a proper translation without knowing the language, culture and the context of the people concerned. The history of the translation work done among the Ovawambo and Okavango people by missionaries from Finland and Germany and indigenous translators respectively and at different intervals is also covered. Chapters five to seven examine different challenges that translatability posed to the process of the translation of the Bible in the ELCIN. The translatability theory challenges the Bible as the Word of God, as it stands; it challenges the exclusiveness of African Traditional Religion and Christianity and allows them to form dialogue. It also allows for the challenge of new situations like the liberation of women and the HIV/AIDS

pandemic with regard to the translation of the Bible. The biblical message must be more inclusive than exclusive.

The translatability and interpretation theory make this possible. Many theologians within Africa and beyond it contributed significantly to the theory of translatability and developed it from different perspectives. Translatability rejects Christian uniformity and makes it universal. The whole aim of the translatability theory is to make the Bible, the Word of God, and theology as a whole relevant and inclusive to all people. This is what took place in the northern belt of Namibia among Ovandonga, Ovakwanyama and Okavango people. The process of translation into African languages allows an African heritage to be found in Christianity. There is no culture, which is superior to another, as there is no language superior to another. While the aim of missionary enterprises was to Christianize Africa, this aim has been transformed to that of developing Africanized Christianity through the translatability principle, and therefore Christianity is now an African religion as well.

This study calls those who think that African languages and cultures are worthless in matters pertaining to the Bible and its message to recognize the richness in African languages. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage the ELCIN to do more translations of the Bible in many if not all languages in her constituency, in order to cross the bridge of “foreignness” and exclusivity of African Christianity.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Introduction

Translatability is a theory introduced by Lamin Sanneh and developed and supported by Kwame Bediako and other theologians in Africa. Translatability means the state of being or able to be translated. In this context the Bible as the Word of God, as discussed in chapter five, is the subject of the study of translation. The translatability theory accommodates language, culture and tradition in the process of the translation of Christianity and the Scriptures. In this thesis the researcher examines whether or not the translatability theory was applied in the process of translating the Bible into vernacular languages in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (hereafter ELCIN). The focus of the research is specifically on the northern belt of Namibia, and Ovawambo¹ and Okavango people respectively (see Map I). When referring to African language terms this thesis uses, Oshiwambo prefixes, oshi-, ova- and oka-, instead of the English article ‘the’, as Munyika also suggested (Munyika 2004: 11)

Translation goes hand-in-hand with interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics will, therefore, not be left untouched in this study. The term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek messenger god, Hermes. Mueller-Vollmer describes the work of Hermes as follows:

In order to deliver the messages of the gods, Hermes had to be conversant in their idiom as well as in that of the mortals for whom the message was destined. He had to interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he could proceed to translate, and explicate their intention to mortals (1985:1).

Biblical scholars have adopted Hermes’ approach to biblical interpretation, a method termed hermeneutics. According to Gillespie, Hermeneutics is derived from a Latin word *hermeneutica*, coined from the Greek word *hermeneia*, meaning interpretation (1986:193). These terms form a technical term for the theory undergirding exegesis as the practice of interpretation (Gillespie 1986:193). Therefore, a biblical hermeneutics

¹ Ovamboland is where Ovawambo live and is divided now into four regions namely: Ohangwena, Oshikoto, Oshana and Omusati. Ovakwanyama occupied a large part of Ohangena region and Ovandongwa occupied part of Oshana and Oshikoto regions (see Map II).

theory is a method that helps people to understand the biblical message in its original setting and apply it to the present situation and thus to make it relevant. Hermeneutics takes us back into the historical background of the text, brings us to the present and the context of the text, and carries us to the future. According to Nürnberger the ultimate goal of biblical hermeneutics is to reach an authoritative and relevant proclamation of the Word of God for our times. 'Authoritative' means that the Word of God creates, sustains and empowers, whereas 'relevant' means that the divine Word responds redemptively to contemporary human needs (2002:39). That means that the Word of God must always be authoritative and relevant. This is fully discussed in chapter two.

Translatability and interpretation are related to each other in this study because they are making the Word of God understandable in any language and in any context. Whenever translation is taking place, interpretation is also taking place.

1. 2 Background to and motivation for the research

The Christian religion emerged from Judaism. From its inception Christianity was created from a multiform of traditions, religions and cultures. The Christian religion developed in a crucible of dialogue and ideological conflict involving very different viewpoints and it will continue to develop in that way in many parts of the world where it has been introduced and planted (Van der Heever & Scheffler 2001:243). With Jews and Muslims, Christians are called "People of the Book". What makes Christianity different from other religions, Islam in particular, is its translatability principle (Sanneh 1989:214,215; Maluleke 2000: 102).

Translatability, according to Wolfgang Iser, is a key concept for understanding the encounter between cultures and interactions within cultures. Translation is usually associated with converting one language into another, be it foreign, technical, professional, or otherwise. Translatability however refers not only to languages that have to be translated, but also to the many different cultures that have to come into close contact with one another, calling for mutual understanding both in terms of the culture, and in terms of the specificity pertaining to the culture encountered (2005). That means that translatability makes it possible for culture to interact and form a mutual understanding instead of rejecting each other. Translatability is not a technical

term, but a concept, which makes the process of translation a meaningful one. Because of a lack of understanding of the Bible in any given language and culture, the applicability of the translatability theory is necessary. The Translatability theory closes the gap and helps with foreignness in the Christian religion.

The translatability of Christianity and its Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God, enables the Christian religion to spread and the Bible to be translated and to be accepted worldwide, including in Africa. Therefore the translation of the Scripture and Christianity and its adoption by any cultural, race, gender and linguistic group has played an important role in bringing the message of God to Africa (Sanneh 1989:51). What occurred in other parts of Africa in the translation of Christianity and the Bible was mirrored by what took place in Northern Namibia in the ELCIN. Christian missionary entrepreneurs made translation one of their priorities. Finnish missionaries who arrived in Northern Namibia from Finland from 1870 onwards brought Christianity and started with the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages (Nambala 1994:81-82). The ELCIN later took up the challenge of translation and managed to translate the Bible into three official languages of the area, namely: Oshindonga (1954), Oshikwanyama (1974) and Kwangali (1987). Currently the Bible is being translated into Oludhimba (Laukkanen 2002:19). Having the Bible available in vernacular languages enables the members of the ELCIN to read the Word of God in their own tongues. It also gives Africans a chance to hear God speaking in their own languages, not only through dreams and seers. As Maluleke claims, God speaks to Africans in their own language, giving rise to a vernacular local Christianity (2000:102).

Bediako points out that the single most important element for building an indigenous Christian tradition is therefore having the Scripture in the vernacular languages of the people. He further adds to this argument that there is “no more important single explanation for the massive presence of Christianity on the African continent than the availability of the Scriptures in many African languages” (1999:62). Maluleke agrees with Bediako, stating that the Bible is certainly the most widely available and most widely translated book on the continent (2000:91). Therefore the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of ELCIN has given members an opportunity to interpret and to contextualize the biblical message. The researcher concurs with

Bediako that Christianity in Africa attained this vernacular status, and thus became internalized considerably more quickly than elsewhere, and therefore constitutes one of its most remarkable signs of hope in the twentieth century (1999:61).

The ELCIN Constitution stipulates: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) is based on the Bible; the Holy Word of God, which never errs ... The Holy Bible will be the foundation of her teaching above all other literatures and creeds” (ELCIN 2000:11). This statement indicates that ELCIN has accepted the Bible as the Word of God and based her teaching and activities on the Bible. This is a fundamentally Lutheran understanding of the Bible. For ELCIN and other Christian communities in Africa, “the Bible is one of the most significant resources in Africa, especially in Christian Africa” (Maluleke 2000:91). The Bible, therefore, is regarded as not only the Word of God, but also the authoritative Word of God. The Biblical message however needs to be translated into the culture, language and idiom of the people in order to make its message relevant and acceptable. Nowadays questions about the relevance of the Bible as the Word of God are heard from both within and outside the ELCIN’s membership. These questions have provoked many reactions through the history of Christianity, as they have in the ELCIN. These questions arise because on the one hand it is difficult to identify the exact nature of the Word of God in the Bible, while on the other hand the Bible excludes part of humanity (women) from its message. The application of the theory of translatability as proposed by Sanneh and Bediako aims at providing answers to these questions in this study.

The researcher is highly motivated to carry out this research in order to analyze the way the Bible is accepted in the ELCIN. Some members of the ELCIN understand the Bible as the Word of God in a literal sense. This is a legacy of the mother church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF), which sent missionaries, among whom were fundamentalists, to Ovamboland and Okavango (Munyika 2004:316).

Another motivation is that some preachers in the ELCIN prepare their sermons without considering the language, culture and the context in which the text was written. Although their message was clear, they lack the original context, because each text has an original context, different from the present, both in time and culture, which needs careful consideration. Furthermore the books of the Bible were written at a specific time, in a particular culture, and a particular context. It is clear that the

Bible is not a book that fell from heaven; it was written in a human context, reflecting the daily life experiences of a particular people (Nürnbergger 2004:7). It is also a surprise, that in some instances, the biblical message is also relevant to the lives of the ELCIN members, although they live geographically, culturally and historically far away from the world in which the Bible was produced, because it touches their way of life. However, in some cases it can appear to be irrelevant, because it tells the story of a certain group of people, at a certain time and place. Therefore, translation and interpretation are necessary for making the Bible relevant in vernaculars in the world in general and in Africa in particular.

1.3. The aim of this study

Therefore, the overall aim of this study is to understand the concept of the translatability and interpretation theory and to apply it to the process of translation of the Bible and Christianity as a whole. The applicability of the translatability theory will promote a better understanding of the Word of God and make it more inclusive.

The research also shows how the translators applied and appropriated the theory of the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture into the language and culture of the members of the ELCIN. Furthermore, it also grapples with how the Bible stimulated both theologians and lay readers to make the biblical message relevant to people and to address their needs in their own cultural settings. In the process the researcher hopes to convince theologians and pastors, in the ELCIN in particular, who are continuously interpreting the Bible, that local interpretations of the Bible are as valid as other interpretations done by missionaries (Maluleke 2000:91). Translatability is the way to reach a good understanding of the biblical message. Little has been written about the missionary impact on African culture in the ELCIN. Those who have done research into this topic did so from different perspectives, that is, from a historical perspective, like Nambala, and from a systematic perspective like Munyika. These texts, as well as the work done by Sanneh and Bediako on the translatability of the Bible are now outlined. The researcher will investigate if ELCIN translators did apply the translatability theory in the process of translation of the Bible in vernacular at different stages. This is discussed in detail in chapter four.

1. 4 The objectives of the study

This study aimed at the following objectives:

1. To analyze how the translation work in the ELCIN took place.
2. To examine whether the biblical message is relevant to Ovambo and Okavango people.
3. To explore how translatability and interpretation was applicable in the process of Bible translation into vernacular languages in the ELCIN.
4. To see how African Traditional Religion and Christianity dialogue in the ELCIN.
5. To find out the conception of the Bible among Ovambo and Okavango people.
6. To analyze the use of the Bible in new situations such as for women and HIV and AIDS in the ELCIN.

1. 5. Preliminary literature studies and the location of the research within the existing literature

The Finnish missionary Seppo Löytty, who worked in the ELCIN as a trainer of pastors, presents in his book, *The Ovambo Sermon: A Study of the Preaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango in South West Africa* (ELOK)²(1977), research on how the Ovambo pastors have been taught the Bible and how they prepared and delivered their sermons to their people. Löytty shows that the pastors were very dependant on the influence of missionaries from Finland. There were two main aspects to this influence. On the one hand Finnish missionaries failed to make the Bible or Christianity relevant because they were reluctant to accommodate African beliefs and culture, regarding them as superstitions, while on the other hand some of the missionaries were fundamentalists (Löytty 1971:20-28). The observation of the researcher is that the Finnish missionaries were more dialectic than dialogic. For them, being a good Christian was to surrender completely your local religious beliefs, practice and culture and become westernized.

² South West Africa was the name of Namibia before independence in 1990. The Evangelical Lutheran Church Ovambo-Kavango was the name of the mission church, which was operating among Ovambo and Okavango people in the Northern belt of Namibia. Its new name is The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). ELCIN no longer operates in the northern part of Namibia only, but in the whole of Namibia. The majority of the members are Ovambo and Kavango people.

Munyika, in his book, *A Holistic Soteriology in an African Context* (2004), tries to answer the question of a holistic soteriology for Ovawambo and of a biblical hermeneutics, which is holistic rather than privatized. He thus points out that there is some relevance for both biblical scholars and for Oshiwambo in the concept of soteriology and puts emphasis on the comprehensive well-being of all. Munyika's approach allows Ovawambo, who are mainly members of ELCIN, to understand soteriology from the perspective of their own tradition (Munyika 2004:4). Munyika thus made an immense contribution to the contextual interpretation of the Bible in Namibia. Munyika did not touch on the issue of translation; he just concentrated on the understanding of soteriology from the Oshiwambo Traditional Religion and the Christian religion. His approach was more from a systematic theology perspective. Although Munyika did good work he concentrated only one aspect of Christianity. Nevertheless, knowingly or unknowingly, he applied the translatability theory because in his theological interpretation he included language, culture and context, namely the context of Ovawambo people.

Laukkanen in his book *Rough Road to Dynamism*, (2002) writes about the history of the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali. He discloses the names of those who were involved in the whole process in each case. Laukkanen shows how the indigenous translators played an important role in ensuring that the people concerned would accept the Bible; not only understanding its language but also ensuring its relevance to them. There are no longer any questions regarding the validity of translating the Bible into vernacular languages in the ELCIN because this task has been completed. The question now is whether the Bible in the vernacular languages in the ELCIN is relevant to those for whom it was translated. It is relevant only if the translatability theory was applied to its translation process. This has taken place in ELCIN during the time of translation.

Laukkanen, analyzing the translations of the Bible in vernacular languages in the ELCIN, notes that sometimes translators could not find suitable expressions in their own languages, and that their solutions to this varied from one translation to another (2002: 249). This does not hinder the translation processes. So, Laukkanen concludes his work with the following words:

Although translators were unable to communicate all of the treasure of the Bible, as their target languages would have required, it is well presumable that their translations have been valuable at many levels of church activities. ...The process of Bible translating has been likened to reformation of the church: the basic message of Christianity must not be changed or modernized, but it must be re-refined to make the original message come out more clearly than before (2002:250).

Munyika differs with Laukkanen because he concentrated more on the theme of Soteriology, whereas Laukkanen concentrated more on the process of translation of the Bible itself. Munyika is more concerned with the biblical teaching of redemption compared the teaching of the apostle Paul, Luther and Ovawambo, while Laukkanen was more concerned with the history and the process of translation. They have influenced each other because teaching has to do with history. Although they use different approaches, their goal was the same: to make the Word of God relevant to ELCIN Christians in their languages, culture and context.

This thesis continues the research conducted by Munyika concerning Oshiwambo and biblical concept of soteriology, and the Bible translating work conducted by the missionary Laukkanen, who wrote about the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali respectively. Furthermore, the thesis is a challenge to pastors and theologians in ELCIN, who fail to contextualize, and enculturate the biblical message; but rather take the Bible as it was presented to them. This study is interdisciplinary because it deals with missiological issues and Bible translation in Africa, both of which led to African theology.

Laukkanen outlined the translation process of the Bible done in the ELCIN; however he did not show how the translatability theory was applied in that process. The researcher is arguing that translatability is the principle, which makes translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in the ELCIN relevant and acceptable.

The works of Sanneh and Bediako on the translatability theory as it is discussed in chapter two, offer to many theologians, including the researcher, a more accurate historical picture of Christian translation, and their theological interpretations can enable Christian mission to be more faithful to the truth and more respectful of other languages and cultures. Against this background the researcher uses the theory of

translatability and examines in what ways it is applicable to the translation work in the ELCIN.

Furthermore, translatability, which is a key concept for the understanding of encounters between cultures and interaction within cultures, is equal to incarnation. Incarnation is the concept of understanding God who became human, “The Word became flesh and dwells among us” (John 1:14). The fact that God has taken the form of a human in Christ, and identified himself with a person, makes God more understandable in a human situation. If this does not happen the incarnation was impossible and we cannot talk about the translatability of God’s word. For God to make God’s message relevant to the people in this world, God changes and takes the form of humans in the person of Jesus Christ. Majola, who supported Walls on the concept of incarnation, asserts that:

The Holy Scriptures, which at first assume a Hebrew or Greek form, by means of translation are incarnated into the forms and shapes of the receptor’s culture and language. ... Incarnation involves a transformation of the source to enable it to take the form of the receptor. As a form of incarnation, translation calls for all that is implied by such current concepts as enculturation, indigenization, contextualization or even trans-culturation. This process implies more than a simple transfer of meanings, concepts and terms from the source language and culture to the target language and culture. Such a transfer implies a transformation for what is transferred must enter a new world, a new system of organization and ordering, of seeing and valuing (2002:8)

The Word of God has incarnated into vernacular languages in the ELCIN as well, therefore the Bible, through its translatability, has become part of the ELCIN. Incarnation is about the coming of God in human form, whereas translatability is about the Word of God translated into any language.

In the case of understanding the Bible as the Word of God, this assertion has undergone many challenges within and outside the ELCIN: the challenge of understanding, the challenge of the language and culture, the challenge of context, the challenge of gender equality and the challenges of diseases like HIV/AIDS (as discussed in this thesis). These challenges began during the time of the missionaries and continue to the present day. Regardless of these challenges in the ELCIN, the Bible still enjoys a unique and reverential status.

One factor that contributed to the ELCIN members accepting the Bible is that the Word of God is powerful, like the word of an older person among Ovawambo and Okavango communities. These people are accustomed to keeping and obeying the word of older persons in the community. Therefore as they were taught that the Bible is the Word of God who is believed to be above all, they obeyed it in full. This is fully discussed in detail in chapter five.

1. 6. Research problem

The question of the applicability of the translatability and interpretation theory to the Bible, the written Word of God in the vernacular languages in the ELCIN is the main focus in this thesis. The central motive is to apply the theory of translatability, which overcomes the irrelevance and misappropriation of the biblical message in vernacular languages in the ELCIN. The problem is the common neglect of the use of vernacular terms and culture in delivering the biblical message contextually. The biblical message cannot be understood in a foreign mediation; instead it must be understood in vernacular languages and must address the problems of the people concerned. This is what the translatability theory tries to address. If the Bible fails to address and attend to the needs and problems of the people in their context and culture, then it is irrelevant. The Bible in vernacular languages in the ELCIN, although accepted, has aspects which are irrelevant, because the message is not yet fully contextualized, and more so for marginalized women. Some of the practices in the Bible differ from the practice on the ground. Missionaries failed to make the biblical message more relevant because their main concern was to win many African souls to Christ without taking into account the need to take seriously the culture of the people (Munyika 2004:294,295; Löytty 1977:21).

For something to be relevant to people, it must address the needs of the particular people and answer questions pertaining to their life orientation. What are the needs and questions of the people concerned? Does the message of the Bible attend to the needs related to their culture, or is its message something far beyond their way of life? What makes the Bible relevant? Is it the translation or the interpretation? The researcher ultimately aims to reveal ways in which the Bible could be made more relevant in the ELCIN.

If the translations of the Bible into vernacular languages have been valuable on any level of the ELCIN, then it is relevant to its members. It is true, as Metzger *et al* pointed out, that believers who place their faith in the Bible do so because they mirror themselves in the Bible and find themselves as part of the Bible and are convinced that God has something to say to them in the Bible (1959:12). This is what ELCIN members realize when reading the Bible in their vernacular languages. They are not alien to the Bible. Their traditions and cultures are not excluded. These are clearly articulated when the translatability theory is applied to the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages.

Missionaries who worked in ELCIN have been praised for a job well done in the field of translation. However some ELCIN members feel that missionaries brought the Christian religion to Africans in their vessels or containers, and that the recipients (Africans) need to transfer Christianity from the foreign vessels and place them into their own vessels or baskets. This is a cultural practice among Ovawambo. When a person visits others, especially a woman, she would carry vessels or baskets with a gift, '*omulongelo*'. The receiver of the gift has to transfer that gift to her own baskets or vessels and return the empty vessels to their owner. According to that view it seems that the ELCIN is still keeping Christianity in the vessels of the visitor, which is abnormal for Ovawambo. Accordingly, the ELCIN needs to remove or transfer Christianity from Western vessels (culture) and place them in her own vessels (culture): the normal Ovawambo way of doing things. This statement highlights the view that the ELCIN is keeping the gospel in a foreign container, and therefore she needs to transfer it to her own container, that is, her own language and culture. This is the essence of the translatability of the gospel. The translatability theory is the one way of transferring the gospel or Christianity from a foreign container into an African container, that is, language and culture.

The hypothesis in this research is that what makes the Bible relevant in the ELCIN is the translatability of Christianity and its Scriptures into vernacular languages and the biblical hermeneutical method of interpretation as represented by Sanneh and Bediako, conducted in other parts of Africa where Christianity was planted.

1. 7. Theoretical framework

This thesis is based on two theoretical frameworks: the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako, which purport that Christianity and its Scriptures, are translatable. If Christianity and its message are translatable, then they can be translated fully into the vernacular languages in the ELCIN. Therefore the translatability theory forms part of the theoretical framework of this research. Biblical hermeneutics, which includes historical and critical methods of interpretation, is also included because it makes translation possible, as explained in detail in chapter two.

1. 8. Research design and research methodology

1. 8.1. Research design

This research is designed to use literature reviews and interviews. The translatability theory of Sanneh and Bediako is the theoretical framework. The Translatability of the Christian religion signifies its fundamental relevance and accessibility to persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated. There is nowhere the character of Christianity more evident than in the Christian view of Scripture rather than in translatability theory. The Bible, which is at the centre of translation, has emerged from the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures and tradition (Van Heever and Gerhard 2001:254). It crossed into many cultures and languages through translation and interpretation. The Bible through translation and interpretation assimilates and was assimilated into those cultures it encountered. So it has reached Namibia, and northern belt of Namibia in particular, spreading through the work of missionaries among Ovawambo and Okavango (Kwangali) people respectively, the majority being members of the ELCIN. The researcher investigates the application of the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako in relation to the missionary impact on African culture and the reception of Christianity and the Bible in vernacular languages in the ELCIN. An investigation was also conducted into the process of the translation of the Bible into three vernacular languages in the ELCIN (Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Rukwangali), which resulted in making the Bible acceptable and in opening a way for the interpretation of the Bible. The presentation of the Bible to the ELCIN by missionaries and its reception among the people has had a great impact on its role and relevance.

1. 8. 2. Research methodology

The researcher uses the triangle method in carrying out this research, using: a) books, journals, book reviews, and other research, which has been conducted by researchers and written down, b) archival research, to examine the old manuscripts which are stored in the archives of Bible Societies, the ELCIN and Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (hereafter FELM), c) fieldwork research which is a very important aspect, because it will shed more light on the subject matter to be documented. Little has previously been written about ELCIN in terms of the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture. Therefore the methods to be used in this research include the historical-cultural and the descriptive approaches, theological analysis, a review of existing literature, interviews and participatory observation.

In the case of translation the researcher focuses on the translatability theory as represented by Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, (who dealt with the conceptions of Christianity in other parts of Africa), and investigates how it is applicable to the ELCIN. Translation conducted under the auspices of the ELCIN is tested against the theory of translatability as mentioned earlier. In the case of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages, the researcher analyzes the work done by Finnish missionaries and their indigenous co-translators in the northern part of Namibia, and particularly how they presented and taught the Bible to indigenous people. The researcher considers those aspects, which demonstrate the relevance and contextualization of the biblical message to that particular context and culture.

The researcher has consulted four indigenous Africans translators, especially the first generation of pastors and theologians, two missionary translators, three laypersons as well as three ordinary African Christians who have received the Bible for the first time. Some of these people were involved in the process of translation, and then received the Bible from Western missionaries and make use of it to convey the biblical message to the people in their vernacular languages, culture and context. In this way the researcher gathered information to lead to possible solutions to the research problem. The researcher also conducted interviews with three elderly people in the community to determine whether the use of terms and concepts of African Christians today have a relationship to the African religious heritage. Furthermore, the challenges of today, HIV and AIDS and women's emancipation form part of the

research. Two female theologians and one layperson were interviewed about gender issues in the ELCIN. Because of the challenge of HIV and AIDS, five HIV and AIDS coordinators and trainers in ELCIN were interviewed in connection with their task in the church. These challenges form a major part of the context in which the Bible is presently read and interpreted. All the interviewee names, questionnaires as well as their ethical consent form and some of their photos form part of the appendices of this thesis for further consultation. The degree, to which these challenges are accommodated in the current reading of the Bible, is thus an indication of the extent to which the translatability theory has been and still needs to be applied.

1. 8. 3 My Social Location

Translation and interpretation is a complex matter. It touches the entire sphere of human life, because it is the whole life of a person who indeed is to be translated. This means the translatability and interpretation process involves social life, cultural life, spiritual life, language and context (Dube 2004:101). Translation and interpretation of the Bible is more about the spiritual and religious aspect of life. According to Dube, “social location is a self-explanatory term, which refers to an individual’s place or location in his/her society” (2004:101). That means that social location aims at introducing yourself to your readers or listeners. Not only to introduce yourself, but also to show the driving force behind your work or your study. Social location is very important because it locates you at your place in the society, community, family and academic field. It empowers and disempowers a person. (Dube 2004:101). Mugambi also contributes to this notion when he insists that a person who is “born and bred” in the culture is best suited to carry out meaningful academic research on that culture (2002:188).

Social location is another kind of autobiography or Curriculum Vitae (CV). “Social location theory, therefore assumes that we are all located in society in relationships, institutions and values that are characterized by power” (Dube 2004:103), which lies behind our responsibilities and our studies. Here follows my social location.

I was the second last born in our family of eight, two daughters and six sons of peasant parents. When our last-born died during the course of the liberation struggle in Namibia, I became a last-born. Our parents worked hard to raise their children.

They sold mahangu (finger millet), maize, milk, goats, cattle and other farm products to cater for our education. My parents are members of the ELCIN. So I was raised up in a Christian family.

Socially my parents were the first generation to occupy the area east of Oukwanyama in the early forties. My father is the headman (chief) of the village called Okamanya, in Okongo Parish. I grew up there with other children, but of course as the son of the headman. The headman has a special place in the community. He is a leader of the community.

I started my early education at Okongo, and my secondary education at Ongha Secondary School and High School at Ongwediva High School where I completed my matric. For Tertiary education I attended Paulinum Lutheran Theological Seminary at Otjimbingwe, Namibia from 1982 to 1985. I obtained a Diploma in Theology, with Greek. I enjoyed Systematic Theology, Biblical Studies, Liberation Theology and Greek (elementary) among other modules.

I was ordained in 1986 as a Lutheran pastor and placed at the Parish called Omundaungilo in the rural area between Eenhana Parish and Okongo Parish. The Omundaungilo parish suffered under South African occupationist army forces. From 1977 to 1985 it was deserted. Some people disappeared and others were killed including headman Stefanus Ngehanghoshi Naholo. Others ran away for life, never to come back to Omundaungilo anymore. It was during my time as a pastor that many parishioners began to come back to their houses and the church. Now Omundaungilo has settled back to normal again. I served at Omundaungilo Parish for almost ten years 1986-1996. I am married and am the father of four, two daughters and two sons. I am happy with my family and feel blessed by God in our life with many things.

I applied for the first time to do further studies, and my church leadership granted me study leave. I was admitted then to the University of Natal where I completed my BTh Honours in 1996-1997. When I went back to Namibia I was given the post of Executive Secretary of the ELCIN Eastern Diocese at Oniipa where I served for five and a half years. I was again given an opportunity to further my studies. This time

round I was given a scholarship to study up to doctoral degree. I was admitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal from 2003 to 2008.

The burning issue in my academic years was ‘how do we get the Bible in our vernacular languages?’ What is translation? Who were the translators? What is interpretation? Who has the right to do interpretation? Is translation and interpretation of the Bible the same thing? Why do ELCIN pastors always refer to Jerusalem, Palestine, Egypt, Galilee and Israelites and other places and nations mentioned in the Bible? Where are Ovawambo or Namibian people located in the Bible? Why is the Bible translatable? Is the translated Bible in ELCIN relevant to the readers? In my studies I came across the theory of translatability and interpretation of Sanneh and Bediako, which attracted me to research. In this study I would like to find answers to those questions. I am doing this study as a pastor and member of the ELCIN, who takes part in the reading and interpreting of the Bible in the vernacular languages in Northern Namibia. My social location is the driving force behind me to do this research as an insider.

1. 9. Limitations

The research is carried out within the ELCIN, focusing on Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Rukwangali languages respectively.

The researcher conducted literature research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Most of the relevant material and the ELCIN Church itself are located in Namibia and in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) in Helsinki, Finland. To obtain the information needed the researcher was required to travel to Namibia and to make contact with Juoni Salko and Mrs Toivanen, the wife of missionary translator Pentti Toivanen, the FELM worker who worked in the Okavango area, via the Internet and e-mails. Traveling requires time and money, which were limited. One major problem is that there are many books written by missionaries, which are stored in archives in Finland, which require translation from Finnish to English or Oshiwambo.

The researcher made use of the Internet to gather relevant information on the subject matter. Consultation with the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), now The Finnish

Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), who did mission work among Ovawambo, and Kavango communities, also took place. An inadequate knowledge of Biblical Languages also form part of limitation on the researcher's part.

1. 10. Research ethics

This research was carried out within the ethical boundaries of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher has worked independently. This is the researcher's own work, unless otherwise stated. All sources that are used, either quotations or paraphrases, are clearly referenced. The researcher is accountable for the work. The materials and consultations are and will be kept confidential where necessary.

1. 11. Chapters outline

This thesis is divided into eight chapters that are all around the applicability of the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako. They contain the challenges that the translatability and interpretation theory posed to the Bible translators in northern Namibia.

Chapter one is the introduction to the whole research project. It gives the overall structure of the thesis. It discusses the motivation for research, preliminary literature studies, research framework, research problems, research design and methodology, limitations and research ethics. It also shows how the research was conducted.

Chapter two discusses in detail the theories of translatability and interpretation of Sanneh and Bediako, which are supported by many African Christian theologians. It defines terms and concepts around the translatability theory. It also details that translatability is a principle of Christianity, which makes it distinct from Islam. This chapter shows that the interpretation method goes hand-in-hand with the translation of the Bible, therefore modes of reading the Bible are also discussed. The aim of this chapter is to see how the translatability and interpretation theories of Sanneh and Bediako work to promote the vernacularization of Christianity and the Bible in Africa in general and in northern Namibia in particular.

Having explored in depth the concept of the theory of translatability and interpretation, chapter three discusses the historical background of the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people. These African people live in the northern part of Namibia. They had the same roots of origin coming from the east of Africa southwards until they settled in Okavango and Ovamboland. They are part of the Bantu-group and their language shares common features with other Bantu languages in sub-Saharan Africa. Ovawambo and Okavango people were the targets of the Finnish missionaries when they came to Namibia. Ovawambo and Okavango people later formed the backbone of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The Bible was translated into their languages, Oshindonga (1954), Oshikwanyama (1974) and Rukwangali (1987). The chapter discusses culture, language and beliefs and practices, God and ancestral veneration. The aim of this chapter is to bring about the historical background of Ovawambo and Okavango people and how they interact with Christian religion. It shows that when we know the cultural settings of the people we can apply the theory of translatability appropriately, and the biblical message will be relevant to the particular people.

Chapter four deals with the history of the translation of the Bible in the three vernacular languages in Northern Namibia, a project run by the ELCIN. Various translators conducted the translation of the Bible in northern Namibia at different intervals and at different levels, first missionary translators and then indigenous translators. Knowingly or unknowingly, translators applied the theory of translatability in the process of translation, which is why the Bible was acceptable and is relevant to these communities, which form the bulk of the membership of the ELCIN. Language and culture play an important role in translation. The aim of this chapter is to see how translators applied the principle of translatability in the process of translation in the ELCIN.

Chapter five discusses how the translatability theory presents challenges to the understanding of the Bible, as the Word of God. Luther, the reformer, and the Lutheran understanding of the Bible are discussed, referring to the writing of Nürnberger and other Lutheran theologians in Africa. ELCIN is part of the Lutheran

community; therefore her conception of the Bible is linked to that of the Lutheran church. Hasheela (1981), presents the view of the ELCIN on the Bible. The question of the Bible as the Word of God is examined, based on the contemporary views of African theologians like Maluleke, Mbiti, Oduyoye, Dube, Mosala, and Kanyoro. The aim of this chapter is to show how the translatability theory challenges the traditional understanding of the Bible as the Word of God and how different views affect the understanding of the Bible in ELCIN. Challenges to the concept of the Bible as the Word of God through the centuries up to the present times of ELCIN are also discussed.

Having discussed the challenges of the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God, chapter six deals with another challenge: the dialogue between African Traditional Religion, Christianity and other religions in Northern Namibia. The emphasis is on the use of terms and concepts in the vernacular languages, which are used to define the Christian message today. The dialogue between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, which makes transformation possible, is discussed in relation to what has happened in other parts of the world and in Africa, among Ovawambo and Okavango people. The changes the Bible and Christianity brought to Ovawambo and Okavango culture and their daily life are defined and considered. The aim of this chapter is to examine how Christianity and African religion influence each other, in terms of language, culture and context. Translatability makes the dialogue possible.

Chapter seven explores the new challenges facing Bible translation and interpretation today, with a special focus on gender issues or feminist theology and HIV and AIDS. The translatability theory makes it possible for the biblical message to accommodate all of humanity and any situation including HIV/AIDS. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians shed more light on these challenges. The aim of this chapter is to overcome the exclusivity problem in the Bible, which cause some women theologians to reject it for not having anything positive to say about women, from the translation viewpoint. Translatability makes the biblical message inclusive.

Chapter eight contains the conclusions and recommendations to the whole thesis.

It tries to show how translation is to be conducted in the ELCIN based on the theory of translatability. The significance of the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in the ELCIN is dealt with. The possible future of the process of Bible translation in the ELCIN will be guided by the application of the translatability and interpretation theory for it to be more inclusive is part of the researcher's recommendation.

1. 12. Conclusion

This chapter covers the introduction of the whole study. It deals with issues which are covered by this study regarding the translatability and interpretation theory, which makes the Bible in vernacular languages in ELCIN, northern Namibia relevant and acceptable.

The motivation of the research, the background, the aim of the study and the objectives have been explored in full. The theoretical framework of the whole thesis is the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako. The translatability and interpretation theory allows language, culture and context to be included in the Bible translation process. Research design, research methodology and social location, which are the driving forces behind this study, are shown. The chapter's outline whereby all chapters and their contents are summarized is introduced. Limitations and research ethics as provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal are shown and adhered to.

The next chapter deals with the concept of the theory of translatability and what the interpretation of Sanneh and Bediako entails.

CHAPTER TWO
TRANSLATABILITY AND INTERPRETATION THEORY OF SANNEH AND
BEDIAKO

2. 1. Introduction

As noted in chapter one, translatability and interpretation are part of the process of making the biblical message relevant in any given culture, language and context. Translatability is a key concept for understanding the encounter between cultures and interaction within cultures. It also implies the translation of otherness without subsuming it to be defined by preconceived notions (Iser 2005:1). Without translatability the Bible could never be at home in any language, culture and context. Only through this process of translation can we talk about the Good News for the salvation of all humanity. The correct meaning of the Bible can only be attained and delivered to God's people through the processes of translation and interpretation. Packer puts it rightly when he writes:

Every text has its immediate context in the passage from which it comes, its broader context in the book to which it belongs, and its ultimate context in the Bible as a whole; and needs to be rightly related to each of these contexts if its character, scope and significance is to be adequately understood (1977:101).

Packer here refers to the need to contextualize the Bible in the setting in which it was written, but it is also necessary to contextualize the Bible in the setting of its readers, in order to make it relevant to them.

Translation of the Bible into vernacular languages and the interpretation thereof was at the center of spreading of Christianity in the world and in Africa in particular. Both Christianity and the Bible are translatable which allows them to be accepted universally. In the words of Sanneh: "Christian particularity has hinged on the particularity of culture and language, both essential components in translation" (1999:2).

This chapter focuses on the concept of the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako. It will also show how other theologians responded to these theories. Translation and interpretation approaches to the Bible will be discussed at

length in relation to the missionary work undertaken in the Namibian context. The aim of this chapter is to see how translatability and interpretation theories work to promote the vernacularization of Christianity and the Bible in Africa in general and in ELCIN in particular. This chapter will serve as a basis to the whole study. Therefore its importance in clarifying the theories involved cannot be overemphasized. To achieve this aim, the chapter will provide the following: a) a definition of terms, b) a discussion of Sanneh and Bediako's concepts of translatability and interpretation, c) an overview of translation approaches to the Bible, d) an analysis of the interpretation and modes for the reading of the Bible and e) a discussion of interpretation, context and culture. The structure of this chapter is an attempt to work out how the translatability and interpretation theory works in the process of Bible translation and interpretation.

2. 2. Definition of terms

2. 2. 1 Translatability (*Oukwakutoloka ile oukwakutula*)

The term 'translatability' is derived from the verb 'translate'. To translate means to change from one place to another place, to change from one state to another state or to change from one form to another form. In this context it is to change from one language to one's own or another language. Translatability is the state of being translated. If something is translatable it is capable of fitting into any given condition. This means that when the Bible was translated it fitted into the language and culture of the target language and culture. In the Christian understanding, translatability is the processes whereby Christianity and its Scripture are enabled to be accommodated into any language, culture or context. It is through this process that Christianity was accepted in Africa and the Bible became a book for African Christians. Translation of the Bible into vernacular languages goes hand in hand with interpretation, because the process of translation in itself is interpretation.

2. 2. 2 Interpretation (*Okufatulula*)

To 'interpret' is to make something clear, to explain or to elaborate. Interpretation also involves adaptation. It is through adaptation that people begin to understand new things and new ideas, which suit their context. Interpretation makes adaption possible. Interpretation is one of the arts that make the message of the Bible clear to the readers

and listeners in their context. One cannot understand something without an interpretation. The Biblical text was written in a given time and context and to specific people, therefore it needs to be interpreted into new situations in order to be understood. The message of the Bible is not always clear in itself unless it is interpreted. Therefore interpretation helps people to adopt what is interpreted into their own understanding. Interpretation is what makes the Bible and its message accepted in Africa today. In the opinion of the researcher, interpretation is an ongoing process, because theology is not static; it grows to meet the needs of people in new situations. Theology in its different disciplines is about the interpretation of the Word of God in different ways, and the Word of God is found in the Bible.

2. 2. 3 Hermeneutics

The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the name Hermes, the messenger god of the Greeks. In order to deliver the message of the gods, Hermes had to be conversant in their idiom as well as in that of the mortals for whom the message was destined. Hermes had to understand and interpret for himself what the gods wanted to convey before he could proceed to translate, articulate, and explicate their intention to the mortal (Mueller-Vollmer 1985:1). According to Gillespie the term hermeneutics is derived from the Latin word *hermeneutica* and the Greek word *hermenēia*, which means interpretation. Therefore the term 'hermeneutics' denotes a concern that is shared by fields of knowledge such as philosophy, sociology, theology and other fields of the humanities. Hermeneutics cannot be confined to a specific issue, but must be understood in its broader spectrum of the human and social sciences (Mueller-Vollmer 1985:ix). Thus hermeneutics is the art of delivering the message without losing its original meaning. The exegetes use the art of hermeneutics to find the original message of the text. While translation involves saying the same thing in a different language, hermeneutics or interpretation brings the meaning from the original language, but "the meaning of the words depends upon their usage, and that usage is a variable dependent upon cultural factors operative at a given time and place in history" (Gillespie 1986:193). Salem Hashikutuva³ (appendix XVII), from a

³ *Hashikutuva Medusalem*, known as Salem, was a political commissioner in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). He has been involved in interpreting messages from the army commander to soldiers in operational areas. Although he did not get training in matters pertaining to translation, he gained experience while he was part of the liberation struggle for the total independence of Namibia from the colonial power. He was born at Onakalunga. He grew up with his parents at Onamungodji. He

political point of view, shares the same sentiment when he argues that a translator or interpreter needs to know both the intention of the speaker/writer, and the aim and the context of the listeners or readers, either political or religious. He further argues that it is desirable if the translator/interpreter is the part of the field concerned (2006).

The terms ‘translation’, ‘interpretation’ and ‘hermeneutics’ play a vital role in the process of the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God, in Africa and among Ovawambo and Okavango people in particular. It is because of these terms and concepts that the Bible in vernacular languages in the ELCIN could become relevant. While hermeneutics unearths the meaning of the text from its original setting, translatability transfers the message of the text into its new language, culture and context. These terms will play an important role in this chapter, because they are intermingled with the process of understanding the translatability and interpretation principles of Sanneh and Bediako.

2. 3. Sanneh and Bediako’s theory of translatability and interpretation

2. 3.1 Sanneh on translatability

Lamin Sanneh (Appendix I) is the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity and is a professor of history at Yale Divinity School, USA. He started his primary education in Gambia and graduated at the University of London with a PhD in Islamic History. He taught at various universities including those in Ghana and Aberdeen in Scotland. He served for eight years as Assistant and Associate Professor of the History of Religion at Harvard University and moved to Yale University in 1989. Sanneh is the author of over a hundred articles on religious and historical subjects and several books. Sanneh converted to Christianity from Islam, and then moved from the Protestant to the Roman Catholic Church. What converted him to Christianity is the significance of Jesus in God’s work of salvation. An important aspect of Christianity that appealed to him is that it preserves indigenous life and culture as well as its emphasis on the mother tongue in its mission work in contrast with Islam, which regards Arabic as a sacred language. As Bonk writes:

Where indigenous culture has been strong, it has absorbed Christian life worship, thereby sustaining and even increasing its vitality. Where

went into exile in 1976 where he underwent military training, and political education. He came back to Namibia 1989. Now he is serving as deputy commissioner in the Namibian Police.

conversion has been to Islam, on the other hand, indigenous cultures have tended to be weak, and soon lose entirely the capacity to think religiously in their mother tongue (2003:1).

Sanneh is clearly one of the great scholars of Africa. He has contributed a great deal to theology in general and to African theology in particular. Sanneh introduced the principle of translatability as a successful method of doing mission work and other scholars supported him. In his book, *Translating the Message* (1989), Lamin Sanneh deals largely with the question of the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture into any language, culture and context in Africa. According to him, translatability is the source of the success of Christianity across cultures. He further argues that Christianity is an open religion willing to adopt any culture that will receive it, “equally at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races and conditions of people” (Sanneh 1989:51). Translation is not confined to the Scriptures, but it includes the entire Christian religion. It is not only a matter of language, but of the whole of the Christian message. Translatability has also challenged the uniformity of Christianity. Therefore, early modern missionaries followed the logic of the translatability of Christianity and submitted the religion in the most intimate way to the terms of local culture (Sanneh 1989: 90). The translation process recognised both the worth of the language and relativised the significance of each cultural medium (Carman 1989:1).

Sanneh says that translatability is an important principle of the Christian religion. This principle needs to be followed wherever the Christian faith is to be transmitted. “Translatability becomes the characteristic mode of Christian expansion through history” (1989:214). What causes translatability to be at the center of Christian mission in Africa and in other parts of the world is that it deals with the encounter between cultures without neglecting one or another culture (Iser 2005:1). Sanneh decided to take translation beyond its narrow understanding (translation from one language to another) and make it universal to include also culture and context as happened in the history of Christian mission and theology. Christianity evolved from a complex situation of Jewish, Greek and Gentile communities with their cultures and languages. Sanneh asserts that “in most of these cultures, language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture”. He further argues that:

Missionary adoption of the vernacular, therefore, was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria for the message, a piece of radical indigenisation far greater than the standard portrayal of mission as Western cultural imperialism (Sanneh 1989:3).

Sanneh, in his struggle to make the point of missionary expansion clear, observes the action of Catholic and Protestant missions. He pointed out that Protestant missionaries have been preponderant in Bible translation work, the work that Luther, the reformer, loved so much (Brecht 1990). They showed eagerness to translate the Bible, because the Bible is a crucial standard of authority (Sanneh 1989:3). The researcher agrees with this statement because in Northern Namibia, the Lutherans owned the project of translating of the Bible in the vernacular languages; Catholics only joined them later (Laukkanen 2002:115,132). Both the Catholics and Protestants involved in the work of translation came to be engaged with indigenous cultures in durable ways (Sanneh 1989:3).

Despite translation into whatever language and culture, the biblical message remains the same. Sanneh refers to what Livingstone observed in Africa (Botswana). David Livingstone was later convinced that:

...European(s) had no monopoly of truth that even the simplest primitive person could stand right at the heart of God's favor, and that all cultures performed an equally necessary, though inadequate, function in mediating the mystery of God. Europe's advantage, vis-à-vis Africa, lay in its responsibility to proclaim the gospel with the help of those material resources with which Africa was poorly furnished, but it was not an advantage of intrinsic moral superiority (1989:109).

As it spread, Christianity became more universal than where it began. It accommodated the many languages and cultures it encountered. This assists in translation. Sanneh writes:

The historian is thus confronted with a signal fact about Christianity in the sense that its continuous translatability has left it as the only major world religion that is peripheral in the land of its origin; and yet what it lacks in the predominance of its birthplace it has more than made up in the late fruits of its expansion (1989:4).

Sanneh makes a comparison between Christianity and Islam on the issue of translatability. Both religions have conducted mission work in Africa and elsewhere in the world. He observed that according to Christianity, scriptural translation is the

vintage mark, whereas for universal adherence to a non-translatable Islam, the Arabic Qur'an remains its characteristic feature (Sanneh 1989: 214,215; 2004:16). Muslims ascribe to Arabic the status of a revealed language. It is the medium in which the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Islam was revealed. Sanneh asserts: "The author of the Qur'an, who is God, thus came to be associated with its speech, so that the very sounds of the language are believed to originate in heaven" (Sanneh 2004:16). With regard to Christianity, however translatability became the characteristic mode of expansion throughout history. Christianity has no single language, and historical experience traces this fact to the Pentecost event when the believers testified to God in their native tongues (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). As there is no sacred language in Christianity, translatability won over uniformity (Sanneh 2004:17). It is through the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture that the Christian faith established itself in many cultures in the countries it evangelized through the centuries. Sanneh concludes that the contrast between Christianity and Islam is that:

Whereas for Christians, mission has come preeminently to mean translation, for Muslims mission has stood stubbornly for the nontranslatability of its Scriptures in the ritual obligation. But, ...both religions have made gains as missionary faiths (1989:7).

Historically, Christians translated their sacred text into Greek in the first century. That marks the beginning of the translation process that continued through different forms and cultures. "This process both recognized the worth of each language employed and limited or relativized the significance of each cultural medium" (Carman 2005:1).

The Muslim scholar Abdul al-Jabbar, in Sanneh, shows among many issues, two distinctions that divided the Islam and Christian religions. One of these is the language. Jabbar argued that translation is not only a mistake, but also a corruption indistinguishable from unbelief. Another factor is the incorporation or compromising of the teachings of Christ with the teaching of the world rulers. For example the Sabbath is replaced by Sunday, as a day of prayer and by instituting the Roman festival of the Birthday of Time as the birthday of Christ, the Feast of Candles; is thus celebrated as Christmas. Jabbar argues that the adoption of pagan practices into Christianity is a big mistake, which Islam did not make (Sanneh 1989:217-220; 2004:18,19). However, Sanneh argues that for Christianity, translation is not only concentrated on language, but it also involves the wholeness of humanity, which is

language and culture. Christianity recognizes the encounter of different cultures and it upholds them in mutual understanding, not only in terms of the culture that one belongs to, but also in terms of specificity of pertaining to other cultures encountered. So the notion of translatability emerges as a counter-concept to a mutual superimposing of cultures (Iser 2005:4), but rather cultures as respected in their uniqueness.

Therefore, for Christianity to adopt or incorporate other religious practices is not corruption, but it is an indication that it values their existence. Africans hailed the adoption of culture, because it makes Christianity an African religion. According to Sanneh, the Christian religion has two ways of dealing with culture, which he calls 'mission by diffusion' and 'mission by translation'. By 'mission by diffusion', he meant the religion in its expansion from its initial cultural base and its implantation in other societies, primarily as a matter of cultural identity. In other words the culture of the missionaries is made an inseparable carrier of the Christian message. This is what Islamic mission does. Islamic mission made its adherents everywhere to be alike regardless of their culture and language. 'Mission translation' meant, "it carries with it a deep theological vocation, which arises as an inevitable stage in the process of reception and adaptation" (Sanneh 1989:29). In other words the recipient culture is considered to be the true and final locus of the proclamation (Sanneh 1989:29; Verstraelen 1993:147). Mission translation means that the message of the Bible is translated into the language and culture of the people, but the message remains the same. Mission by translation is what makes Christianity different from Islam in mission work. Sanneh confirms this in his statement:

Furthermore, any religion (such as Christianity and Islam) may settle into becoming a cultural complex and spread by diffusion. Nevertheless, the preponderant balance of emphasis falls to one or the other. Mission as diffusion is unquestionably the stronger strand in Islam, whereas mission as translation is the vintage mark of Christianity (1989: 29).

In some instances Christianity was spread through mission diffusion. Missionaries from the West compelled their converts to relinquish their culture and take on Western culture as part of Christianity. In the ELCIN for example the first generation of Christians rejected many of their own cultural practices, regarding them as pagan and instead saw Western culture to be part and parcel of Christianity. For Sanneh this

is unacceptable; for him Christianity is first and foremost a pluralist religion. He further argued “if translatability is the taproot of Christian expansion, then resistance to it by ecclesiastical institutions is like the rebellion of the branches against the tree” (Sanneh 1989:30). For Sanneh there are two factors, which must go hand in hand in doing mission work. These two factors are translation and translatability. According to Carman, translation is one important medium and translatability one important principle in Christian mission (2005:3).

One cannot understand culture as a monolithic entity, but as a multi-layered phenomenon (Iser 2005:5), and this is, therefore, how Christianity should be seen. Therefore African Christians need to see their own elements or their African heritage in Christianity as well. Translatability made this a reality. Sanneh writes:

God is not an interchangeable cultural concept, a pious embodiment of cultural self-guard. But neither is God an abstract force who is encountered outside the limits of self-understanding. To the Jew, God must speak as a Jew, with a repetition of that particularity in respect to the Gentiles (1989:30).

Sanneh argues against the notion that mission and colonialism were two forces aimed at destroying indigenous culture. For Sanneh mission furnished nationalism with the resources necessary to its rise and success, whereas colonialism conspired to undermine it (Sanneh 1989:106). Sanneh argues further that mission aimed at the establishment of national churches and envisaged a future without itself, whereas colonialism saw only the perpetuation of dependency (Sanneh 1989:116). If colonialism did destroy indigenous cultures and languages, missions did not destroy them, instead it uplifted and accommodated them. This means that it was missionaries who initiated the development of indigenous languages and reduced them into written form. That is why these languages exist to date. Those languages that are not developed into written form are vulnerable and likely to disappear. The Bible is the important book, which keeps the languages into which it was translated alive. This is what Christian missionaries did. Therefore Christian missions helped African and other people in the world to raise the spirit of nationalism and independency. Carman also commented that:

African Christians, reading the Bible and reflecting on its message in their own languages, have tended to question, and sometimes to renounce, the Western presuppositions of the church. Moreover, the

languages and cultures into which the Christian message has been translated have been invigorated, not destroyed (2005:1-2).

One has to stress the point that translatability makes Christian religion an accommodative and inclusive religion. This means that the Christian religion accommodates different cultures where it interacts with them, and it includes all people who welcome it. Therefore, the Christian “religion is the willing adoption of any culture that would receive it, equally at home in all languages and cultures, and among all races (and sexes) and conditions of people” (Sanneh 1989:51). As far as the language is concerned, Christianity does not have a sacred language. The Bible can be translated into any language in the world. The Bible in any language is authentic. Sanneh praises the translation of the Christian religion into the vernacular for the fact that it makes the religion alive. Without vernacularization, Christianity could not flourish. “The vernacular became a necessity for the life of the religion, the soil that nurtured the plant until its eminence acquired doctrinal heights” (Sanneh 1989:70).

Sanneh’s work offers to many academics and culturalists a more accurate historical picture of Christian translation, and his theological interpretation can make Christian mission globally more acceptable and more respectful to other cultures. The theory gave an opportunity for the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages, it gave chance to the interpretation of the Bible and it gave chance to the new hermeneutics to take place, which accommodate cultural dimensions and context. Carman also supported Sanneh that there is no culture above others and the researcher agrees with them because culture and languages are gifts from God to the people, and all are equally valid. Each culture and each language can express God’s will and God’s dealing with God’s people (2005:6).

Some theologians in Africa and elsewhere contributed to the theory of translatability of Sanneh. Bediako cites Sanneh that he (Sanneh) liberated the Gospel from the colonial context and placed it in the wider setting of African culture, including the religious background of African societies. Interpretation is always contextual. Colonialists to suit their context of colonialism, interpreted the Bible. “Thus says the Bible...” was used to convince African people to accept and obey any government, even the unjust one, as ordained by God (I Peter 2:13). With the theory of translatability Sanneh

opens the room for people even to criticise situations which suppress the people in the name of the Bible. Bediako further argues that this is crucial for Sanneh because it is what African converts did with the Gospel received through the Western missionary transmission which really counts (1997:119).

Bediako further noted that having the Bible in their vernacular languages allowed African Christianity to begin to question the behavior of some people, which was contrary to the teaching of the Bible as a whole. The translated Bible into vernacular languages does not only make it easy for African Christians to read the Bible, but it has also provided African Christians with essential ingredient for the birth of African theology which treats African mother-tongues as a fundamental medium in its theological discourse and shows which direction African theology will take (Bediako 2000:58).

African Christians, through the reading of the Bible, caused Christianity in Africa to diverge from the interests of the European administrators, who claimed to be Christians, because they had a different agenda in Africa. Through reading and interpreting the Bible in their own language, culture and context to understand the Bible from their own context different from European administrators: Carman writes:

Early on, Christianity in Africa began to diverge from interests of European colonial administrators. The Protestant emphasis on the primacy of the Bible, a Bible translated into the languages of its local hearers and readers, took away primacy authority from the missionary and gave it to an indigenous church that could be proud of its own language and culture. This is logic of translatability, which worked against the quite conscious efforts of Western missionaries to assert their theological or moral authority or their often less conscious and more ambivalent relations to Western rulers and business (2005:3).

Regarding the Bible, Bediako cites Sanneh that the importance of Bible translation and its priority in missionary work are an indication that 'God was not disdainful of Africans as to be incommunicable in their languages'. The process of translation of the Bible into African languages imbued local cultures with eternal significance and endowed African languages with a transcendent range. It also presumed that the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor-culture so the missionary needed to discover God in the new culture. According to Bediako, Sanneh argues that:

Through the very process of Scripture translation, the central categories of Christian theology: God, creation, Jesus Christ, history and other Christian terms and concepts are transposed into local equivalents, suggesting that Christianity had been adequately anticipated (Bediako 1997:120).

Bediako considers the African Christians experiences as one of the aspects to be considered as far as the translation process is concerned. African pre-Christian religious heritage must be taken seriously as a religious reality in its own right (Bediako 2000: 55). In the process of translation the local religions must also provide the Christian religion with idiom. This means that dialogue has to take place between the two religions namely African (local) religion and Christianity (Bediako 1997:120-123). This statement is central to this study because it highlights the importance of dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, (hereafter ATR), which will be discussed in chapter six.

Nürnbergger contributed to this debate on translation and interpretation of the Bible that the biblical texts have emerged and evolved in response to historical situations, frames of reference and the specific interests of their authors, and that subsequent readings of these texts are once again determined by the situation, frames of reference and interests of the readers (2002:11). These situations could be found in African communities as well. Therefore, it is only through the method of biblical hermeneutics that the biblical texts can be realized and become relevant. Nthamburi urged African theologians to focus on hermeneutics, which study the Bible and human experience in order for it to be decisive for human existence. African theologians must seek the original biblical context in order to recover the original meanings and then be able to interpret modern cultural systems of meaning that are relevant to African Christians (2002:15).

Maluleke urged African theology to continue the process of translation, the missionaries from Europe started, but they did not go far enough because of cultural differences. African theologians have to continue the task of contextualization and to make the Bible relevant to the people concerned, because they are also capable of becoming agents of mission (Maluleke 2000:89).

In conclusion, the researcher agrees with Sanneh, as supported by Carman, that: “the principle of translatability should serve as a powerful deterrent to the tendency of a national church to absolutize its form of Christian faith” (2005:5). Each religion has its aims and objectives as far as mission is concerned. What is common to missions in their different approaches is that religion is expressed through culture but also transcends and transforms culture with God’s saving Word (Carman 2005:6).

2. 3. 2 Kwame Bediako on translatability

Kwame Bediako (appendix II) is the director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Studies and Applied Theology in Ghana. Bediako is a student of Andrew F Walls, and together they have mentored students throughout Africa, who in turn, continue to mentor scores of others. Bediako and Walls are two great scholars of Africa and African Theology (Balcomb 1998: 4,5). As his student, Walls influenced Bediako. He developed further the concept of translatability of Sanneh. Bediako took seriously what his teacher Walls taught him: to recognize that the Christian religion is ‘culturally infinitely translatable’. Because of this nature of the Christian religion, its expansion into different cultural contexts in history has had many cultural manifestations (Bediako 1997: 109). In Europe Christianity takes the form of European culture, in Asia, with many faiths, Christianity takes its form, in Africa with diversity of culture it has manifested itself in their cultures. These manifestations did not change the face of Christianity, but made it accessible and acceptable worldwide.

According to Bediako, translatability also means incarnation (Bediako 1997:107). The salvation plan of God has manifested through the process of incarnation. God transformed from God’s divinity and became human in Jesus Christ. In this way God became part of humanity in order to save human beings (John 1: 1-14). Therefore if God is able to change and dwell among us, so God’s word might also change and become incarnate. Bediako maintains:

Incarnation is not always the same, it is different but yet each incarnation in its form has managed to preserve elements which unite them all, sharing in common reality like God, Jesus Christ, a sense of belonging, reading common scriptures, and celebrating the word of God in sacraments with elements like water, bread and wine (1997:109).

This means that the incarnation of Christianity is inevitable in any form everywhere, but it must have a common reality or share the same reality, which is faith in Christ. Incarnation has also been taken to mean adaptation, which means it takes other elements from different cultures and accommodates them. According to Shorter, adaptation was a means by which the African church could develop its own life style, and it was highly appreciated. Adaptation theology was soon replaced by the theology of incarnation, as Shorter asserts:

Theology must be open to the aspiration of the people of Africa, if it is to help Christianity to become incarnate in the life of the people of the African continent. To achieve this, African churches ... must take over more responsibility for their own evangelization and total development. They must combine creativity with dynamic responsibility (1977:150)

Incarnation and adaptation are the points of departure that make African theologians look to the translatability of Christianity and its Scriptures as the center of the Africanisation of Christianity in order to make Christianity an African religion.

Bediako states that translatability is another way of saying universality. This means that translatability frees Christianity from being a local or regional religion and makes it a universal religion, accepted wherever it goes. Bediako writes:

Hence the translatability of the Christian religion signifies its fundamental relevance and accessibility to persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated. Nowhere is this character of Christianity more evident than in the Christian view of Scripture (Bediako 1977:109).

It is only through translation of Scripture that Christianity became a universal religion. One cannot separate translation of biblical Scripture from incarnation. They go hand in hand all the time. That is why Bediako states clearly that:

... behind the Christian doctrine of the substantial equality of the Scripture in all languages, there lies the even profounder doctrine of the incarnation, by which the fullest divine communication has reached beyond the forms of human words into the human form itself. ...Translatability, therefore, may be said to be in-built into the nature of the Christian religion and capable of subverting any cultural possessiveness of the Faith in the process of its transmission (1997:110).

Kwame Bediako is influenced by theologians like Sanneh, Idowu, Walls, Mbiti and others in the quest for the indigenisation of Christianity in Africa⁴. He is convinced that the translatability principle is the only way to indigenous Christianity in Africa. He further says that the theologians mentioned above are looking for theological identity, theological idiom and a Christian *modus vivendi* that, according to them, would be more appropriate to the African context and reality. Only if Christianity has become rooted in African culture and become part of it, can one talk of indigenisation (Bediako 1997:115). Therefore indigenisation is as much about discarding 'foreignness' as it is about rooting the faith in local reality and this has to be materialized through translation of the Bible into vernaculars in Africa (Bediako 1997:115). Indigenisation may also thus mean translatability, because by indigenizing you accommodate new things in your culture and allow dialogue to take place. This is what happened in Africa.

Since its inception Christianity was in Africa. It had its origin in Africa. According to Christian history, the early church fathers like Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine were from the African soil. They pioneered the vernacular language use of Latin in the North African Church (Balcomb 1998:9). Christianity started in Africa, but Westerners first got the opportunity to put their cultural elements into Christianity because it is a translatable religion. On the other hand Western missionaries were the vehicles used to transport Christianity to other parts of Africa, and so greatly influenced it. The reason why African cultural elements were not accommodated into the Christian religion, according to the researcher, is that on the one hand the translatability theory was not applied, while on the other hand Africans kept oral tradition, which was not accepted, whereas the Western world developed a written form. Many people including scholars believed, especially in the Western world which had developed a written form, that what was written, was right and could be kept for reference in the future. Therefore, because Africans did not write anything down in the past their cultural elements were denied in the Christian religion. Now because of translatability and interpretation African heritage has found its way into the Christian religion.

⁴ Sanneh translatability, Idowu 'the Predicament of the Church in Africa and Towards an Indigenous Church (1965) Walls 'Culturally infinitely Translatable' and Mbiti 'Ways and Means of Communicating the Gospel', the Africanization of Christianity. These writings of great African scholars influenced Bediako in an understanding of Christianity in Africa.

Bediako suggests that grassroots, the theology of the people, which does not depend on training as theologians, but depends on life experience, or the natural theology of Munyika (2004) can deliver the academic theologians from the burden of imagining that it is their task to construct an African theology. Grassroots or natural theology is the theology of ordinary members of the church, who have never undergone any training. It just appears from within human reality and experience in life (Bediako 1997:60). Natural theology, according to Munyika, is theology, which does not necessarily depend on other theologies, but emerges from the experience of the theologian when interacting with people⁵. In order to keep Christian faith in Africa one can start with the religiousness of the Africans from grassroots level. Bediako opted to speak of ‘Christianity as the religion of Africans’ instead of ‘Christianity as an African religion’. The former indicates that Christianity is the religion of an African, which means that Christianity belongs to Africa. The latter indicates that Christianity is a religion for an African. The latter is more general whereas the former is more specific, and the latter denotes less of a sense of ownership than the former.

Bediako based his concept of translatability on the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2:11, which says ‘How is it that we hear in our own language the wonders of God’. Christianity rejects the doctrine of a special sacred language of its Scripture and makes God speak in the vernacular, as happened on the Day of Pentecost. “Accordingly, the Bible translated into whatever language, remains essentially and substantially what it is believed to be in its original autographs” (Bediako 1977:109). The event on the Day of Pentecost also shows that people can speak God’s wonders in their own tongues and destroy the notion of sacred language in Christian religion. Because the translatability theory makes translation possible, this is what happened on the Day of Pentecost. This event also shows that God manifests Godself in any language and culture.

Therefore Bediako stressed that these events of the Day of Pentecost should be upheld because they provide an important Biblical and theological warrant for taking seriously the vernacular languages in which people everywhere hear the wonders of

⁵ Dr Munyika was the General Secretary of the ELCIN (2000 –2006). This assertion was made in his speech on the occasion of the retirement festival of the bishop of the ELCIN, Apollos Kaulinge at Ondobe, December 05, 2004. Now Munyika is the General Secretary of Churches United Against HIV/AIDS (CHUAHA).

God. It is a blueprint that God hears and speaks each and every language under heaven. None can claim that there is one language that is better than others, or that there are either inferior or superior languages. For God, all languages are equal in expressing his wonders. Therefore Bediako writes:

The ability to hear in one's own language and to express in one's own language one's response to the message which one receives, must lie at the heart of all authentic religious encounter with the divine realm. Language itself becomes, then, not merely a social or psychological phenomenon, but a theological one as well. Though every human language has its limitations in this connection, yet it is through language, and for each person, through their mother tongue, that the Spirit of God speaks to convey divine communication at its deepest to the human community (1997:60).

For these reasons African languages, as many as they are, can express the wonders of God, and at the same time they become the media through which divine communication can be conveyed to other people. God is ready to be praised in all human languages. Divine communication, according to Bediako "is never in secret, esoteric, hermetic language; rather it is that all of us hear them, in our own language, speak the wonders of God" (Bediako 1997:60). Bediako maintains the assertion of his teacher Andrew F Walls, that Christianity rejects the notion of a special, sacred language for its Scripture and becomes 'culturally infinitely translatable' (Bediako 1997:61).

Vernacular languages are not only applicable to African languages, but "all human languages are vernacular languages in their appropriate context" (Bediako 1997:61). Vernacularisation in Africa made Christianity take root in Africa and allows Christianity to become stronger in African communities. Now Christianity is a religion of an African. The most important element for building a church in an indigenous Christian tradition is the Scriptures in the vernacular language of the people. The people concerned understand it in their own terms and in turn respond to it. That means that the Scriptures, available in vernacular languages, create an opportunity for theologies. The value of the Bible in vernacular languages to converts was generally recognized quite early. The availability of the Scriptures in many African languages is an important phenomenon because it keeps Christianity in Africa and makes Christianity an African religion. Bediako reaffirms this when he writes:

By rejecting the notion of a sacred language for the Bible Christianity makes every translation of its Scriptures substantially and equally the Word of God. Thus the existence of vernacular Bibles not only facilitates access to the particular communities speaking those languages, but also creates the likelihood that the hearers of the Word in their own languages will make their own response to it on their own terms (1997:62).

The Bible in the vernacular language in Africa is the second concentric circle in Bediako's three concentric circles view. The three concentric circles are the living God, the Bible and faith and spirituality. These three concentric circles lie at the heart of African Christian life, which according to Bediako, must be taken seriously in all Christian formations. The Bible should not be regarded as an ancient book, but as a context which people inhabit and in which they participate (Bediako 2001:31). Bediako states also that:

African Christianity today is inconceivable apart from the existence of the Bible in African indigenous languages or mother tongues. For the mother tongue Bible has been the means by which many Africans made their own responses to the Christian message, in terms of their own needs and according to their own categories of thought and meaning (2001:31).

This is an indication that Africans have taken seriously the message of the Gospel as they have heard it and feel at home with the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This means that African Christians welcome Christianity and it becomes their religion. In many instances the Bible or Christianity became part of African Christians' daily life. They find themselves or read of themselves in the Bible. So the Bible became a primary source of African Christianity. Bediako further noted;

It has deep roots in the long histories of the peoples of the continent [Africa], whilst it has proved to be capable of apprehension by Africans in African terms, as is demonstrated by the massive and diverse presence of the faith in African life. The eternal Gospel has already found a local home within the African response to it, showing that Christ has become the integrating reality and power linking old and new in the African experience (2000:55).

There is a need for continuity of the vernacular heritage in terms of worldview and mission originated churches. The rejection of the vernacular heritage creates a tension between the two. There is no need for the substitution of traditional religion by Christianity; rather dialogue must take place. According to Bediako, the missionary

enterprise of the nineteenth century did not see in ATR and culture a partner for dialogue. The reason was simply that African tradition and practices were regarded as heathen or pagan. Now things have changed and dialogue between religions is upheld. Dialogue opens the platform for religions to listen to each other and influence each other. No religion and no culture is above another. That is why the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission states clearly that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one and the same for all, but it is always expressed in a particular language and culture. The statement goes further to state that “the Gospel speaks to people in the midst of their everyday lives, so that they hear God’s call in their own language and through their own culture” (FELM 2001:10).

Because Christianity is ‘culturally infinitely translatable’ it is possible to see its various circles of expansion into different cultural contexts in its history as so many cultural manifestations or incarnations of faith. There is no single aspect of Christianity. Translatability as incarnation has its origin from God. If it is possible for God to translate God self into human form, so is it possible for God’s spoken Word to change to written form, and at the same time God’s Word may change into any language and any culture. The researcher agrees with Sanneh and Bediako that translatability rescued Christian religion from a Western possessiveness, which has led to the emergence of a genuine indigenous Christianity in terms of *Missio Dei* (Mission of God), in the local setting; a fresh cultural incarnation of faith (Bediako 1997:122).

As mentioned in chapter one, translation goes hand in hand with interpretation. Translation and interpretation aim at one goal; to make Christianity and the biblical message relevant to African people. It is because of the translatability principle that Christianity is at home with local people. Therefore translatability is what makes Christianity and its Scripture, the Bible, in vernacular languages in the ELCIN relevant to its members in the northern belt of Namibia. What Sanneh and Bediako have presented to us is a good mirror for any missionary work to be carried out “from everywhere to everywhere” (FELM 2001:8), in the globe.

According to the researcher’s analysis, although translatability aims at the accommodation of languages, cultures and context, the use of gender sensitive

language has been neglected. In many African languages gender-sensitivity does not exist, and neither does gender-bias. In the African language a person is just a person and God is God. According to Dube most African languages, Oshiwambo and Kavango in Namibia included, are gender-neutral and their deities are gender-neutral, but colonial translators of the Bible gave the deities male genders. This needs more research in local culture. Nevertheless if the translatability theory does not consider gender balance in translation, then the translatability theory lacks something important. The researcher is convinced that gender is also included in the translatability principle. Women are part and parcel of the process of translation and interpretation of Christianity and its Scriptures in Africa, as will be demonstrated in chapter seven of this study.

To conclude this section the researcher agrees with Bediako that:

... translatability is the only true basis and starting point for seeking indigeneity. From this perspective, however, indigeneity does not lie at the end of quest. Rather it is presumed within the very translatability of the Christian religion. Indigeneity is as much a matter of recognition within the Gospel as it is an achievement of actual Christian witness. Thus, universality, translatability, incarnation and indigeneity belong in a continuum and are integral to the warp and woof of the Christian religion [wherever it is planted] (1997:123).

2. 4. Translation of the Bible into vernacular languages

Having discussed in depth the theory of translatability and interpretation as presented by Sanneh and Bediako, in this section we look into translation itself and how the translatability theory is applied. Translation is one way to make the Bible relevant in vernacular languages in Africa, while interpretation is one way to make a biblical message clear. One cannot draw a line between translation and interpretation, because “every translation is simultaneously an interpretation” (Brecht 1990:50), but for academic reasons one can distinguish between the two. Rabin describes translation as a very central activity of humankind and has been carried on throughout the ages, and it was effective. The proof of the effectiveness of translation is the spread of Christianity, a religion disseminated almost entirely by means of translation from one language to another, from one culture to another and from one context to another (Rabin 1972:108). It is more effective because of its translatability principle.

Translation is the work of the people, the translators. Therefore when discussing translation the translators must be considered as well, because they are the vehicles, which make translation possible. Here follows some views of translators and translation. The Italians says: “A translator is a traitor”. This means the translator can manipulate the situation. Sometimes the reader is at the mercy of translators, following what the translator intended to say instead of following the author’s intentions (as these two may differ). The French say: “Translations are like women! If they are beautiful they are not faithful, and if they are faithful, they are not beautiful” (*sic*) (Rabin 1972:108). This means that if the translation is pleasing the readers or hearers it is not faithful to the source text/language and if the translation is faithful to the source text/language it is not pleasing in the target language. The reason is that what one language means is not necessarily what is meant by another language even if they use the same wording especially in the case of literal translation, which translates word by word and sentence by sentence. Therefore the translators need to know the subtleties of the source language and the language/culture of the target language/culture in order to make the translation relevant and understandable.

Translators cannot be without challenges. They also face challenges in doing translation. According to Mojola translators faces the following challenges:

They have to grapple with all the complex problems arising out of the need to express the ancient and eternal message of the Bible in their own language. They face the challenge of how to translate biblical concepts, ideas, practices, festivals, rituals, spiritual beings, cultural artifacts, metaphors, beliefs, etc. in terms that make sense in the local vernacular. How to do this meaningfully, accurately, faithfully, clearly and with native genius and natural rhythms is the challenge that faces every translator (2002: 202-203).

That means that the translator plays an important role in keeping the biblical message fundamentally the same as its first hearers heard it. At the same time the translators have to maintain the dialogue between source culture/language and target culture/language. If the translator fails to do so, then the translation will be irrelevant to the people concerned.

The abovementioned challenges have faced missionary and indigenous translators in the Northern Namibia, in the ELCIN, when embarking on the translation of the Bible

into vernaculars, (Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali in particular). They tried to match some of these ideas and practices; they managed to accommodate some, and failed in others.

The researcher agrees with Mojola that translation is a necessary component, of Christian mission and ministry (Mojola 2002: 203), because without this component, Christianity and the biblical message would be irrelevant. According to Andrew Walls, as quoted by Mojola, incarnation is another form of translation, so translation and incarnation are inextricably intertwined (2002:203). Mojola concludes this argument by stating that:

Seeing incarnation as translation underlines the necessity of making Christian discourse and practice deeply rooted in particular places and times, in particular cultures and languages, or in the linguistic and cultural practices of the ordinary person in his [her] mundane everyday existence (2002:203).

From the beginning most of the Bible translation was done by missionaries from Europe with little knowledge of the vernacular languages and culture of African people. In preparation for translation missionaries studied Hebrew, Greek and Latin. When carrying out translation they used the Hebrew and Greek texts available at the time, together with the translations in their own tongues (Hermanson 2002:7,8). It is very important and easier for the people to understand their own language rather than other languages. Rabin confirms this when he writes:

The basis of understanding which people have who live in the same culture and speak the same language provides the ability for the hearer to understand the speaker, or the reader to understand the writer. (1972:109).

Translation does not operate in a vacuum, but within the language and the culture of the particular people. God revealed Godself also in cultures. Translation is always culture-bound. Culture-bound translation means that each culture has its own way of dealing with cultural differences with regard to the translation of different types of writing or information, for example literature, religion, law, poetry etc. Each type is treated differently in a way that is understood and expected by people within that particular community (Rabin 1972:110). The researcher argues that any translation of the Bible in vernacular languages, which ignores cultural dynamism, is a failure,

because translation cannot be done in a vacuum, but has to be applied to a given language, culture and context.

Naudè contributed to the notion of language being culture-bound as he asserts that:

Language plays a role in its wider social and cultural context by forging and sustaining cultural practices and social structures ... One should think of language not just of language and culture but also as part and parcel of culture. The linguistic system permeates all other systems within the culture. Speaking is a culturally constructed act reflecting politeness, personhood, gender, social position, socialization, etc (2002:57).

One has to bear in mind that each religion, each culture, and each language has its own way of writing religious literature and its own way of translating religious works. In many cases there is a separate language for each purpose, known as biblical terms or sacred words. According to Rabin, biblical terms are those, which originated from biblical languages or source languages (1972:110). Sacred words and terms from original languages that are found in many Bible versions in ELCIN and other translations are: Selah (Ps 32:4), Hosanna (Mat 21:29), Temple (II Chron 2:1; Lk 2:46), Passover (Dt 16:1; Mk 14:1), and Amen (Dt 27:15; Rev 22:21) to mention just a few examples. Rabin referred to biblical English as being completely Hebraized (Rabin 1972:110). This means that each translation carries the notions or characteristic of the source language. In the ELCIN, the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga (1954) carries the characteristics of German, English and Greek. The Oshikwanyama version (1974) carries the characteristic of German, English, Greek and Oshindonga, while the translation into Kwangali (1987) carries English, Greek, Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama. For example the words like Hallelujah, Amen, and rabbi are hard to translate into any language. It is difficult to remove those elements or characters from their source languages, because in that process you devalue the translation. However, it should be borne in mind that translation is an ongoing process. It has origin, but it has to continue as generations come and pass. The translatability theory will make this process possible at each stage of translation.

Mojola provides us with the following major shift in Bible translation:

1. The Era of Spreading the Faith (300-BC) when the first translation of the Hebrew Bible was undertaken in Alexandria, Egypt.

2. The Era of European Vernaculars (405-) inaugurated by Jerome's translation of the Scripture into the popular language of the time, Latin Vulgata.
3. The Era of Printing (1450-), which completely revolutionized the practice of writing, reading, book production and dissemination of knowledge.
4. The Bible Society Era (1804-) officially inaugurated by the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).
5. Interconfessional Era (1965-), which coincides with the Vatican II of 1965.
6. The Era of Non-Missionary Translation (1970-), which marks the change from translations largely done by foreigners to those largely done by indigenous speakers (2002: 204-205).

The ELCIN started with the translation work of the Bible with the Bible Society Era and ended with the Non-Missionary Translation Era. Besides work on parts of the Bible, especially the New Testament, the translation of the whole Bible in the ELCIN started in 1885 (Oshindonga), and later in 1952 (Oshikwanyama) and in 1960 (Kwangali) (Tirronen 1977:108; Laukkanen 2002: 114). The next section deals with the interpretation of the Bible, based on the argument that each translation is interpretation.

2. 5. Interpretation of the Bible

Translation is the first step toward interpretation. Therefore, there is no interpretation of the Bible if there is no translation. Translation paves the way for interpretation. The aim of interpretation is to make the biblical message clear and understandable. Interpretation cannot be separated from hermeneutics, because hermeneutics is the art of interpretation aimed at retrieving the message from the biblical text and applying it to a given context. Interpretation is to do with making people understand the speech or the piece of writing or the text in their own context. There are many aspects involved in the process of understanding text, writing or speech. Some of the aspects include the person who delivers the speech, the culture to which he/she belongs the mood of the author, and the context. That means that one can understand a speech or piece of writing and understand the person who is speaking or writing, for they too have the same rules to consider as do the reader and the listener.

Theologically speaking interpretation, although it is human endeavor, serves biblical authority. “If [biblical] authority may be defined as the legitimate exercise of effective power, then the authority of the Bible is exercised effectively only through biblical interpretation” (Gillespie 1986:192). Interpretation of the Bible is imperative if we want to get the actual message of the text. Gillespie stresses this point that “we are compelled to interpret the Bible if we expect to encounter its authority” (1986:192). This means that there is nothing to make the biblical message relevant if it is not interpreted.

Chladenius contributed to the discourse of interpretation saying that there are always two things to consider in speeches and in written works: a comprehension of the author’s meaning and the speech or writing itself (1985: 56). Because of these two aspects, one cannot easily claim to wholly understand the speech or a written work. Therefore, “all books and speeches produced by people will have something in them which is not understandable” (Chladenius 1985:56), including the Bible. The Bible is a written work produced at a certain time from a certain culture and tradition. Therefore one cannot claim that he/she understands the biblical text completely. He/she has to wrestle with the text in order to get the meaning or meanings out of it. For Chladenius a full understanding takes place only when one imagines all the possible meanings, which can be thought of with each word. The complete understanding of the speech or writing must encompass a number of concepts (1985:57). This is, in fact, the role of interpreters in any given circumstances.

According to Nürnberger, hermeneutics, which is the art of interpretation, has become a very complex and sophisticated enterprise. It uses science, technology and emancipation data to find the meanings of the given text from its original context to the present (2000:11). He further noted that following the hermeneutics approach in relation to the biblical text, the dynamic character of the biblical tradition must be upheld without sacrificing its timeless functions of laying foundations, defining identity, granting acceptance, bestowing authority and giving direction to life (Nürnberger 2002:12). That means that we have to bear in mind that the Bible is our source knowledge of the God of life who is always for us and not against us. To do better interpretation, the following mode of reading the biblical text is effective. These

modes of, or approaches to the reading of the biblical text help the interpreter to get the right meaning of the text and also make the biblical message more inclusive.

Translatability is more to do with translation of the Bible as well as its interpretation. The next section will deal with the different approaches to the reading of the biblical text in order to make it more understandable and inclusive.

2. 6 Modes or approaches to the reading of the Bible

Nürnberg and West offer us complex hermeneutical approaches to the reading of the Bible in order to extract the meaning of the text correctly without losing anything. These approaches to the reading of the Bible are suitable for making the Bible in any language, whether in Africa, or elsewhere in the world more understandable. These approaches include various stages in the history of theology and of the church. Each reading emphasizes a different aspect of the Bible. These approaches are behind-the-text reading, in-the-text reading, before-the-text reading, above-the-text reading and below-the-text reading (Nürnberg 2002: 42; West 1973:26-50), and the researcher has added an in-the-culture reading and an in-gender reading of the Bible.

2. 6.1 Behind-the-text reading

This reading emphasizes the historical and sociological context of the Bible. The reader uses historical-critical tools to unearth the meaning of the text in its original form. According to West this mode of reading concentrates on what is behind the text, which is not written in the text itself (West 1993:27). Nürnberg deepens this argument by adding that the original meaning of a text can only be understood when we locate it in the context and the flow of the history in which it originated. Therefore the ancient message in the Bible contains the decisive disclosure of the intentions of God not only for the past, and that particular context, but also for all times and situations including our own time today. So, hermeneutics must unearth the ancient biblical meaning and the Spirit must disclose the continuing significance of this meaning for us today (Nürnberg 2002:43). It is not always easy to read behind the text because sometimes it is hard to find relevant information or material in this exercise. Nevertheless there is a need to read behind the text in order to get the actual meaning of the text in its original setting.

2. 6. 2 In-the-text reading

In-the-text reading emphasizes the literary and narrative context of the Bible. It concentrates more on the text itself (West 1993:27). This reading in the text itself affirms that the text is decisive as it stands. This means that one can simply draw the meaning from the text itself with no need to search anywhere else. The text liberates itself from its author, its original listeners and its context. The text has its own dignity and carries the truth about God on its own. "It is the Word of God because God speaks through it now and here" (Nürnberger 2002:53). The problem of this approach is that God does not only speak through these texts (Nürnberger 2002: 53), but God speaks in the entire Bible. Many preachers, who do not have any knowledge of the history of theology, use this approach. In the ELCIN for example, many preachers favour this approach, because it is straightforward. This is probably due to the lack of informative literature such as commentaries, or it is due to the fact that the in-the-text method of interpretation may appear to be an easy one, requiring no deeper investigation of the context. The danger of in the text reading approach is that it can easily be manipulated and say what the interpreter wants it to say instead of carrying the original message.

2. 6. 3 Before-the-text reading

Before-the-text reading emphasizes the thematic and symbolic context of the Bible. It concentrates on what is in front of the text (West 1993:27). According to Nürnberger this reading reverses the order between the text and the situation. It looks into the revolution in the understanding of revelation. This focuses on the reaction of the hearers of the text at that moment and their way forward. This approach does not bother with the original meaning of the text, but only with its present and future. All readings discover new meaning, or even meanings, (polysemy), from the text. The new meaning/meanings are "derived from current needs, emanating from current situations and their interpretation" (Nürnberger 2002:45). Nürnberger further explains that "before-the-text reading comes close to the insight of the Reformers that the Word of God is always a Verbum externum, a word coming from outside one's prejudices, interests, needs and interpretations" (2002:46), which has a different meaning from ours. This approach is more contextual and situational. One cannot concentrate on the present and future meaning of the text. The historical part of the text

must be considered, because each text has always historical aspects, which also have a meaning to us today.

2. 6. 4 Above-the-text reading

Above-the-text reading has to do with the tradition of the Church or of the various denominations. The Reformers had differences in their teaching and emphasis in doctrine issues. For Catholics the biblical text is seminal; it's true meaning is guided by the hierarchy of the Church. Protestants defined their identity by means of a number of confessional documents. This means things must be well documented. The Bible is declared as the rule of faith (norma normans), Lutheran Reformers emphasised "law and gospel" etc. This means that creeds, confessions and doctrines of different denominations and churches determine the meaning of the text in each denomination. For example, the Lutheran church placed the Bible into the hands of ordinary members of the church, and under Lutheran tradition and dogma, these would appropriate whatever seemed to fit their respective situation (Nürnberg 2002:50,51). The danger to above-the text reading of the Bible is that it limits the interpreter to a certain degree of understanding. The text does not have a single meaning for a certain confession but for all human beings. "The biblical text is only the Word of God because, and in as far as it witnesses to Christ, who is again defined as a expression of God's redeeming grace ..." (Nürnberg 2002:52).

2. 6. 5 Below-the-text reading

Below-the-text reading follows the trajectories of before-the-text reading within biblical history (Nürnberg 2002:57). This means that one needs to follow arrays of events that took place in the process of the evolution of the text which have evolved up to the present date. The meaning of the text is not static; rather it is a process without end as long as the world exists. What is perceived to be truth today could be changed tomorrow. For example in the past it was believed that the sun was circling the earth, but according to the Copernican theory the earth is circling the sun. Shifts are inevitable in the world of science and archaeology (Munyika 2004:241).

The meaning of the text could be drawn from the biblical historical process right up to date, in different languages and cultures, and it carries the truth (Nürnberg 2002: 55-

58). Nürnberger states clearly that although there are trajectories in biblical history, we need not lose the central themes and identity of Christian faith. So, he writes:

The Christian faith indeed has a central theme, which constitutes its identity and its criterion of truth, namely the ever-changing response of God's redemptive concern to ever changing situation of human need (2002: 56)

One cannot always follow the discoveries of science as a solution to the problem; otherwise they might change their views. One has to have in mind that the meaning of the text may change due to the new situation and needs. Below-the-text reading, according to Nürnberger, is nothing but a behind-the-text reading of the series of before-the-text reading, which led to the formation of the canonical Scriptures (2002:58)

2. 6. 6 In-the-culture reading

In-the culture reading of the Bible emphasizes the cultural setting of the reader. It concentrates on the context of the receptor culture. This reading is useful for African Christians because they want to read themselves in the Bible, which is an ancient Near East document. In-the-culture reading of the Bible allows one to read his/her culture into the Bible and to see whether that culture is or will be accommodated by the text. Culture is an important aspect of human existence. Without culture there is no identity. From the African feminist perspective, Dube quotes Kanyoro that cultures remain alive and authoritative to African women and these are their lenses for reading the Bible (Dube 2001:1,9). This reading allows each culture to enrich the interpretation of the Bible and contribute to the worldwide Christian church (FELM 2001:10). It is not necessary that all cultures be reflected in the biblical text, because the biblical text evolved from a certain culture and tradition at a particular time. However, the Word of God has a meaning for each culture, therefore in-the- culture reading of the Bible allows the reader to see his/her culture addressed by the Word of God.

2. 6. 7. In-gender reading of the Bible

In-gender reading of the Bible challenges the traditional way of reading the Bible, which was dominated by the patriarchal system. This mode of reading emphasizes the gender-sensitive reading of the Bible. It seeks to see how women played a role in the Bible, in Christian history and in the society at large. It also seeks to balance the

power between men and women. Women's voices and experiences, which have been long neglected, may be uplifted and considered in reading the Bible. The danger in this approach is that gender balance is not always required in each and every text. One cannot replace or neutralise everything written in the Bible. The biblical text is for both men and women. Nevertheless gender sensitivity must be addressed in reading the Bible.

In the ELCIN, the most used modes of reading the Bible and delivering the message are reading in-the-text itself and reading in-front-of-the-text. Only a few, who the researcher calls academics, are comfortable using other approaches. The researcher's opinion is that both approaches make the biblical message relevant in ELCIN.

2. 7. Interpretation, context and culture

Interpretation is a way of making the biblical message relevant and understandable. While translation is conducted to transfer the Bible from one language and culture to another, interpretation is undertaken to transfer a message from one context to another. Translation paves the way for interpretation. Translation and interpretation are processes that involve human beings. Interpreters are human beings from within a particular location, a particular culture and speaking a particular language. Interpreters do not live in a vacuum. They live in a concrete historical situation and in a particular culture. These are the driving forces behind their interpretive work in the past and still are today. Jacobson, in Padilla, describes interpreters and their work by stating that from their culture they derive, not only their language which is the expression of culture, but also their patterns of thought and conduct, methods of learning, emotional reactions, values, interests, and goals. If the Word of God is to reach them, it must do so in terms of their own culture (1986:301). This means that the Word of God must address people from concrete situations. God has come down into a concrete human situation and operates from within, not from outside.

This research does not deal with biblical interpretation in general, but with special reference to African Christians, their culture and their context. No culture, as a whole, reflects the purpose of God, because cultures are human inventions. Culture is to do with people's lives. It is the identity of each nation, but it is not the identity of God, although culture is a gift from God. In order for the culture to serve as a means of

expression of God's purpose, it must be transformed. "In all cultures there are elements which conspire against the understanding of God's Word" and at the same time "every culture possesses positive elements, favorable to the understanding of the Gospel". Padilla argues further that "the same cultural differences that hinder intercultural communications turn out to be an asset to the understanding of the many-sided wisdom of God; they serve as channels to aspects of God's Word which can be best seen from within a particular context" (1986:301). This is a clear indication that culture is a very important vehicle to transport the gospel to the context of the people. Therefore, any interpretation, which leaves out culture and context, will be meaningless.

The hermeneutical task requires an understanding of the concrete situation as much as an understanding of Scripture. Each text emerges from a concrete situation, and it must be made meaningful to us today in our current concrete situation. Today we need to hear the meaning of the message as the first hearers in our own context heard it. This is the task of interpreters. "No transposition of the biblical message is possible unless the interpreters are familiar with the frame of reference within which the message is to become meaningful" (Padilla 1986:302).

Padilla describes hermeneutics as follows:

Hermeneutics has to do with a dialogue between Scripture and the contemporary historical context. Its purpose is to transpose the biblical message from its original context into a particular ... situation. Its basic assumption is that the God who spoke in the past and whose Word was recorded in the Bible continues to speak today to all mankind [sic] in Scripture (1986:302).

Interpretation has to do with the contextualization of the gospel. The failure of the Western missionaries to do effective interpretation was that they assumed that their task was simply to extract the message directly from biblical text and to transmit it to their hearers in mission fields, with no consideration of the role of the historical context of the hearers in the whole interpretive process. They did not even consider the context of the mission field (Padilla 1986:307). They took it for granted that the message remains the same. This is not the case because context and situation are not the same. This attitude of missionaries caused the Christian religion to be regarded in some parts of the world as an ethnic religion, or the white people's religion. The

gospel has a foreign sound in relation to many of the dreams and anxieties, problems and questions, values and customs of different people. The Word of God must be reduced to a message, which touches life on digression. The urgent need in the church or mission originated church everywhere is for a new reading of the gospel from within each particular historical situation (Padilla 1986:307). There is no gospel message outside the context and the situation. The gospel message is always within a given context of people.

Kwok Pui Lan, a theologian from China, shed light on the interpretation of the Bible from the Chinese perspective, which is also relevant to the African setting as well. When Christianity arrived in China it encountered Chinese religions and culture. It was hard for Christianity to spread more rapidly in that country than it did. Christianity was characterized by Western domination and cultural imperialism. Interpretation of the Bible amongst the Chinese community has to consider other faiths and the culture of the people in order to be effective and understandable. Interpretation is a complex thing, therefore Lan writes: "Interpretation of the Bible is not just a religious matter within the Christian community, but a matter with significant political implications for other peoples as well" (1993:18), because the person as a whole is a socio-religio-political being. Politics has its implications that also need to be addressed with the Word of God. In many countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world there is political unrest, which causes the suffering of the people. People want to be saved from unjust systems in the world of politics through contextual interpretation of the Bible.

There is a need for new ways of interpreting the Scriptures from within the cultural context of Africa (Abogunrin 2001:52). In the ELCIN for example, theologians are using Western ways of interpreting the biblical text. They are using Western tools, Western ideas, Western culture and the like, and neglect their own way of life, which sometimes proves meaningless and irrelevant (Abogunrin 2001:54). The western tools, ideas and culture differ from theirs and of their hearers, so they need to use their own tools. The best way to do interpretation is to use the available means within a given cultural context and situation. That is why Abogunrin states that:

Overdependence on theories and rules of interpretation developed under conditions alien to African life will undoubtedly affect the

growth of the church to maturity. It also reduces our credibility as African theologians, diminishes our spirit and distorts the universality of Jesus Christ to whom the Scriptures bear witness (2001:53).

So, the ELCIN theologians need to develop their own ways of interpreting the Bible to suit their context, because they have the Bible translated into their languages. This cannot be taken for granted, but it has to be done critically. Western tools of interpretation at our disposal could be translated into African tools for better serving this task. Bediako states clearly that African Christians having the Scripture in their own tongue have weakened any Western bias in their presentation of the Gospel (2000:58). Abogunrin warns African theologians against being “western ambassadors” to their own people. So, African theologians must retrain themselves in African patterns, after they have been trained in Western patterns (2001:59). This is what is called the translatability of Christianity, and the characteristics of Christian mission.

2. 9. Conclusion

In this chapter we dealt with the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh as supported by Bediako and other African Christian theologians in Africa and Christian theologians abroad, which is the theoretical framework of this thesis. Translatability, a term used most frequently by Sanneh, refers to a process in which the Christian message expresses its universal ethos, its capacity to enter into each cultural idiom fully and seriously enough to commence a challenging and enduring dialogue between culture and Christianity. In this context translatability is to do with the translation of the Bible from one language and culture to another without losing the meaning and the message of the biblical text. The focus in this chapter was on how vernacularization took place in Africa in general, and in the ELCIN, in particular. Interpretation and its method of hermeneutics were also addressed in this chapter. It is through interpretation that the message of the Bible is understood. Hermeneutics helps theologians to get the message of the Bible from its historical flux, and bring the meaning of the biblical text to the contemporary situation. The methods of translation and the various approaches to the reading of the Bible have been discussed.

Translatability is an authentic form of translation, because it provides meaningful access for self-realization and cultural fulfillment in the ELCIN. Again translatability

renders Christianity compatible with all cultures. Therefore it is applicable to the translation of Christianity and its Scripture in the ELCIN for the development of a relevant and sound theology. The Bible is at the centre of Christianity.

As we have dealt with how Sanneh and Bediako present the effect of translation and interpretation in African Christianity, the next chapter will deal with the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people into whose language, the Bible was translated in northern Namibia.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ORIGIN OF OVAWAMBO AND OKAVANGO PEOPLE

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the translatability and interpretation theories of Sanneh and Bediako, which provide the theoretical framework of the whole thesis. Ovawambo and Okavango people form the backbone of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The languages, cultures and beliefs of Africans who lived in the northern belt of Namibia made a major contribution to the way in which the Bible and Christianity as a whole have been translated and received. This chapter provides a historical background of these African people (Ovawambo and Okavango people) into whose languages the Bible was translated. This chapter will cover the origins of Ovawambo and Okavango people, their language group, their culture and their religious belief and practices. This chapter is needed because it provides the background of Ovawambo and Okavango people. The background information is important because in translation, the translator needs to know the culture, the language and the context of the receiver. The translatability theory is effective once the people concerned are known. This chapter also includes how Ovawambo and Okavango people perceive God, how they pray and the veneration of ancestors. This shows that Ovawambo and Okavango people knew God before missionaries came.

Comment [UKZN1]: Add a summary of what is covered in this chapter

3.2 The origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people

Many African peoples, who live in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ovawambo and Okavango peoples, originated from the Great Lakes. Therefore, Ovawambo and Okavango people have the same roots. Ovawambo and Okavango people live in the northern belt of Namibia (see Map III on appendix). They believe in the Supreme Being, *Kalunga/ Karunga kaNangombe* [God of Nangombe). Their languages are among the Bantu group of languages.

Ovawambo and Okavango belong to the Bantu people of Africa. According to Knappert, the Bantu in Namibia are divided into Ovakwanyama, Ovandonga, Kwangali, Herero and some smaller groups (1981:3). This chapter will concentrate more on the first three groups that occupied Ovamboland and Okavango, but will not neglect the other groups. The Bantu are a sub-group of the African people, having originated through the miscegenation of Bantu and

Hamites. They originally settled in the vicinity of the Great Lakes in East Africa. Because of a conflict of interests, caused mainly by overpopulation and the over-exploitation of natural resources, this group of Bantu migrated to southern Africa (Malan 1980: 6). The historian, Williams, holds that the group of Niger-Congo Bantu-speakers migrated to somewhere in the area of Nigeria and then to Cameroon and Gabon, from where they gradually spread eastward north of the forest and south to the forest edge near the Congo and the Lower Kasai, and the Lualaba tributaries. These people were later called Imbangala, and were composed of the Kinguri, the leader, and his followers. Among the Kinguri followers were the political entities of the Kabungu, Mwa Cangombe, Kangengo, Ndonga, Kibombo kyaWulu, Kambwizo and Lunga. Some of these leaders, of the Kabungu, Ndonga, and Kalunga (Lunga) reached Ovamboland (Williams 1991:53). These three latter names are important because they were the ancestors of Ovawambo. According to Laukkanen, the great migration of the Bantu peoples occurred between the ninth and fourteenth centuries A.D (Laukkanen 2002: 26). The local Bantu groups that reached their present habitation toward the middle of the sixteenth century included Ovawambo and Okavango people (Malan 1980:6, 7). All these theories indicate that the Ovawambo and Okavango people came from north and central Africa and moved southward until they settled in what the researcher refers to as the northern belt of Namibia because the area stretched from Kaprivi in the east to Ruacana in the west.

3. 2. 1 Ovawambo people

The Ovawambo lived in Ovamboland (see map III), which covers 53 300 km² and is situated in the north of Namibia between the Etosha National Park and the Angolan border. The border between Namibia and Angola, established in 1890, divided Ovawambo, especially Ovakwanyama into two. Two thirds of Ovakwanyama live in Angola and one third live in Namibia (Nambala 1994:28), which makes up about 35% of the 700 000 of Ovawambo who lived in Namibia, and Aandonga comprises 30% of the Namibian population⁶ of 1, 820,916 (1.8m)⁷. In the west Ovawambo shares a common border with Kaokoland, and in the east with Okavango. The whole territory consists of a vast, sandy plain, which forms part of the Kalahari Basin. A network of shallow watercourses called *oshana* traverses the central part of Owambo. *Oshana* (pans) keeps the water that flows from neighbouring Angola (Malan 1980: 75-77). *Oshana* cannot keep water for any length of time and therefore most of the time Ovamboland is a dry area. The eastern part of Ovamboland forms part of the northern Kalahari woodland.

⁶ <http://www.Namibian.org/travel/Namibia/population/Ovambo.htm>

⁷ <http://www.multied.com/nation/Namibia/Population.htm>.

Ovawambo settled on a fertile grassy plain suitable for farming. Presently Ovamboland is divided into four regions, namely; Oshikoto, Ohangwena, Oshana and Omusati respectively.

There are several theories about the origin of Ovawambo. Here follows the Laurmaa and Nambala theories of the origin of Ovawambo people.

According to Laurmaa, Ovawambo's roots are connected (as are other Bantu people) to the nations mentioned in the Bible, the Hebrews and Egyptians and others. Their tales and wisdom are related to the biblical ones. The teachings of the Israelites extended to Babylon and Assyria and other countries as well as to Egypt and Ethiopia down to South of Africa (1949:15). Laurmaa's theory regarding the origins of Ovawambo would suggest that because of their long journey to reach Namibia, this group of Africans lost their possessions, their original culture and religiosity and even their skills. According to Laurmaa, with increasing time and distance, they were gradually deprived of their status. When meeting and interacting with other nations they lost and gained good and bad things. As they were trying to make a life in difficult conditions they became dangerous to themselves, to animals and to nature. This means that they probably fought each other, killed animals for survival, as meat and clothing, and destroyed nature for their own survival. Although they lost many things from their forefathers and foremothers, their faith in the Creator of everything, to whom they gave different names, remained. According to Laurmaa the names of God such as, *Ndjambi* (Okavango), *Kalunga* and *Pamba* (Ovawambo) emerged from far away as Egypt. The name *Ndambji* means 'gives reward' this meaning that God the Creator rewards. *Pamba* was a name for the crocodile, the Egyptian god. The old Ovawambo had Sun [*Etango*] as their God, which also served for God by Egyptians. Ovawambo respect "Etango". Therefore when someone is sick every morning he/she has to face the sun as a source of health and prosperity (Laurmaa 1949:16). The wisdom of Ovawambo, according to Laurmaa, has its roots in the teachings of the Phoenicians, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians and the teaching of the Israelites in the Old Testament and New Testament (Laurmaa 1949:14-16). This theory shows that there was a connection between Ovawambo with the Israelites people, in religion and in some cultural practises.

Laurmaa's theory contains some plausible suggestions, but it is too exaggerated. On the one hand it shows that Ovawambo came from northern Africa to southern Africa. It is also quite obvious that people who have migrated a great distance and mixed with other nations will lose

and gain aspects of culture. On the other hand the theory implies that those people who remained, in North Africa or in Ancient Near East, remained, as they were, losing nothing. If this is the case then the Ancient Near East was the center of all humanity. According to the researcher, it is not only the people from North Africa moved to South who had lost their culture and gained others, but all people lost and gained good and bad things. This theory also implies that missionaries and other western people rehabilitated Ovawambo, when they came to Namibia because they had lost much of their culture and possessions during their long journey. Ovawambo have been people with identity and dignity just as other people in the world. There was no need to be rehabilitated by others as the theory of Laurmaa suggested. The missionaries did missionary work among them to show them how to worship God, who created them, in whom they believed. One important thing is that even though they lost many things, they kept faith in God. God is the creator of all humanity wherever they are and gives them a gift of tongues, languages and culture. Although people have different cultures and languages, all human beings have something in common because they are created in the image of God. God who led them through to Namibia for many years is the same God who brought missionaries to Namibia. The Laurmaa's theory thus clearly needs more investigation.

According to ELCIN historian, Nambala⁸, the origins of Ovawambo are unclear and it is not even known how long they have lived in Namibia (1994:28). According to him, there are many possibilities concerning the origin of Ovawambo. One possibility is that Ovawambo came from the east sometime between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. Another possibility is that they may have come from the northeast over the Zambezi and Okavango Rivers and trekked westwards until they reached what is known as Ovamboland today. Another version is that they may have come from the north through Angola and crossed the Kunene River or between the Kunene River and the Okavango Rivers. They divided into groups; some followed the rivers while others moved southwards parallel to the rivers. It was not clear whether they came as a group or as a small family and in clan unities. Nambala concludes that Ovawambo are part of the great Bantu movement from the northeast to the southwest of Africa (1994:28).

⁸ Dr Shekutaamba V V Nambala is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). His is a historian and theologian. He served as a director of finance in ELCIN. Now he is working in the ELCIN archive. He wrote books on the history of the church in Namibia such as; *History of the Church in Namibia (1994)*, *Ondjokonona Yaasita Naateolohi muELCIN 1925-1992 (1995)*, *Hambelela Nyokokulu: Ondjokonona ya ELCIN 1870-1990 (1996)* [Praise your grand mother otherwise your mother was not born]. Nambala is co-writer with Buys of the, *History of the Church in Namibia 1805-1990: An Introduction (2003)*. He writes many articles for the ELCIN magazine *Omukwetu* under the title *Iitoolwa yaNambala*.

Ovawambo comprise seven tribes or kingdoms, namely: the Kwanyama, Ndonga, Kwambi, Mbalantu, Ngandjera, Kwaluudhi and Nkolonkadhi/Eunda (Malan 1980:7; Laukkanen 2002: 26; Peltola 2002:49; Knappert 1981:143; Nambala 1994:28). These tribes formed seven dialects in Ovamboland. Three of the Ovambo dialects, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Oshikwambi have developed into written languages (Kiljunen 1981:22). This thesis will concentrate on two languages namely: Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama respectively, because these are the languages into which the Bible was translated.

Historians are struggling to discover the etymology of the name Ovawambo, Aawambo or Ovambo. According to Nambala, Herero neighbours probably gave these people the name 'Ovambo' (1994:28). According to Williams, the name Ovawambo may have derived from the noun *ovayamba*⁹, the name they were given by *Ovakwanghala* (San people or bushmen as colonialists called them) who were the earliest settlers of Ovamboland. The name *ovayamba* literally means 'rich people'. *Ovakwanghala* continue to call Ovawambo *ovayamba* to the present (Williams 1991:54,55). The researcher agrees with Williams that someone gave Ovawambo this name because no one could name himself or herself.

According to the versions of historians like Williams, Malan and Peltola, Ovawambo belong to the south-western Bantu group, but are culturally closely related to the matrilineal agriculturists of central Africa. On their way to Ovamboland they passed the Okavango River. Some historians believe that they followed a branch of the river, which flowed south to the Etosha Pan. In the sixteenth century they settled at the small lake at Oshimholo. Later they left Oshimholo because arguments erupted among themselves over the fishing rights on which they were dependent. From there subdivisions emerged, each with its leader. In the course of time independent tribes were established, each with its own territory or kingdom, and chief or king as its leader.

Another legend about the origin of Ovawambo speaks of the Omumborombonga tree. According to this legend two brothers, Nangombe and Kadhu who were sons of Mangundu, trekked southward from the north and journeyed to south of the Zambezi until they reached the

⁹ The word "ovayamba" literally means 'rich people'. Ovakwanghala (San people) regarded the Ovawambo as rich people, probably because they owned goats, cattle, fields and other possessions, while the San did not possess anything at that time.

“Omumborombonga” tree somewhere in Ovamboland. At this tree they separated. Kadhu went westerward first to the Kaokoveld and later southward to the central highlands of Namibia. Kadhu become a great ancestor of the Herero. Nangombe remained in Ovamboland and therefore became the great ancestor of Ovawambo (Nambala 1994: 29). Nangombe is associated with Kalunga, called Kalunga kaNangombe (God of Nangombe). The aim of this section is to show how Ovawambo tribes are connected to each other and to the other Bantu people.

The Oukwanyama area or kingdom extends north to the Angolan border, south to Ondonga, west as far as Uukwambi and east up to Okavango. The border between Namibia and Angola later cut through the middle of the Oukwanyama tribal area. This resulted in part of the Oukwanyama area being located in southern Angola. The Ondonga area or kingdom extends north to Oukwanyama, south to the Etosha Pan, west as far as Uukwambi and east up to Okavango (Peltola 2002: 49; see appendix map III).

According to Malan, the first contact between Ovawambo and the Europeans took place in 1881, when Sir Francis Galton and Charles John Anderson visited Ondonga. (Malan 1980:79). This version however does not agree with other sources. Malan may have been misinformed or possibly he was referring to contact with European traders. Other sources tell that the Finnish missionaries arrived in Ondonga as early as 1870, bringing Christianity into Ovamboland (Peltola 2002:48). However, even this was not the first contact between Europeans and Ovawambo. Some Ovawambo had made contact with Europeans in the southern and central part of Namibia before 1881. According to Knappert, the first European to set foot in what is known today as Namibia was captain Jacobus Canus in 1486 (1981:13). This issue can be left with historians to verify it.

The economic life of Ovawambo is mainly dependant on cattle pastoralists. Cattle play a major role in the economy of the homestead of the clan because they are the inheritable property of each clan (Williams1991: 41-42). Agriculturalists, which can be traced from central Africa, also form part of the economic life of Ovawambo. Settlements in Ovamboland were established in the fertile areas to make it possible for the people to cultivate and produce foods (Williams 1991:43). Each Owambo man must own herds of cattle to prove his manhood; and

the cattle he owns and the storage of *omahangu*¹⁰ determines his wealth. In their prayers to Kalunga, the Ovawambo always pray, among many other things for rain to have a good harvest, of beans, and healthy cattle (Knappert 1981:145,146, 159).

Politically each ethnic group in Ovamboland is under the leadership of a king [*ohamba/omukwaniilwa*], who is succeeded through a matrilineal system within the ruling family, and who is usually a male. There are female queens by birth but they cannot rule, because the heir of kingship is the brother of the ruling king, and if he has no brothers the chieftainship goes to his eldest sister's son. The son of the king will not succeed him, because he belongs to a different matriclan (Malan 1980:87). Nambala also confirms this by stating that children belong to the side of the mother. "Kingship is not inherited from father to son, but rather from brother to brother or to sister or someone from the king's queen's mother's side" (Nambala 1994:30).

The social organization of the Ovawambo is basically matrilineal. Kinship is determined through the mother, and consequently children are affiliated to the lineage and clan of their mother only. (Malan 1980:80). The expression '*Omulumenhu edalelangada*', literally means "the man bore children not for his clan", but for the woman's. This means that women play an important role in the continuity of the clan. Women are at the center of the family. If the family does not have a female child it is called, '*epata ola ya moshiti*', meaning 'the clan has ended up as dead wood'. Women are respected in the family as far as the continuity of the family is concerned, but not as people of authority. Malan states:

In any matrilineal society the persons of authority are not women, but men who stand in a matrilineal relationship to their kinsmen. It is therefore not the father but the mother's brother who occupies the most important position in relation to her children. The sons (not daughters) are the heirs-to-be of their maternal uncle (1980:83).

The king rules together with senior headmen. Things can change now because there is a shift from matrilineal towards patrilineal society due to the Western influence¹¹.

¹⁰ *Omahangu* is the main crop of Ovawambo fields. Sometimes it is called finger millet. *Omahangu* are prepared, pounded and used to cook *oshifima* (porridge), the staple food of Ovawambo. *Omahangu* porridge is rich in nutrition. Each Ovambo family has its *omahangu* field.

¹¹ <http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/population/owambo.htm>

It can be noted here that it was a turning point in the history of Oukwanyama when on November 12, 2005 the traditional authority of Oukwanyama installed Mwadinomho Martha Nelumbu (Appendix II), as the first queen to take leadership, after the death of Kornelius Mwetupunga Shelungu (Mandume II). Queen Nelumbu is the 19th ruler of the Oukwanyama Kingdom. The Oukwanyama Kingdom has been silenced for over 88 years since the death of King Mandume Ndemufayo who was betrayed and killed in 1917 in the battle with South African-British troops on one side and Portuguese on the other, nearby his palace at Oihole (Williams 1991: 153-157). In her inaugural speech Queen Nelumbu stated, among many other things, that she was ready to accept and tackle the current problems and to lead all the groups in the Oukwanyama community: She said: “I will rule differently from our forefathers who were both political and war commanders. I will be the traditional leader because we want to achieve the goals of an independent Republic of Namibia” (Nelumbu 2005: 7-8). She also stressed the need to put to an end immediately to the widespread abuse of mothers, children, and orphans in homes and in the country at large (Nelumbu 2005: 7-10).

As we have discussed the origin of Ovawambo the next section will deal with Okavango people who are related to Ovawambo into which the Bible was translated.

3. 2. 2 Okavango people

The Okavango area is 41 700 km² in extent and is situated in the northeastern part of Namibia. In the north the Okavango River forms the international boundary with Angola. In the east the territory shares a common border with Botswana and West Caprivi, in the south with Bushmanland, and in the west with Ovamboland (Malan 1980:93). Okavango has changed from being a ‘homeland’ under the separate development system of colonial South Africa to a ‘region’ in independent Namibia (Nambala 1994:21). Okavango people lived on both sides of the Okavango River (see map IV). Presently there are 140 000 Kavango people in Namibia¹² divided into five politically distinct ethnic groups, characterized by considerable cultural and linguistic differences. The ethnic groups are the Kwangali, Mbunza, Shambyu, Gcriku and Mbukushu (Malan 1980:7; Nambala 1994:21) (see appendix map IV).

Okavango people are Bantu-speaking peoples. Like their neighbours, Ovawambo, Okavango people originated from the Great Lakes in East Africa. According to Muha there are reasons why Kwangali people, one of the tribes in Kavango, left the east and Central Africa, the place

¹² <http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/population/kavango.htm>

called Handa or Masi where they split with their cousins the Ndebeles, the Shotos the Masai and the Hereros. The reason for their split is probably the invasion of Moslems in north Africa in Ethiopia and Egypt in search of pasture and grazing areas because they possessed large herds of cattle; it is also possible that they splited because they wanted to settle without disturbance; and parhaps they split because of ethnic wars. This took place between 1300-1400 (Muha 2002:6). From there they moved in a southwesterly direction and settled near the Kwando River, from where they finally migrated to the Okavango between 1750 and 1800. The Kavango River that forms the international border between Namibia and Angola has divided the ethnic groups, which are found on both sides of the river (Malan 1980: 94).

The historian, Nambala, cites Totemeyer who contends that the Kavangos and the Ovambos, came as a joint group from the east, first migrated southwards and thereafter westwards past the headwaters of the Zambezi, to the banks of the Okavango River (Nambala 1994:21). According to Williams who singles out the Kwangali tribe of Okavango saying that “the Kwangali ones trace their origin further back to the Handa country in southern Angola, from where they migrated and settled at Makuzu of Mutenda¹³, where a split between them and the Aandonga-led group took place” (Williams 1991:66). Makuzu was the royal court of Mutenda situated in the northwestern of Nkurenkuru, in southern Angola (Muha 2002:6-7). This movement shows that the Aandonga (one of the tribe in Ovamboland) and Kwangali have the same roots or the same ancestress (Williams 1991:79). Okavango peoples are riverine, living along the banks of the Okavango River where they practice their subsistence economy, which is based on agriculture supplemented by pastoralism, fishing and hunting (Malan 1980:93; Williams 1991:80). For survival reasons some Kavango people moved away from the river and settled along some of *omiramba* looking for a favourable place for agriculture (Malan 1980:97).

The Okavango River is the source of life in the area, as water is life. The river has water the whole year around allowing fishing, pastoralism and crop farming (Malan 1980: 93). This means that the Okavango tribes are river-bound, and their economic life depends on the river. The most common crops Okavango tribes produce are finger millet (*omahangu*), sorghum (*wilia or tumbi*) and maize (*lipungu or mundere*) and there are also other products cultivated on a small scale. Animal husbandry also increasingly forms part of their economic life nowadays.

¹³ *Mutenda was said to have been their leader while at Makuza. It is typical among Okavango and Ovawambo to call a place by the name of the founder or leader.*

As with Ovawambo, having a herd of cattle is a symbol of wealth in the society. Cattle play an important role in ploughing, providing meat, milk and hides and in rituals, especially sacrifices to ancestral spirits (Malan 1980:99).

Kinship plays an important role among Okavango people from the clan to the social structure. Malan describes this situation as follows: "All the major political, social, economic and religious functions of a society are performed within the framework of the matrilineal kin group which have evolved from this rule of descent reckoning" (1980:97). Each ethnic group in Okavango is politically independent. The ruler is a king or chief (*hompa*), a title, which is hereditary or transmitted through the matrilineal system within the ruling lineage of the royal clan. Similarly to Ovawambo practice, the first in line is the leader's younger brother, and then the eldest son of his sister, in case there is no brother available (Malan 1980: 94,102). Among the Okavango ethnic groups, the king is the overall ruler, as Malan writes:

The [king] chief (*hompa*) is the trustee of the whole area, and his office represents the hub of tribal life in all its major manifestations. The decentralisation of administrative functions and the delegation of authority occur only to a very limited extent (1980: 102).

Among the five Okavango ethnic groups, the institution of matrilineality determines the basic structure of the society. The most important social groupings are the clan and lineage. Each of the Okavango tribes consists of a limited number of clans –the Kwangali and Mbukushu have nine, the Mbunza and Shambyu eight and the Gciriku seven. The matriclan is also divided into a number of segments or family units called *mazimo*¹⁴ (Malan 1980:103). Matrilineality has been challenged, with some people taking a middle way, that is, both matrilineal and patrilineal.

As mentioned earlier, the installation of a female queen is a landmark in the history of Ovakwanyama. Inheritance has been problematic among Ovawambo and Okavango, and they have now adopted the western system of allowing a wife and children to inherit from their husband and father, unlike in the matrilineal society.

¹⁴ *Mazimo* (pl) is characterised by shallow genealogical depth, consisting of the three generations and two ascending generations of ancestral spirits. It is only in the royal families and certain other prominent families, (the *masimbi* or clan-leaders) who hold hereditary positions, that descent is reckoned further back to earlier generations in order to establish political privilege and status.

3.3 Language groups in northern belt of Namibia

It is very important to discuss, in this subsection, the languages spoken by Ovambo and Okavango people. Although these languages differ slightly they are related because they belong to the “Bantu” family. Oshiwambo and Kavango are languages, which were reduced to writing and they are official languages in the area, and again the Bible was translated into these languages. This section will also show how the Bantu languages are related.

In Namibia the Ovambo are most numerous speakers of Bantu language making up almost half of the population of the country (Laukkanen 2002:27). Oshiwambo¹⁵, is the collective language spoken by all Ovambo people. Oshiwambo consists of seven dialects and each tribe has its own dialect. There are two official written languages in Ovamboland: Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama, which most of the people in northern Namibia understand and the speakers of these languages are the most numerous (Knappert 1981:143). Because Ovambo are in the majority (700 000) in Namibia, after independence they scattered all over the country and therefore their language, Oshiwambo, is now heard throughout Namibia.

All other ethnic groups in Ovamboland have accepted Oshindonga because it is a dialect, which is close to their own dialects. It was taught in schools and churches. Oshikwanyama is slightly different from other Oshiwambo dialects. For example the word for blood is *ohonde* in Oshikwanyama, while in Oshindonga and other Oshiwambo dialects is *ombizi*; therefore Oshikwanyama was developed as a separate written language. According to Malan the substantial differences between Oshikwanyama and the other dialects have been regarded as adequate motivation by linguists to develop it as a written language in its own right (1980:80). Most of the Oshikwanyama speakers live on the Angolan side of the border. According to Laukkanen, in Angola Oshikwanyama has retained its distinctiveness better than in Namibia, where related dialects and languages have mixed with it more readily (2002:28).

According to Knappert, Kwangali one of the languages spoken and written in the Okavango region is the most north-easterly of all the Namibian languages. Kwangali is also closest to the Central and Eastern Bantu languages, not only geographically but also linguistically

¹⁵ *Oshiwambo* is a collective language spoken by Ovambo. It differs from European languages. The noun starts always with a prefix *oshi-*, whereas many words European languages start with a consonant. Example the people who live in Ovamboland are called Ovambo and they speak Oshiwambo. In European language it would be written: The people who live in Ovamboland are called Vambos or Wambo and they speak Oshiwambo language. I will use the prefix *oshi-* in the Oshiwambo way of speaking. In Kavango the prefixes *Ru-*, *Shi-*, and *Thi-* are used before the noun.

(1881:136). Okavango people speak four different languages or dialects. The Kwangali and Mbunza speak the same language, Rukwangari or Rukwangali, into which the Bible was translated. There are two possibilities why the Bible was translated into Kwangali. On the one hand Kwangali or Rukwangali is widely spoken and understood by many ethnic groups in the Okavango region. On the one other hand; missionaries began their missionary work in the Kwangali area. The ShiShambyu, RuGciriku and ThiMbukushu, although they are close to each other, have their own dialects (Laukkanen 2002:28; Malan 1980:97). The collective language spoken in Okavango is Rukavango¹⁶.

The following Table of Bantu languages illustrates how they related to each other.

Oshikwanyama	Oshindonga	Rukwangali	Swahili	English
Okupita	Okupita	Kupita	Kupita	To pass
Okupeta	Okupeta	Kupeta	Kupeta	To bend
Okutuma	Okutuma	Kutuma	Kutuma	To send
Ombwa	Ombwa	Mbwa	Mbwa	Dog
Ongoma	Ongoma	Ngoma	Ngoma	Drum
Onyama/ombelela	Onyama	Nyama	Nyama	Meat
Ongobe	Ongombe	Ngombe	Ngombe	Cow
Onguwo	Ongugwo	Nguwo	Nguo	Cloth
Nhee	Ne	Nne	Nne	Four

Oshiwambo (Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga) words begin with a vowel whereas Rukwangali words begin with a consonant similar to Swahili, a Bantu language spoken in central and east Africa. As we have dealt with language groups of Ovawambo and Okavango people, in the next subsection we are going to deal with traditional beliefs and practices among these African peoples.

3. 4 African traditional beliefs and practices

The beliefs and practices of Ovawambo and Okavango people are not very different from other African Traditional religious practices. It is hard to separate the religion of Ovawambo and

¹⁶ Okavango people speak four different languages or dialects like ShiSambyu, RuGciriku and ThiMbukushu, RuKwangali and Mbunza. The official written language is RuKwangali. Because Rukwangali is spoken in Okavango to be inclusive of all languages spoken in Okavango region, it is called RuKavango.

Okavango people, because they have the same religious beliefs and practices. It is therefore better to discuss them all together. Ovawambo and Okavango people believe in the Supreme Being called *Kalunga*, and the ancestral spirits, *ovakwamhungu*. According to Mbiti (1992) and Nürnberger (2004), the dead are part of the living. But the death itself is not considered as a promotion of someone who has passed away. It remains a terrible thing in our lives. Those who have passed away are remembered and respected as part of the community of the living, but not worshipped among Ovawambo and Kavango people.

3. 4. 1 God [Kalunga]

Ovawambo and Okavango people believe in the existence of a Supreme Being called *Kalunga/Karunga*. As the Creator, *Kalunga* is endowed with the highest authority and power over the whole of creation, including spiritual beings in the supernatural realm. *Kalunga* is not involved in the everyday life of the people, therefore no direct worship is offered to *Kalunga*. “He is seen as a vague and far-off being, which is only referred to during unnatural circumstances” (Malan 1980:90).

Besides the one Supreme Being, *Kalunga*, there are spirits, witches and other mysterious beings that Ovawambo believe in (Knappert 1981:144). These other beings are not worshipped, neither are they seen to be universal. Human beings, sometimes for their own benefit, often manipulate these beings.

According to Peltola the idea of one God was not altogether unknown to Ovawambo, before the arrival of Christianity, but it was a vague concept because it was rather the fear of spirits and witchcraft that drew the attention of Ovawambo. Nonetheless they did have an idea of some kind that God had once created the world (Peltola 2002:71). The researcher disagrees with Peltola, who says that the idea of one God was unknown to Ovawambo. Ovawambo worship one God. Ovawambo religion is monotheistic. Other lesser spirits are known of but not worshipped.

The researcher’s father told the story of how *Kalunga* [God] was perceived among Ovawambo [Ovakwanyama]: *Kalunga* was perceived as a tall person stretching from earth to heaven, filling the whole of earth and heaven. From this legend missionaries drew the name *Kalunga*. Therefore it was not strange for Ovawambo to hear about God from the missionaries because they were already familiar with God (Ngodji Sn. 2006). When a person is sick, for example,

first the healer has to deal with him/her, but if they fail then the person is referred to *Kalunga*. The Oshiwambo saying: “*Okalunga ashike ta talwa paife*” which literally means “we are looking to *Kalunga*”, as *Kalunga* is the last resort to tackle human problems.

Aandongga believed in the Great God, *Kalunga*, the Creator who often speaks to people, always starting with: “I am *Kalunga* ...” (Knappert 1981:156). The biblical God when speaking to people also says: “I am God YHWH ...” God of forefathers and foremothers (Exodus 3:14). Ovawambo prayed to God, *Kalunga*, before the arrival of Christianity. They prayed to *Kalunga* in times of difficulties, in times of planting and harvesting, in times of war and peace, in times of famine, in times of victory and defeat and in times of joy.

Interesting is the story that says *Kalunga* appeared to a woman, called *Nelago* [fortune]. *Kalunga* would send *Nelago* back to the king of Ovandongga with a good or bad message. The king would have to offer a sacrifice to appease God if something had annoyed God. If the king did what *Kalunga* had told the woman, then she would go back to report to *Kalunga*. The woman had to pray to God to inform God that the king had obeyed God’s command (Knappert 1981:157). This is a clear indication that God, *Kalunga* of Ovawambo, involved women in his dealings with people on earth, and not only men. Women have been mediators between *Kalunga* and the nation or the king.

Aandongga directed their prayers to *Kalunga kaNangombe* [God of Nangombe]. *Nangombe* is believed to be the first ancestor of Ovawambo people (Knappert 1981: 145,156). So, Aandongga pray thus when entering new homestead:

Our Lord, God of Nangombe
Come with us! Come and chase away all evil
Come let us enter through this gate!
Help us bring good harvests through this gate
Bring food inside; keep hunger far away (Knappert 1981:145).

The prayer includes a plea for the well-being of the family and protection against evil; it includes the invitation to God to be present with the people in the new home; it includes the wish for a good harvest because people depend on this for food to keep hunger away. All these factors demonstrate that Ovawambo knew God before the missionaries arrived.

Another related prayer of Aandongga, said upon entering a new homestead, is as follows:

God give us a good harvest
Give us beans and cattle
Many cows and many beans
Grain, much grain, rain, much rain
Crops, good crops, and many cows (Knappert 1981:146)

All that are mentioned in this petition in the form of a song is what Ovawambo value in their daily life. Ovawambo depend on these things and they believe that it is only God who can provide them. As mentioned previously, it is true that African religion provides a fertile ground for the Christian religion. Therefore it is not right to remove all the pre-existing beliefs of people and introduce another kind of religion; instead these beliefs can be harmonized.

Ovakwanyama, as with Aandonga, believe in *Kalunga* and they offer prayer to *Kalunga*. They believe that God speaks to people on earth in different ways. He wants people to respect others, especially their parents and elderly people in the community. There is a story that two children laughed at their mother, as she grew older. God spoke to them directly from heaven: “I am God, *Kalunga* your, father. ... Never again mock your old mother” (Knappert 1981:148). God is always God, whether, among Ovawambo or among Jewish people; only the time, context and culture can change.

Here follows one of the prayers of old Ovakwanyama; the prayer for soldiers:

Kalunga, [God] on our side
Pampa [another name of Kalunga] in our midst
Namhongo [another name of Kalunga] blow with *ongalo*¹⁷
Kalunga, on the side
Namhongo raise up the wind
Pampa carries the rod
Kalunga says: “My sons let’s go”
Kalunga, are we not going to be injured?
Namhongo, are we not going to be shot?
Kalunga protect us. Puh!

Kalunga awaken your spirit to help us
Kalunga give to us
God remove the evil and bad luck
God place the good in front of us, and evil beside us
God let us find a rotten tree to get wood
Kalunga help us to get fortune
Pampa helps, Kalunga blows.

¹⁷ *Ongalo* is a finely woven platter of basketwork for sifting meals. Ovawambo and Okavango people use this when sifting *omahangu* or maize meal.

The next prayer is the prayer for the sick:

Kolokolo I fight for Pamba
Kolokolo I fight for Kalunga
We come close to Kalunga
To heal our sick person

Let the ancestor leave the person
I touched the ground
Kalunga never abandoned you like your mother
Kalunga raised up the tree of Namhongo
Pamba raised up Namhongo's mat
None can enter the main room of Kalunga
None can look into Pamba's room¹⁸

These prayers of Ovakwanyama are a clear indication that they know and pray to God in whom they believe and trust. There are no fundamental differences between these prayers and those that Christians offer today. Because of this evidence the researcher found that those Christian missionaries in the northern belt of Namibia adopted not only the names of God from Oshikwanyama but also the way of praying from the Ovakwanyama. These two religions have influenced each other in the process of translation. The translatability of the Christian religion and its Bible into vernacular languages and idioms allows dialogue to take place.

Okavango people believe in and worship a Supreme Being called *Karunga* or *Njambi*. He is regarded as the creator of the universe including all forms of life on earth. They directed their prayer to *Karunga* and offer sacrifices to *Karunga*. During the annual ceremony for the prayer for rain called *Nyambinyambi*, they pray to *Karunga*, and offer sacrifices of oxen and cows to *Karunga* to bring rain (Muha 2002:7). The purpose of the ceremony is to chase all the ill luck out of the country and to call for rain, because the rain cannot fall if the country is not cleansed (Knappert 1981:136, 137; Nambala 1994:22). This shows that the Kavango were religious people and had been praying to God, before Christianity came. Their God is holy, hates uncleanness and never associates with evil. Everything that is good is from *Karunga*. Here follows an example of their prayer:

Oh Karunga
Help us now with rain in plenty

¹⁸ These prayers are translations from Oshikwanyama. Some of the words are hard to translate into English, because they are in the form of poetry. The content is that the prayer is directed to God who can cure the sick. Source: "A Sabedoria Do Povo Cuanhama". A Congregacao do Espirito Santo agradece a Missao toda a colaboracao Prestada a esta publicacao.

Let the rain fall on the branches
Let there be fish in the river
May the fruits bend down the branches
May the cows bear many young ones
May the land receive your blessing
May misfortune not befall us
May we all be rich and happy ...
(Knappert 1981:137).

This prayer indicates what Okavango people most need in their daily life: Rain makes the fields yield and the fruit trees bear much fruit; it lets the rivers hold enough water for the fish; and it causes the grass to grow which allows cattle to produce offspring and stay healthy. Okavango people also pray for blessings from God, to shower them, and to be protected from evil and misfortune.

Karunga does not get directly involved in the everyday life of the people. Usually it is with elderly people and leaders in the society, especially the kings who are not directly involved in the daily affairs of the people. Okavango people also believe in the existence of an evil being, *Shadipinyi*, whose evil nature puts him in direct conflict with *Karunga*. *Karunga* allows *Shadipinyi* to carry out his evil works (Malan 1980: 105). This means, according to Okavango belief, that *Karunga* permits evil to take place. Okavango people believe in the existence of ancestral spirits (*wadimu*), who have the power to influence their living descendants, and this is the foundation of the people's active religion. Supplications, sacrifices and rituals are directed to *wadimu*, not to *Karunga*, to secure their benevolence and protection. The eldest male, who mediates between the forefathers and their living descendants, is the only person to perform rituals. Other religious practices and prohibitions, including taboos, are also present. Magic plays an important part in the active religion of Okavango people. Witches and sorcerers are believed to wield magical power to harm or kill other people (Hambyuka 2006).

The entire African Traditional Religion practiced by Ovawambo and Okavango people has been challenged by the Christian religion, particularly in the area of marriage, divinations and witchcraft. Polygamy in most communities is replaced by monogamy. For healing wise people opt to go to hospitals instead of attending the traditional healer. These practices are not completely wiped out by Christianity they are still alive in some communities. One has to understand that with inter-cultural contact, cultural change is inevitable among Ovawambo and the Okavango people.

3. 4. 2 Ancestral veneration

Among Ovawambo and Okavango people, as in any other African communities, ancestral veneration does exist, but on a small scale. In the African world-view, ancestors are another category of beings that inhabit the world; because physical death is not the end of existence, it is a change of mode (Mugambi 2002:66). Therefore ancestors are to be remembered. According to Muha it was important to Kwangali people to worship at the grave of the *hompa* in order to chase away personal misfortune, hunger and natural disasters. They believed that *hompa*, the king had reached another world, the world of living death, where he/she could talk directly to God so that misfortune and illness could be alleviated (2002:7). This was the importance of ancestral veneration among the Kwangali tribe.

According to Malan, religion of Ovawambo and Okavango people centers not around *Kalunga*, but on the worship of ancestral spirits, *ovakwamhungu* (plural), in Oshiwambo and *wadimu* in Kwangali (1981: 91). These spirits are believed to have the power to influence their living descendants in various ways, depending on the conduct of those in the community who are physically alive. They can bring good luck and bad luck into the family as a whole or to individuals. It is also believed that ancestors can inflict illness, childlessness and death (Mugambi 2002:66), therefore they need to be pleased and appeased all the time with different kinds of sacrifices and offerings (Malan 1981, 105; Mugambi 2002:66). Malan further asserts: “The blessing of the spirits is ensured by worshipping them regularly and by honouring the tribal traditions instituted by the forefathers” (Malan 1980:91).

Ovawambo and Okavango people direct their prayer to *Kalunga*, God of Heaven and not to *Ovakwamhungu*, ancestors. That means they worship Kalunga not the ancestors. However Ovawambo remember those whom have gone before them in terms of wisdom and power. According to Munyika, Ovawambo believe that ancestors are their helpers, protectors and guiders in their life (2004:177). Nürnberger argues that ancestors demand respect, to be remembered; to be feared; set the rules; bless; punish; and give instructions (2002: 142). But Ovawambo do not worship them; they rather remember them. Malan got this point wrong as he says that Ovawambo and Okavango people worship ancestors. There is a relationship between God and ancestors in African communities, which needs to be maintained by the community all the time to avoid anger. That is why Mugambi writes:

Any offence against the ancestors was at the same time an offence against God since the network of relations was totally integrated.

Breaking relations within the physically living community would offend the ancestors, and offending the ancestors would arouse the wrath of God (2002:66).

According to Munyika, the idea of ancestral veneration among Ovawambo must be seen against the philosophy of respect and its consequences, which is so fundamental to the life of the living (2004:176). When Ovawambo celebrate any function in the family, they invoke the spirit of ancestors. When they eat *oshipe*, the first harvest, they throw food to the eastern *ovakwamhungu* [ancestors] and to the western *ovakwamhungu* [ancestors] before they start to celebrate. When the Ovawambo are celebrating marriage, they call those who have departed by their names, calling them to watch what their children are doing. In this way they are maintaining the relationship between themselves and *ovakwamhungu*. It is believed that if ancestors are remembered and receive their dues, they in return bless people and such blessings are believed to come from *Kalunga* (Munyika 2004:177) and not from *ovakwamhungu*.

The term 'worship' is very complex and it can be understood from different perspectives. What it means to the Europeans is not what it means to Africans/Ovawambo. European missionaries perceive the way Africans relate to their ancestors similar to the way they relate to God, and that is worship. Ancestral veneration is one of the features Ovawambo brought from the Ancient Near East, according to the theory of Laurmaa, especially from Jewish people, because their ancestral tradition kept tribal context alive (Nürnberg 2002:141). The researcher agrees with Munyika that ancestors cannot be compared or equated to God because they are human. Veneration is a better term to describe what Ovawambo do with regard to their ancestors and not worship (Munyika 2004:178). Veneration is to remember and respect someone who has gone on before at certain occasions, whereas worship is to serve or adore the one who is helping you in your daily life.

3.5 Conclusion

The peoples who live on the northern belt of Namibia are Bantu from central Africa. They have many things in common. Their social settings are the same, and the languages they speak have only slight differences. Ovandongwa and Ovakwanyama understand each other whereas the Okavango people differ slightly. Ovawambo use vowels as prefixes to verb while the Okavango use consonants, as shown in the table on page 66 They all believe in one God, *Kalunga/Karunga*, whom they worship and to whom they offer prayers, but they believe also in the existence of ancestors. Against the background of Ovawambo and Okavango people, the

next chapter will deal with the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), and will establish whether it is relevant to these people. The applicability of the translatability theory will be the framework used to assess this, because it is only through translatability that the biblical message is made relevant in Africa and in the world at large. This is because translatability, according to Sanneh, is the genius of the Christian religion; it has the ability to adopt each language and culture as its natural destination and as a necessity of its life (Sanneh 1997:69; Satari 1996:271).

This chapter has established the origin of Ovambo and Okavango people, their language, culture and their religious beliefs and practices. It traced them from the north to the south of Africa and then to their present location, Ovamboland and Okavango. Their language, culture and beliefs contributed significantly to the translatability and interpretation process of Christianity and its Scriptures in ELCIN. A translator who does not know the language and the culture of the people is not able to do a good translation. It is important to know the language and the culture of the people. The next chapter will deal with the history of the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages into ELCIN.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE INTO NORTHERN NAMIBIAN LANGUAGES.

4. 1. Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people, their language group and their beliefs and religious practices. It is important to know the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people, because it helps the translators to do a better and relevant biblical translation. This chapter will focus on a brief overview of the missionary work undertaken in the northern belt of Namibia among Ovawambo and Okavango people. It will provide the historical background of the mission work and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the applicability of the translation theory of Sanneh and Bediako as discussed in chapter two, in relation to the Bible translation undertaken by ELCIN.

Finnish missionaries initiated the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages, and ELCIN later took up the challenge to translate the Bible into the indigenous languages namely Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Rukwangali. Missionary and indigenous translators were responsible for making this translation possible and relevant. In this chapter the following topics will be dealt with: translation theories; the missionary work in the northern belt of Namibia; the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga; Oshikwanyama and Rukwangali; the work of the indigenous translators Amakutuwa, Amaambo and Lihongo at different times and locations and the implications of translation.

4. 2. Translation theories of the Bible

Although the Bible is translatable, it is not feasible for one to simply stand up and claim to be engaged in translation. There are procedures to be followed in order to make translation relevant to the people. Besides the knowledge of the source and target languages the translator needs to know which theory of translation to apply. The theories of Bible translations have to do with the degree to which the translator is willing to investigate in order to bridge the gap between the two languages. Eugene Nida did a lot as far as translation theories are concerned. He introduced the dynamic equivalence theory of translation, which was used as a guideline by ELCIN translators. Below I will discuss Nida's theories on Bible translation.

4. 2. 1 Literal translation or formal-equivalence theory

According to Nida,¹⁹ literal translation is an interlinear translation from one language into another (1947:11). Literal translation deals with rendering the Bible from one language into another word by word. This reproduces the form of the original text rather than the meaning of it. Formal-equivalent translation seeks, as far as possible; to convey not only the structural information of the message, but also its general meaning (Jordaan 2002:20). Formal-equivalent translators are accused of reproducing the text from its original form without considering the meaning of the text in the receptor language (Jordaan 2002:20). That is why Nida asserts that there are many interlinear translations from Greek to another language but that they are difficult to understand because Greek words are quite different from those of other languages (1947:11). Missionary translators have followed the method of literal translation because they were not thoroughly familiar with the languages and culture of the target languages.

In ELCIN, Martin Rautanen with his limited knowledge of Oshindonga and with the help of indigenous people, managed to translate the Bible into Oshindonga (1954). The role of indigenous people in the first translation of the Bible into Oshindonga was to appropriate the proper use of the words and terms. Rautanen followed the method of literal Bible translation, but some elements of dynamic-equivalent principle were accommodated. Those who translated the Bible into Oshindonga (1978), Oshikwanyama (1974), and Kwangali (1989), mostly the indigenous translators, were introduced to dynamic-equivalence translation in a seminar held in Turfloop, South Africa in 1967. According to Laukkanen, Nida attended the seminar and introduced “new ideals of seeking for dynamic equivalence instead of translating words and concepts one by one” (2002: 86).

The problems we experience in translation today are an inheritance from the first Bible translation, the Septuagint, because the translation approach that was followed was literal. There are no ways to solve them at this stage. Nida writes;

Some well-known translations have been very literal. ... in many passages the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament translates the Hebrew almost word for word. The Greek is very poor

¹⁹ Dr Eugene Nida was an American specialist in linguistics and an anthropologist. He received his doctorate in linguistics at the University of Michigan in 1943. Nida edited the quarterly journal *The Bible Translator* from 1950. He introduced dynamic or equivalent translation of the Bible, aiming at getting a message across in any given language and culture, as opposed to literal translation which is more focussed on rendering word by word.

when judged from the standpoint of the form of expression, but the translators were bound by a traditional literalism in linguistic usage. The Septuagint was of great importance among the Greek-speaking Christians and Jews, but it probably failed to attain wider acceptance because of the awkward and unnatural form of expression (1947:11).

The literal translation approach is to a large extent not accepted because it actually distorts the facets of a language rather than revealing them (Nida 1947:12).

4. 2. 2 Free translation theory

This is the middle way translation. It is called “closest equivalents translation” because its translation is based on the closest equivalents in the two languages and includes the two extreme translation approaches, namely the literal approach and the dynamic-equivalent approach (Nida 1947:12). The principle of closest equivalence in translation also implies the avoidance of interpretive renderings. Nida pointed out three basic requirements in following the closest equivalence in translation; that the translation must represent the customary usage of the receptor language; the translation must make sense; and the translation must conform to the meaning of the original (1947:13). If the translation does not have these basic requirements it is not relevant to the people, the speakers of the receptor language. They must be carefully considered at all times in making any good translation (Nida 1947:13), and good translation is what makes the biblical message understandable and relevant.

4. 2. 3 Dynamic-equivalence translation theory (or functional translation)

The dynamic-equivalence approach, as opposed to formal equivalence has developed from the 1980s onward. Most Bible translations done during and after that period were based on the dynamic equivalent approach. There is no watertight division between these two approaches because, “... functional-equivalent translation seeks to cast the message in good contemporary language usage, but does not negate the text and its structural qualities but strives toward producing a text which is of equal value to the source text” (Jordaan 2002:20), even with different wording, language and culture. Joubert contributed to this argument saying that “the aim of dynamic-equivalent translation is to have the same impact on a modern audience as the original text had on its audience” (Joubert 2002: 31). In line with Joubert’s dynamic-equivalence translation approach, there is much correspondence with the biblical hermeneutics approach to translation, which seeks to retrieve the message of the text from its original setting and to transport that message into the contemporary situation.

According to Jordaan it cannot be over-emphasized that the functional-equivalent approach, “has to do not only with language, but also with a particular understanding of the nature of communication and a particular understanding of the nature of the Bible” (2002:21). We need to understand that the aim of any approach to translation is to make communication possible. What is to be communicated is the message. The message is very important. To make communication possible, involves more than one language and one culture, and of course also time and space. Therefore the researcher agrees with Jordaan that:

It was a message, which communicated to the readers of the time, but, because it does not correspond to the culture situation of the present-day reader, it also cannot communicate with present-day readers. Therefore a functional-equivalent translation wants to distinguish between the socio-historical orientation of the Bible writers/readers and the socio-historical orientation of the modern readers in order to communicate the message effectively to the modern readers (2002: 21).

This is the effectiveness of the functional equivalent translation, and therefore the functional equivalent theory is considered to be the best option as far as the communication of the message is concerned. This approach is compatible with the translatability theory of Sanneh and Bediako, which also seeks the meaning of the text, rather than the literal meaning of the words. The translatability theory is more concerned with a translation of the Bible, which is more inclusive and relevant and understandable to all humanity. A functional equivalent approach to translation does not look to the wording from source language to target language, but to the meaning of the text or equivalent meaning of the text. Both the translatability theory and functional equivalent translation are aiming at conveying the biblical message to be understood within that particular language and culture.

Both Biblical translation theories are important. Although they oppose each other, at the same time they need each other. That is why Jordaan states: “Every translation of the Bible contains both formal-correspondent elements as well as functional-equivalent elements to a greater or lesser degree” (2002:19), but they represent two extreme poles within translation science. We will see in the following chapters which of these two translation theories are effective in making the Bible in vernacular relevant in ELCIN.

4.2.4 Translation theories and the translator

When dealing with translation theories one cannot leave out the role of the translators. Whang, from the Roehampton Institute London, has also contributed to the translation theories. He focused more on the translators. Whang makes three points about the translators: Firstly, the most important factor in translation is the competence of the translator. According to Whang, translators have to be competent not only in the source language, but also in the receptor language. Being competent in the source language does not qualify them if they are not good writers of the receptor language (1999:47). He stresses the point of the competence of the translators, because if the translators are not competent in their translation work, their product will not be relevant. We need a good translation in order to do good interpretation. Secondly, Whang mentioned the professionalism of the translator. A translator needs to spend much time reading and rereading his/her work. This will make the translation smoother and more readable. Thirdly, Whang touched on the issue of culture in translation, which has to be surmounted by the translator. A cultural gap is not spatial, but historical. Any linguistic gap is a kind of cultural gap. It is the task of the translators to fill this gap in their translation. Whang concludes his argument that, "Translation is not simply changing a sentence in one language into the equivalent in the second language by using the semantic devices of the second language" (1999:48). Thus translation involves the structure of the language, speakers of the language, their environment, their society and their beliefs (Whang 1999:48). This means that translation is not merely a matter of the language, but the whole cultural structure of the society. Allert added to this argument saying:

"translation is not simply a matter of finding equivalent words in two languages (source and receptor). Translation is the complicated task of transporting material from one world of thought and language to another" (1999:93).

4. 2. 5 Through the window translation

There are two kinds of Bible translation namely translation directly from biblical original languages source texts, and translation indirectly from biblical languages using other language translations as windows to see through. This is what this researcher calls 'through the window translation'. There is a danger in seeing through the window: sometimes the window is dirty and one cannot see clearly. Some windows are tinted so that one can hardly see well. Even the fact that one is looking through the window is in itself not a good thing. That is why biblical languages are so important in the process of translation.

According to Mojola (2002), most of the African Bible translations were not based on biblical original languages as their source texts; they were based on the languages of colonial powers. Many African translations are translations of translations. In African English speaking countries, they used English versions, in Portuguese speaking countries, they used Portuguese versions, in German colonized countries they used German versions, in French colonized countries they used French, in an Afrikaans colonized country like Namibia they used Afrikaans, etc. These translations are biased. They lack the originality of the biblical message. “Comparison with other translations in the colonial languages or those in related languages has contributed to influencing decisions as to the meaning of the texts in question or even as to their correct interpretation” (Mojola 2002:207).

In the case of Namibia, translators used Greek, German, English, Finnish and Afrikaans texts to determine the correct translation and interpretation. One of the researcher’s informants, Rev Amadhila, explained that the Bible Society of South Africa (BSSA), supplied them with the English version ‘Good News for Modern Men’, to use for translation into Oshindonga because its English was easy to understand (2006). This is what happened also when translating into other Namibian languages such as Oshikwanyama and Kwangali. Therefore, one gets the impression that the translators were promoting the ‘Good News for Modern Man’ version of the Bible. Probably this was not the case when one takes into account the comments of Laukannen, who argued that besides colonial and missionary languages, biblical original languages Hebrew and Greek were also consulted in the process of translation (2002:206).

Majola has noted that working directly from biblical original languages and source texts, the Hebrew or Greek, into the African languages and culture is preferable to receiving what the Hebrew or Greek texts say via the languages of the colonizers. The closeness of African languages and cultures to those of the Judeo-Christian world, and to the world of ancient Israel and early Christianity makes direct mediation the preferred option in translation. He also noted that going via a third language and culture, such as Indo-European English or other languages, introduces problems and elements that may not be present in the original texts (Mojola 2002: 207).

According to Peltola, Martin Rautanen, who undertook the first translation of the Bible into Oshindonga (Oshiwambo) first learnt Greek and German in the Training School for Missionaries in Helsinki, and then learnt Oshindonga on his arrival in Ondonga (Peltola 2002:

131). In the process of translating, missionaries encountered problems with languages into which translation was being done. The problems occurred because they did not learn the target languages or the African culture. Hebrew and Greek were not, and will never be, enough for translation. A translator needs to know these original biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) as well as the target language and culture. Missionaries later realized their error of not knowing the target language, but at that time formal equivalence translation was the better option for them in translating word for word. Nida introduced dynamic equivalence translation, which was then adopted. This approach was better for the translators who learnt both the original biblical languages and the African languages, because it looked for meaning rather than translating word by word, as was done in formal equivalence translation. Jordaan defends functional equivalent translation when he writes:

... Although functional-equivalent translation seeks to cast the message in good contemporary language usage, it does not negate the text and its structural qualities, but strives towards producing a text, which is of equal value to the source text (2002: 20).

Translation is also done to make communication possible, but is a complex process. Communication must include the way the people concerned communicate and understand. Therefore it must consider language not only as a medium of communication, but also as the expression of culture (Jordaan 2002:21). According to Nghifikwa, the translator must translate the text into the style and culture of the target people. He condemned the work of those who translated the Bible into Oshikwanyama (1974) saying that it had not been done properly, probably because the translators were bound by the words from the source language. He (Nghifikwa) praised the translators of the Oshindonga Bible (1954), though in some instances they failed to convey the message as it is in the target language. He states clearly that the message is more important than the rendering of words (2006). Rabin shares the same opinion with Nghifikwa on this point of language and culture being the basis of understanding.

This researcher supports the opinion that African translators of the Bible must master and work directly from the biblical original languages in which the Christian Holy Scriptures were originally written, in order to produce correct translations, which will be relevant to African people. Mojola affirms this point when he writes:

This is necessary for authentically engaging the exegetical and hermeneutical task in Africa directly from the original source texts, languages, and cultures and in terms of the receptor African languages,

cultures and traditions without the mediation of the Indo-European languages, cultures and value systems (2002: 207).

It is noted that Hebrew belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family in which the majority of members speak African languages. Munyika (2004) pointed out that there was probably a contact somewhere between Ovawambo, and Israelites or Jewish people. The reason is that there are many similarities between the Ovawambo culture and that of the Israelites. This contact may have been made in Egypt where the Israelites spent 400 years in Africa.

4. 2. 6 Ambiguity versus clarity in translation

When reading the Bible sometimes you understand the text clearly, but sometimes the text is not clear for you. This is the ambiguity of the text. The biblical text must be clear and at the same time ambiguous. The ambiguity of the text cannot be removed by translation. It must remain. Translation is the way of overcoming the barrier of language, culture, sex, time and space, but not of overcoming ambiguity of the text. In other words, translation overcomes all the barriers to communication and understanding the Bible text (Whang 1999:55). One of the implications of this is that the ambiguity of the text needs to be maintained, because the text does not have the same message all the time. Shinana, in Ngodji, stresses this point that Bible translation must not be an interpretation or illustration of the Bible (Ngodji 2004: 119-120). The readers must do their interpretation, and find for themselves the meaning from the text, which suits their context. Translation also must allow what Nürnberger called '*polysemy*', the multiple meaning of the text depending on the current needs (Nürnberger 2004:112-113).

4. 3. Translation of the Bible in ELCIN

ELCIN, as a Lutheran Christian church, has to carry out translation and interpretation in order to make Christianity and its Scripture relevant to her members. Missionaries from The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) and missionaries from within ELCIN formed a team of translators. Finnish missionaries initiated translation and indigenous people later took over. ELCIN has to thank the men and women who did the translation work for the first time. It was a part of mission work to do the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages and they did it. It is now the task of ELCIN theologians to develop the interpretation of the Bible, which will enrich African theology as a whole. The reason is simply that ELCIN theologians knew the language and the culture of the people.

It seems that ELCIN theologians do little as far as translation is concerned. There are as yet no commentaries in the Oshiwambo language. Pastors use commentaries produced by other theologians outside their region, which are sometimes not applicable to the Namibian context. Those who can conduct better interpretations are doing so on their own, and nothing is recorded to keep the process of interpretation moving and to provide a reference work in the future. Nevertheless new development is taking place in ELCIN whereby theologians are out to develop their theology, which would answer questions and the challenges of the day.

Rev Eino Amaambo, Jason Amakutuwa and Matti Amadhila, who undertook the translation and interpretation of the Bible into Oshindonga, (New Testament Revised Edition 1976), called *Elaka Etoye*, (Laukkanen 2002: 202), were criticized for not doing a good job, because they used African idioms and expressions. The researcher feels that they tried hard to accommodate as much as possible of the Oshiwambo culture, idiom, and expression. The whole Bible in Oshindonga (New Version) was published in 1986. This new version of the Oshindonga Bible was not favoured like the first version produced by Martin Rautanen, *Nakambalekanene*, in 1954. The reason is that its language was simple and understandable and it contains Oshiwambo proverbs and idioms which people thought to be inappropriate. Laukkanen cites Hasheela, the General Secretary of ELCIN, of that period:

The publication of OO/86 was not such an immensely joyous event as publication of the first translations into various languages. People in Ovamboland already had the “*Nakambale Bible*” (OO/54), and many older readers continue to favor this older version. ... Not only elderly people but also many theologians prefer the old version, although the younger generation has taken OO/86 as its own” (2002:220)

According to the researcher the problem was not on the part of the translators only, but also on the part of the readers themselves. Readers were not aware of what translation entails. Reading their culture and idiom in the Bible was understood to be playing with the Word of God. When they received the Bible for the first time they were told that the Bible is the Word of God, which cannot be changed. None can remove or change anything from the Holy Book. So putting Oshindonga words, idioms and expressions into the Bible was regarded as adding and removing something from the Holy Book. It was seen as an unforgivable sin (Rev 22:18, 19). The efforts of translators was to make the biblical relevant in the language and culture of the people.

In the northern belt of Namibia, translation of the Bible into vernacular languages led simultaneously to the reduction of Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali languages into written form. These three languages became official languages in ELCIN, and in the academy. To reach this stage each language went through many stages. In Oukwanyama for example, there were language controversies around which orthography and numerical system should be followed. The dispute amounted to a grammatical disagreement, but later compromise was reached (Laukkanen 2002:66-72). Ngodji cited the teacher, the Oshikwanyama speaking Tuulikki Nghatanga-Hamunyela, who confirmed that Ovakwanyama are pleased to have the Bible in Oshikwanyama because it keeps their language alive. Speakers of Oshindonga and Rukwangali shared the same sentiment.

4. 4. The missionary work in the northern belt of Namibia

July 9th, 1870 is the day the first group of ten pioneer missionaries arrived in Ondonga (Ovamboland). This day is a landmark in the history of Ovawambo; therefore, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) observes this day annually as Mission Day. The missionaries who came to Ovamboland were from the then Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), now the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF). The missionaries did not only preach the gospel to Ovawambo, but they also brought development in certain spheres of life. A number of missionaries began to settle permanently in the area. Peltola writes:

The arrival of the Finnish missionaries meant the beginning of a new era in the history of Ovamboland. In contrast with the temporary visits of traders and explorers, the missionaries settled permanently in Ovamboland and began to spread Christian faith and other elements of the western culture among the Ovawambo people (2002:9).

The first Finnish missionaries to arrive in Namibia in 1870 had been ordained to preach the Gospel and to become acquainted with the local surroundings, culture and language (Laukkanen 2002:31), and above all to win as much as possible, the souls of heathens to Christ. They were also involved in what Peltola called “economic and cultural integration of the area into the world system” (Peltola 2002:9). Their arrival was of course the beginning of the process of applying the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture in Namibia.

When missionaries established mission stations in Omandongo, Ondonga in July 1870, they could extend their missionary work to other ethnic groups in Ovamboland. King Nuuyoma

Eelu requested that the missionaries to come to Uukwambi. King Tsheya requested missionaries to come to Ongandjera, and they were requested to go to Uukwaluudhi as well. Although missionaries faced challenges like language, culture and hatred, in their mission work, they managed to overcome many of the challenges. Where they worked they tried to learn the language and culture of the people. This made their work successful.

During their stay in Ondonga, the missionaries learnt the language and the culture of the people. At the same time they reduced Oshindonga into written form. Therefore the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga went hand in hand with the recording in writing of the Oshindonga language. From the arrival of missionaries in Ondonga, there were indicators that there was a need for translation, because the Oshindonga speaking people, especially the king, were not happy with the Otjiherero language, which was used by the missionaries in their preaching. If the king (*Omukwaniilwa*) does not like it, it means the entire people reject it, because the king is called “*aantu*” (people), whom he represents. In some instances they felt insulted. Aandonga demanded to be taught the story of the Bible orally in their language instead of having to learn to read it in Otjiherero. The missionaries had thought they were making progress in preaching to the heathen, as they referred to unbaptised Ovawambo (Tirronen 1977: 35). Tirronen cited Rautanen saying:

Tse otwa li hatu uvita nuulaadhi auhe tatu popi oheli ya getukila negulu lyoshinge, naJesus Omukulili gwaantu ayehe nkene e tu hepekelwa nokwe tu sile. Aapulakeni aya li kaaye uvite ko sha yo taa ti kutya aahongi ohaye tu tuku noku tu halela iihuna yomulilo. [We were preaching bravely about the hell of fire and the glory of heaven, and Jesus the saviour of all, who suffered and died for us. Our listeners did not understand anything, they say that missionaries are insulting us, and wishing us terrible fire, (translation mine)] (1977:35).

In fact the missionaries were not intentionally insulting Aandonga. However communication, in terms of language, culture and context was problematic. Missionaries took up this challenge and started learning the Oshindonga language and culture. They began to contextualize their message to suit the listeners. This situation indicated that the translation of the Bible in order to get the biblical message across and to make communication possible was essential.

In Oukwanyama the Christian missionary pioneers were members of the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS), who arrived from Germany in 1891. The RMS was a pioneer of mission work in Oukwanyama. The German missionaries, like their counterparts in Ondonga learnt the

Oshikwanyama language and investigated its culture, and at the same time they reduced Oshikwanyama to written form. Because of World War I, the Germans had to leave Oukwanyama in 1916, and transferred the mission field to the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS). From 1920, Oukwanyama became part of the Finnish missionary Mission in Ovamboland (Ngodji 2004:33-39).

Finnish missionaries decided also to go to Okavango to do mission work. Ovawambo who had been Christianized already accompanied them. The missionary work in Okavango began in 1920. Ovawambo were very helpful in the mission work among Kwangali people in Okavango, because they have many things in common (Laukkanen 2002:115-116).

Wherever missionary work spread it went hand in hand with the translation of the Bible. The first translation work started with the Oshindonga language.

4. 5 Translation of the Bible into Oshindonga

When dealing with the translation of the Bible into Oshiwambo in general and into Oshindonga in particular, the missionary Martin Rautanen (called the prophet of the Ovawambo) cannot be overlooked. Here follows his short biography aiming at revealing how he learnt Oshindonga, which opened the way for the translation of the Bible. *Nakambalekanene*, in short *Nakambale*²⁰, was the first person to translate the Bible into Oshiwambo (Oshindonga). The other translations that followed (Oshikwanyama and Kwangali), were based on his translation. Who was *Nakambale* and what was his role in translating the Bible?

4. 5. 1 Martin Rautanen, *Nakambalekanene* (1845-1925)

Martin Rautanen, *Nakambalekanene*, (hereafter *Nakambale*) was born in Ingria, Novosolk on November 10th, 1845. He was the first born of Pietari and Katarin Rautanen. Martin married Anna Friedericke Kleinschmidt, on September 11th, 1872. She was the daughter of Kleinschmidt, a Rhenish missionary stationed at Otjimbingwe in central Namibia (Tirronen 1977:19). Rautanen's mother, Anna or Annikka, was a God-fearing and pietistic person. She was an influential force behind Rautanen becoming a devoted Christian. Rautanen learnt from his mother "to take care of far-off nations" (Peltola 2004: 16). Rautanen described his mother as being a "pastorlike mother" to her children (Peltola 2002: 19). After confirmation Rautanen

²⁰ Nakambalekanene is the name given to Martin Rautanen by Ovawambo. Rautanen was well known as Nakambale all over the area. The name Nakambale means 'one who wears a big hat'.

was attracted by an advertisement for a Mission School, and his mother encouraged him to apply. The Finnish Missionary Society would take care of the costs of training and so his poverty was not a hindrance (Peltola 2002:16).

The Mission School commenced on November 17th, 1862 with five students including Rautanen. In the Mission School Rautanen learnt, among others things, German as a foreign language, as well as music, which was his favourite subject. Greek was taught as an optional subject in the final year of training. The students were also trained in manual work like wagon making and tailoring (Peltola 2002:20, 23).

The decision to send missionaries to Ovamboland was taken at the Annual Meeting of the Finnish Missionary Society and during an extraordinary meeting in September 1867. Hugo Hahn of the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) introduced Ovamboland to the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) and requested the society to accept it as one of their mission fields. The FMS subsequently decided to send missionaries to what was then known as South West Africa, particularly to Ovamboland (Peltola 2002:25). This decision was taken at the mission festival held at Helsinki Cathedral on June 9-11, 1868. Martin Rautanen and four other men, B. B. Bjorklund, Pietari Kurvinen, K. L. Tolonen, and K. A. Weikkolin were ordained as mission pastors. The bishop delegated them in the name of the triune God to be preachers among the heathens. The group was destined for Ovamboland to do mission work among Ovawambo (Tirronen 1977:19; Peltola 2002:25-27). Peltola mentions that the Board of the Mission Society expected from young missionaries obedience, the ability to speak or preach in the local language, and to study which part of God's image was present in the heathen in order to understand how their findings might help them proclaim salvation (Peltola 2002:28). This is very important for the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture.

On June 24th, 1868 all five missionary pastors boarded a ship from Helsinki to London. In London on October 27th, they boarded a ship called "Cape City", and embarked on the long journey to Africa. According to Tirronen the group was happy because they were going to deliver the good news of salvation to people who were living in the darkness of paganism (Tirronen 1977:19). This affirms the theory of Laurmaa who held that Ovawambo lost everything in the long journey to Ovamboland, Namibia (Laurmaa 1949:15-16). As shown in chapter three, the missionaries had a wrong impression, because Africans knew God before the arrival of the missionaries, who brought the Christian religion, but not the belief in God.

The group arrived in Cape Town harbour on December 30th, 1868 and proceeded with their journey until they reached Walvis Bay after 64 days. On April 23rd, 1867 the group arrived at Otjimbingwe. Otjimbingwe was a mission station of the Rhenish Missionary Society. They spent a year at Otjimbingwe during which they were introduced to the situation in Ovamboland, learnt Otjiherero for communication purposes and familiarized themselves with the new country and its people. The Otjiherero and Oshiwambo languages are closely related. It was also important to learn Otjiherero because at least the chiefs in Ovamboland were able to speak Otjiherero (Peltola 2002:34-40). It was at Otjimbingwe that Martin Rautanen began with the translation of the Bible, but according to Hahn, he did not make good progress in his language studies (Peltola 2002:42-43).

On May 27th, 1870 the group left Otjimbingwe for Ovamboland, accompanied by Hahn who knew the area and the chiefs. They arrived at their final destination at Omandongo, Ondonga, in Ovamboland on July 9th, 1870. King Shikongo shaKalulu of Ondonga welcomed them cordially. He told them: “You have done well to come here. We will do whatever you will request from us”. When the king asked them whether they had brought guns, as he wished, they replied: “No we brought good news” (Tirronen 1977:19-26; Peltola 2002: 46-48). On their arrival at Ondonga, the Finnish missionaries were using the Otjiherero language, but immediately they realized that people did not understand them well. Therefore the missionaries started to study the Oshindonga dialect (Laukkanen 2002: 32). Rautanen stayed at the Omandongo mission station for six years and was later transferred to Olukonda where he remained for most of the rest of his time in Ovamboland (Peltola 2002:76-79).

Rautanen established a good relationship with King Kambode kaNankwaya who succeeded Shikongo shaKalulu. The king needed Rautanen for his skills; therefore theirs was a two-way relationship, which inspired Rautanen’s confidence. This was a good opportunity for Rautanen to bring the gospel to the king in his kingdom (Peltola 2002:87). The king suffered from bad varicose ulcers and so Rautanen visited him as a physician. Peltola quotes from the diary of Rautanen, which describes his visit with the king as follows:

... As I had a lot of work at this new station, these visits were rather tiring, but the more often I visited the court, the dearer the duty became to me. I learnt to know my patient better and deeper, and when I judged the time convenient, I threw a seed of the Kingdom of God into

the field in his heart. He alone [God] who owns the seed and the heart, knows how many seeds germinate ... (Peltola 2002:87)

A good friendship developed between Rautanen and King Kambonde kaNankwaya. They trusted each other. When Rautanen embarked on a long journey, he left his keys with Kambonde. The king was happy to keep this trust, so he had to make sure that none of his subjects broke into *Nakambale's* rooms (Peltola 2002:88). *Nakambale* was seen as a go-between in matters related to the king and his subjects. When there were disputes between the king and his subjects, the king used to consult Nakambale for advice. The king heeded the advice of *Nakambale* and refrained from punishing the people.

Besides getting closer to the king, the missionaries focused on the children. "They received into their homes so-called foster children, who lived at the station, got their food and simple clothes, worked at the station, and most important, went to school and attended divine services" (Peltola 2002:92). This was Rautanen's strategy of doing mission work, and according to Peltola, it worked, because these children were valuable investments for the future and they presented "as a valuable way to do mission work in Ovamboland" (Peltola 2002:93). These children later developed the first Christian community in Ovamboland. The children may well also have been helpful to the missionaries, especially to Rautanen in his effort to learn the Oshindonga language and culture, which helped him to translate the Bible. In Oshiwambo a proverb says: "*Gwaana mutanda ku nangombe, gwaana maona ku na iilya, gwaana aagundjuka ku na aantu*", which literally means: "If you do not have calves, you don't have cattle, if you don't have new crops, you don't have crops, if you don't have youth, you don't have people". This means that it was necessary to plant Christianity among the youth, who are the future nation. In this regard Rautanen's strategy was successful.

Besides these youth, some Ovambo men became servants at the mission station, attended school and were Christianized. Rautanen mentions three Ovambo men and one woman who stayed with them for several years ranging from three to ten years: Paulus Omushimba, David Niitembu and Elias Ashikomba, and the Bergdama woman Elizabeth Kaukaus. (The second names are not surnames, but African names, while the first names were regarded as Christian names). These people received an education from the mission station (Peltola 2002:97-99). Nambahu was another one of the young men mentioned by Rautanen. He led Rautanen and his

friend to the “*Oshilongo-Stein*²¹”, the stone of the Ondonga kingdom, and he helped Rautanen to learn the language and the customs of Ondonga (Peltola 2002:115). One of *Nakambale*’s assistants in Oshindonga was Josef Nangula. Nangula served Rautanen for long time. The name of Josef Nangula was first mentioned in 1910 (Tirronen 1977:110-111). According to Laukkanen, Rautanen had trained Josef yaNangula to help at the mission station in Olukonda. He proved to be a valuable assistant in linguistic research and translating. YaNangula later became a teacher, evangelist and elder of the Olukonda congregation (Laukkanen 2002:35). The researcher is convinced that the abovementioned people contributed significantly to Rautanen’s getting to grips with the Oshindonga language and culture. Although they are mentioned in passing they represented indigenous people in translation of the Bible into Oshindonga.

The first priority of Rautanen was to learn Oshiwambo. He wanted to understand more deeply the language and the customs of Ovawambo. According to Peltola, in everyday mission work, Rautanen constantly came across Ovambo conceptions and customs, which he felt had to be studied, but his first priority was the study of the local language. The knowledge of the language compensated a great deal for the lack of the training in ethnological methods (Peltola 2002:114). Rautanen was not concerned with ethnological studies, but with linguistic studies of Ovawambo. At the end of 1885 Rautanen mentioned in his diary that he had compiled some language tables, but he had not yet produced any kind of grammar book of the rules of the language. Gradually he started developing and recording Oshindonga grammar. Rautanen used the Otjiherero grammar book written by Hahn as a model for his own work (Peltola 2002: 117). Another method Rautanen used to learn Oshindonga was to collect paper slips on which he wrote Oshindonga words. Many people who have engaged in the learning of the languages of indigenous languages have used the method of writing down lists of words (Peltola 2002:118, 131). “The great advantage was that at any time, there was the opportunity to ask the excellent native speakers how a certain thing was expressed in their language” (Peltola 2002:117). Rautanen could not undertake a proper language course or study on his own: fortunately he had access to the local people to direct him in the right direction.

²¹ Oshilongo-Stein, was a stone of Ondonga kingdom. The stone of kingdom is connected with the power of the king in Ondonga. There were many taboos connected to the stone. People feared when Rautanen and his friend visited the stone. They were awaiting something extraordinary to take place, but in vain.

The work of Rautanen was very significant not only among the Finns, but also in Namibia, in general, and in Ovamboland in particular. Rautanen and his counterpart, the German missionary Hugo Hahn (1818-1895) of the Rhenish Missionary Society were, according to Peltola, “the two most influential missionaries ever to have worked in the present Namibian territory” (2004:12). Peltola also compares Martin Rautanen with his Scottish contemporary Robert Moffat (1795-1883), who conducted missionary work among the Tswana in Botswana. Both had humble origins, both worked in Africa for a full fifty years, both had an important influence on the local heathen rulers and both translated the Bible into the vernacular languages (2002: 135).

Many of the collections of Rautanen have found their way into museums. In 1908, for example, collections of 159 items were brought to the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Rautanen collected close to five hundred objects that cover, in a many-sided way, the material culture of the Ondonga tribe at the end of the nineteenth century (Peltola 2002:120). He served fifty years in Ovamboland (1870-1926) and died in Ovamboland on October 19th, 1926 at the age of 81 years. His grave is located in the Olukonda cemetery in Ovamboland (Peltola 2002: 346-349; Laukkanen 2002:37).

According to Tirronen, Martin Rautanen, *Nakambale*, is a role model for the missionary at present and in the future. A missionary must know about local languages, customs and situations and must become actively involved in all spheres of life, as *Nakambale* did. Rautanen was a preacher and a teacher; an agriculturist and a herder; a builder and architect; a healer and counselor; a postman and transporter; an advisor and diplomat; a scientist and mediator; a Bible translator and a hymn composer; a botanist and a weather bureau. Such a person must be a committed, a fearless, and trustworthy person (1977: 147). *Nakambale* initiated the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga. His translation is known as the *Nakambale* Bible.

4. 5. 2 The first translation of the Bible into Oshindonga, the *Nakambale* Bible (1954)

When Finnish missionaries arrived in Ovamboland, they knew only the Otjiherero language. They received books in Otjiherero from Hahn at Otjimbingwe, as an introduction to African language. In Ovamboland, unfortunately, nobody was able to teach them Oshindonga. Ovawambo could tell them how something was expressed in their language, but they were not

able to explain why. The missionaries' basic language skills in Otjiherero helped them to understand the content and the structure of Bantu languages, of which Oshindonga is one. "Many rules of the Herero language [Otjiherero] could be adapted almost exactly to Ovambo [Oshiwambo] dialects" (Peltola 2002:131). Martin Rautanen made an effort to learn Oshindonga thoroughly. In many cases several Ovambo masters of the language accompanied him both on journeys and at home (Peltola 2002:131).

Martin Rautanen started his Bible translating work in 1882 (Tirronen 1977:106). Before this, he compiled a dictionary of Ovambo and collected Ovambo fairytales. The compilation of the large "*Biblical History of the Old Testament*" was the first extensive literary work that was assigned to Rautanen. Biblical histories played an important role in the African mission fields in the early years when Bible translations were not yet available. The first biblical history books used by missionaries were printed in Finland in 1878, and arrived in Ovamboland in 1879. The missionaries in the field were disappointed because the text of the biblical history book was inappropriate. Rautanen and Reijonen had to edit the biblical history book so that it was relevant and correct in Oshindonga for Ovambo readers (Peltola 2002:132). In other words, the biblical history books were not relevant, so the missionaries had to rework it and make it fit into the context of Ovambo people. This is what is required by the translatability principle. Therefore there was a need to apply the translatability theory. The second printing of the book on biblical history in 1889 provided a revised and more suitable version for translation into Oshindonga. This process gave Rautanen a chance to learn more Oshindonga, because new aspects of the language had become clear to him. Peltola states: "Rautanen had made great progress in the language while he was translating the Biblical History" (2002:132). Rautanen revised Luther's Small Catechism, the third edition, in 1888, the fourth edition in 1893, and the fifth edition in 1903. He translated, composed and revised many hymns from German and Finnish into Oshindonga. While translating, other missionaries were working on an orthography of Oshindonga, because there was not yet an Oshindonga orthography at that time (Peltola 2002: 133-134; Tirronen 1977:107). The abovementioned translations and revisions prepared Rautanen for his major work: the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga.

The translation of the Bible into Oshindonga began in 1885 when Rautanen translated the Gospels according to Mathew and Mark for devotional purposes (Tirronen 1977:108). Rautanen was not the first and only missionary who translated the Bible into Oshindonga. Reijonen translated some of the Sunday texts into Oshindonga in the early 1870's and

Björklund translated some of the Gospels (Peltola 2002:132). But Rautanen made the greatest contribution as far as translation of the whole Bible in Oshindonga is concerned. Peltola writes:

Translating the Bible into Oshindonga was left to Martin Rautanen. While he was translating the German Biblical History and checking Reijonen's translation of the Sunday texts and Björklund's translation of the Gospel of Luke, Rautanen saw the kinds of problems a Bible translator meets. This insight and the need, essential to mission, to have the Bible in the vernacular, made him in 1885, start the work for which he used much time and energy during the following decades (2002: 135)

The problems Rautanen met in translation included cultural differences, linguistic expressions and contextualization. The problem of cultural differences was that Rautanen was a Finn, so his culture was different from that of Ovawambo. Nevertheless Rautanen learnt Oshiwambo culture, which helped him to overcome this problem. Expressions are not the same in different languages. Rautanen had the problem of expressing himself or ideas in Oshiwambo. With the help of Ovambo people who lived around him, he later managed to overcome linguistic expression. Contextualization was another problem Rautanen has to tackle. As a translator he had to contextualize the message, but he was not able to do so. He later familiarized himself with context and became part of it. After overcoming these problems slowly, but sure he eventually became a committed translator of the Bible into Oshindonga. This means that the translator needs to know and familiarize himself/ herself with all these areas, in order to produce a relevant and acceptable translation.

The translating of the Bible into Oshindonga was not an easy task. Rautanen had to wrestle to get meanings, new words and the correct way of expression in Oshindonga. For these reasons he needed assistance from a local speaker to make translation possible. Rautanen needed to discover the correct Oshindonga words for his translations. According to Tirronen, Rautanen collected Oshindonga words by using three methods: from hearing people speak, from asking and requesting people, and by creating his own new words. He encountered problems in asking people because sometimes they agreed with his suggestions simply because they did not want to disagree with such a respected person (1977:110). This is a typical Ovawambo attitude toward a person they respect. This kind of attitude of Ovawambo, as explained above, delayed the process. According to his diary, Rautanen shared his experience and method of translating with the Mission Director, Totterman as follows:

While translating difficult passages, he read them to some of the cleverest Christians and asked them many times how the matter should

be expressed in their language. But Rautanen also had to create new words, either by deriving from existing words or by borrowing from other languages and adding a prefix from Oshindonga. ... Sometimes Rautanen succeeded so well that the new word became a living word in the language words; sometimes the new word was still-born. ... as time went on, to replace the loanwords with words derived from the local language words, which would better serve their purpose. Every now and then, Martin Rautanen admires the possibilities that Oshindonga offers for deriving new words (Peltola 2002:136).

In the references of his sources Rautanen mentions Bible translations from European languages as well as Otjiherero, the only African translation at his disposal. It is surprising that he did not mention biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. Some sources indicate that Rautanen did study Greek, and in his library there was a Greek *Novum Testamentum* (Peltola 2002: 136-137). "It seems to be that during the years in the mission field, he added to his knowledge of Greek" (Peltola 2002:137). He thus may have used Greek in translating. Besides Bible translations, Rautanen had dictionaries and grammar books in African languages including Otjiherero, IsiZulu, Seshoto, Swahili, and Oshikwanyama in his library from 1850-1910. The authors of these books were well-known for their knowledge of African languages (Tirronen 1977:106). These books were helpful to Rautanen to develop Oshindonga language, which was at an initial stage. There were no Oshindonga grammar books at that time. Therefore these books were helpful to Rautanen to reduce Oshindonga into written form and at the same time they helped him in translating the Bible into Oshindonga.

In translating the New Testament into Oshindonga Rautanen used the German translation of the New Testament as his textual basis. He also referred to the Finnish translation, the Russian New Testament and the New Testament in Otjiherero. For translating the Old Testament, Rautanen primarily used Emli Kautzch's 1899 version in German (Laukkanen 2002:35). The Bible translator needs to know original biblical languages as source languages as well as the target language, the language into which the Bible is translated to. It is recommended that the translator may use other Bible translations as references. But if the translator only uses other translations without the knowledge of biblical original languages (Hebrew and Greek) and then the validity of the translation is questionable. This is the case with the *Nakambale* version of the Bible. He used biblical languages as well as other Bible versions in other languages for reference.

After a long struggle of translating, the New Testament in Oshindonga was completed, and printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), and was received in November 1903. Martin Rautanen was present in a meeting of the FMS where he announced the publication of the New Testament in Oshindonga (Laukkanen 2002:34). The translation of the Old Testament was completed in December 1920. On December 24th, 1923 Rautanen at the age of 78, put the last full stop on the translated and proofread Oshindonga Bible. The Old Testament in Oshindonga was printed in 1925. Rautanen praised the Lord God, who made it possible for him to complete this wonderful work. *Nakambale* wished to live to see the whole Bible printed in Oshindonga, but unfortunately this was not to be. The Oshindonga Bible was only printed in 1954, 31 years after its completion (Tirronen 1977:110-112; Laukkanen 2002: 37).

Although the publication of the Oshindonga Bible in 1954 was a joyous occasion for ELCIN, some language experts and the younger generation felt that the translation seemed outdated by the time it was published; therefore, there was a need for a new translation. The suggestion was put forward either to produce a new translation or to revise the existing one (Laukkanen 2002:185). Two missionaries were behind these motions with two different ideas. Elias Pentti wanted a new translation of the whole Bible into Oshindonga, while Arvo Eirola favoured a revision of the existing translation only (Laukkanen 2002:187). It was suggested that:

This translation would be made in natural, idiomatic language understandable to all, even non-Christians. The language would be the native tongue of people living in Ondonga, free from “missionary fingerprints...” (Laukkanen 2002:189).

This was to be done according to the guidelines of the Turfloop consultation (1967), which was organized by the BSSA, to give the Bible translators guidelines for doing translation in which Nida introduced the dynamic equivalence principle of translation. Dynamic equivalence translation corresponds with the translatability theory of Sanneh and Bediako. Many translators in the region, included ELCIN, attended the consultation held at Turfloop, South Africa (Ngodji 2004: 65).

4. 5. 3 Local contributions to translation

In translating the Bible into Oshindonga, to make it understandable and relevant, Rautanen worked together with indigenous people. It is hard to trace who these people were, because they they were ordinary people in the community, therefore they are just mentioned in passing. However their contributions are as valid as those of the European missionaries and other citizens whose history are written down. Rautanen may have written the draft translation,

which he read to indigenous Christians whom he trusted and then discussed ways of expression with them in order to make the text understandable (Laukkanen 2002:34). Translation requires dialogue between people, language and culture. Dialogue can only take place when interacting with the people concerned. Some of the Africans (Aandonga) who helped Rautanen to learn Oshindonga, as mentioned earlier were: Josef yaNangula (Laukkanen 2002:35), Paulus Omushimba, David Niitembu, Elias Ashikombe, Elizabeth Kaukaus (Peltola 2002:97-99), and Nambahu (Peltola 2002:115). These people formed a translation team with Rautanen, because without them the translatability theory, which was represented by indigenous people, would not have been applied in translating the Bible into Oshindonga.

People have a tendency to note the leading figures and forget the ordinary people. This is what happened in this case of translating the Bible into Oshindonga. There is no record whatsoever of the indigenous people that helped Rautanen and contributed to the translation of the Bible. That is why Laukkanen concludes that although many worked to bring about this [Oshindonga] translation of the Bible, it must be remembered that it was Martin Rautanen who devoted his life to it (2002:38). Ovawambo called this translation the “*Nakambale Bible*”. The *Nakambale* translation was the first translation of the complete Bible printed in Namibia. It was regarded as “the perfect Word of God” (Laukkanen 2002: 185).

In the next subsections we are going to deal with other translations that followed the first one, The Amaambo New Testament translation and Amakutuwa Old Testament translation.

4. 5. 4. The Revision of the *Nakambale Bible*

After the completion of the translation of the New Testament into Oshindonga, the need to revise the whole Bible into Oshindonga arose. The Turfloop seminar of 1967 argued that the orthography of the existing translation, the *Nakambale Bible*, was outdated, and that it needed revision (Laukkanen 2002: 199). Languages are not static as they always change over time. Since the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga, the language has been developed and enriched, because Ovawambo themselves started writing and translating literature more and more. A new orthography had been introduced so the Bible also needed to be adapted to this new orthography as well. Another contributing factor to the need for a revised Bible was that the stock of the *Nakambale Bible* was running out, and the decision was made not to print it again. The best option was to revise the Bible version in Oshindonga. “... BSSA proposed in 1968 that the 1954 version of the Bible would be rewritten according to new rules of spelling

and printing, which could be done much before the new version would be ready” (Laukkanen 2002:199).

The then ELOC, now ELCIN, Church Council identified people suitable for the revision. Reverends Seblon Ekanjo and Eino Amaambo were suggested for the job. However this did not materialise because neither of them was able to leave his duties. Bishop Leonard Auala²² approached a theologian, Laina Kivelä, to revise the orthography of the existing Oshindonga Bible. Although Kivelä had other responsibilities, she agreed (Laukkanen 2002:200). Laukkanen writes:

Kivelä revised the text of the Ndonga Bible, which had originally been written by Martti Rautanen and corrected after the Second World War, to conform to new standards of spelling. ... (2002:201).

Kivelä completed her work in 1973 and sent it to Cape Town for printing. The revised Oshindonga Bible was finally printed, and became available to the public in June 1977. Although this edition was regarded as a “temporary” one, because the new translation was still to come, the older generation felt comfortable with it. On the one hand, the older people were familiar with the wording of the respected person *Nakambale*, while on the other hand the younger generation felt that this Bible did not meet present-day requirements. Therefore the publication of the revised Oshindonga Bible eliminated the need to produce a completely new version (Laukkanen 2002:202).

Kivelä worked alone. She was acquainted with the proofreading of Bible translations. There was no need for Africans to do the job, because this was only a revision. The *Nakambale* translation, according to my observation, followed a literal translation approach, which attempted to keep as close as possible to the exact words and phrasing in the source language, yet still make sense in the receptor language. *Nakambale* concentrated more on language than on culture. In the new Oshindonga translation there was thus a need for Africans to be in charge to make translatability possible in a holistic way. The work done by Kivelä shows that women could do much better than men even in the early stages of Christianity in Namibia.

²² Leonard Auala was the first African Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). He was elected as a Bishop in 1958. He has a record of outstanding leadership in the church and in the Namibian community.

4. 5. 5 The Translation of the New Testament into Oshindonga, *Amaambo* Translation

4. 5. 5. 1 Rev. Eino Amaambo (1939-)

It was felt by ELCIN and missionaries that there was a need to produce a good Bible translation, which would serve both the old and young generation in ELCIN. In order to produce a new translation by Africans and for Africans, ELCIN, assisted by FELM, prepared a theologian for the job. Therefore Rev Amaambo was tasked with translating the New Testament into Oshindonga.

After completion of his pastoral training at Elim and at Paulinum Lutheran Theological Seminary at Otjimbingwe (1963-1965), Rev Eino Amaambo (appendix IV) was sent for further studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, in St. Paul, Minnesota USA (1966-1968). Later he was sent to Birmingham, England (1969-1970) for Bible translation training. Amaambo had been introduced to Greek earlier at Oshigambo High School, but he only learnt Hebrew at Selly Oak, in Birmingham (Laukkanen 2002:188-194; Nambala 1993: 39). This means that Amaambo learnt biblical original languages, which were and still continue to be needed by Bible translators. Amaambo, an Oshindonga speaking person, knew biblical original languages and was also a theologian. He was thus a suitable person to carry out a Bible translation, which would be relevant to African Christians.

Amaambo started translating the New Testament into Oshindonga in 1968, using the text of the 'Good News for Modern Man' as his basis, among others. ELCIN Church Council expressed its hope that the New Testament Oshindonga version should be written in a language understandable to young people in particular (Laukkanen 2002:189-190). The Turfloop seminar guidelines were used for this new translation of the New Testament into Oshindonga. Turfloop clarified the goals of making a new Bible version in the Oshindonga language. Rev Jason Amakutuva, Hosea Nampala, and Miss Laina Kivelä represented the Oshindonga language at Turfloop. The representatives of ELCIN and the Bible societies agreed that the Bible in Oshindonga would be translated entirely anew, because the existing version was outdated. It was agreed that the language should be corrected to eliminate what was called "missionary finger-prints", that errors of content should be rectified and that the orthography should be modernized according to the standard set by the language authority of the government (Laukkanen 2002:187-88). Language is not static, but dynamic. It changes from

time to time and from generation to generation. Oshindonga is no exception. The language of the Bible must follow suit as well. A committee of translation was established to make this happen.

4. 5. 5. 2 The committee for the Bible translation into Oshindonga

The translation process needs committees in order to proceed smoothly. The Turfloop seminar supplied guidelines for this process. This is to avoid the domination of one person and one denomination in the translation. Amaambo, as a chief translator, had a team to work with. The committee consisted of people from different denominations in Ovamboland: Eino Amaambo, Hosea Nampala, Toivo Tirronen and Laina Kivelä represented ELCIN (Lutherans); and Father Bernhard Nordkamp, the two teachers, Engerbert Atshipara and Stephanus Antinius, represented the Catholics. No mention is made of the Anglicans. These members formed the Editorial Committee as well as the Review Committee. According to Miss Kivelä, the only woman mentioned in this regard, a spirit of co-operation prevailed in their meetings at which they discussed the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga (Laukkanen 2002:188, 190-191).

In 1972 at a meeting of the translation committee held at Oniipa, United Bible Society (UBS) secretary Heber Peacock, who was in charge of the translation project in Africa, recommended the use of the principle of dynamic equivalence and encouraged the committee to speed up their work. The dynamic equivalent principle of translation is compatible with the translatability principle because both principles seek to deliver a relevant message to the target languages rather than translating word by word from a source language. Peacock also recommended the use of the International Critical Greek New Testament and Today's English Version of the Bible as the basis for translating.

To speed up the work of translating, Rev Matti Amadhila was added to assist Amaambo. The appointment of Amadhila came as a surprise to him. According to Amadhila, he was asked to interpret the sermon of J. Reynecke, the secretary of the BSSA, who visited Okahao parish with Amaambo. When they returned to Oniipa, Reynecke and Amaambo requested the Church Council to release Amadhila from his duty for the task of Bible translation. Then, Amadhila was assigned as a full-time Oshindonga Bible translator (Amadhila 2006). Both Amaambo and Amadhila were stationed at Oniipa in Ondonga tribal area and later moved to Elim in Uukwambi tribal area (Laukkanen 2002:196). Amadhila was an Oshingandjera speaking person whereas Amaambo spoke Oshindonga. This however was not a problem because

Oshingandjera is related to Oshindonga, and Amadhila had learnt Oshindonga at school. The combination of the speakers of different dialects in the work of Bible translation in Oshindonga made it relevant to the readers who were not all Oshindonga speakers, because some of their words found their way into the Oshindonga version of the Bible.

Oshindonga was already established as a written language before the translation of the New Testament into Oshindonga took place. The translators also had the opportunity to compare their translation with the *Nakambale* Bible in Oshindonga but they had “the Good News for Modern Man” to use as a basis. The translators used certain “methods with the goal of producing a version that employed contemporary language to express a message dynamically equivalent to the original” (Laukkanen 2002:198). According to Amadhila, in the process of translating, first they began with checking the manuscript with members of the translation committee and later they used a method of small workshops, whereby the translators and the translation committee met and discussed the text verse by verse together to ensure that it would be relevant and accepted by people (2006). More significant to this translation is that indigenous people, theologians and educated people were responsible for it rather than as was the case with the earlier one where one person was responsible. This ensured its relevance to ELCIN. In this way translatability was enabled.

The translating and checking of the new version of the New Testament in Oshindonga was completed in 1975. Laina Kivelä proofread the text, after which the New Testament in Oshindonga was printed as a separate edition in Cape Town by the BSSA. On May 9th, 1976, a celebration was held at Olukonda to mark the publication of the New Testament in Oshindonga. The title of this work is: *ELAKA ETOYE: Etestamenti epe lyomoshindonga*, (The Good News, New Testament in Oshindonga), also known as “The Amaambo translation” (Laukkanen 2002:198-199). Before the whole Bible in Oshindonga was translated again, the *Nakambale* Bible, the first version, was to be revised.

4. 5. 6 The Second Translation of the Old Testament into Oshindonga, Amakutuwa Translation

The idea of an entirely new Bible translation, which was suggested earlier, was entrusted to Amakutuwa and he completed the job in 1986. Who was Amakutuwa then?

4. 5. 6. 1 Jason Shikomba Akwega Amakutuwa (1917-2008)

Jason Amakutuwa is one of the longest-serving pastors in ELCIN. He was born on December 16th, 1917, in the Uukwambi area. He started his primary school in 1933 at Othika. He was Christianized at Elim (Onashiku) parish in 1934. After he completed boys' school at Ongwediva, he attended the theological seminary in Elim from 1946 to 1949, and was ordained as an ELCIN pastor in 1949. Amakutuwa furthered his studies at Onayena (1956), Elim (1956) and Stofberg, South Africa (1959). He studied English in London (1975). Amakutuwa studied Hebrew and attended seminars on translation issues. He served in many fields in the church and in the public sector. He was a school inspector in Uukwambi area (1954-1972). In the church he served at many places as pastor including Elim, Engela, Tsumeb, Ongenga, and Oniimwandi. He was also a Dean of Western Deanery in Okahao (1961-1963, 1965-1976, and 1982-1983). Amakutuwa was a member of the Bible Translation Committee (1970-1982), and a Bible translator (1977-1981). He retired in 1987. Amakutuwa served ELCIN full-time for 38 years, and even after his retirement he was given some tasks to do in the church (Laukkanen 2002:204; Nambala 1995:43; Amakutuwa 2006).

Amakutuwa spoke Oshikwambi dialect of Oshiwambo, but had to translate the Bible into Oshindonga. This was not a problem for him because the Oshikwambi dialect is related to Oshindonga. Amakutuwa also attended school in the Ondonga-speaking area for five years, so he was acquainted with Oshindonga. Amakutuwa learnt the English language in London in order to equip him with the necessary skills for Bible translating. With these abilities and qualifications Amakutuwa was called upon to undertake the translation of the Bible (Old Testament) into Oshindonga. According to him the whole Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi is from his pen (Amakutuwa 2006).

The translation of the Old Testament came at the right time, because, first, the Turfloop guidelines were in place, second, the indigenous translators and proofreaders were available, third, ELCIN had authority over the work, and fourth Oshindonga language had been developed. Therefore the work of translation was facilitated and proceeded smoothly as planned. This meant that the translation would meet the standard requirements internationally; it would be relevant and inclusive, and at the same time it would consider the culture of the people.

In order that the translation might meet the international standards, in 1976 translation consultant J. L. Reyneke from the BSSA led a weeklong Bible translation seminar in Ongwediva in Ovamboland. Potential translators and members of review committees and other stakeholders participated in the seminar. After the seminar, arrangements for translating the Old Testament were negotiated in a meeting at Oniipa, attended by the ELCIN leadership, missionary representatives, the Bible Society of South Africa (BSSA) representative and translators (Laukkanen 2002:203). The call for Amakutuwa to translate the Bible was a good move for the vernacularization of the Holy Scriptures.

4. 5. 6. 2 The call for Amakutuwa to translate the Oshindonga Old Testament

The ELCIN Church Council called on Reverend Jason Amakutuwa, who had attended the Ongwediva translation seminar, to be the full-time translator of the Oshindonga Old Testament, while Rev Hosea Nampala was appointed to assist him (Laukkanen 2002:204). Toivo Tirronen²³ was appointed as co-ordinator of the Old Testament translation. According to Laukkanen, Tirronen had studied Oshindonga very thoroughly and had learnt other Bantu languages as a private student of Professor Ernst Dammann in Berlin. To promote the Oshindonga language, Tirronen had written articles about Oshindonga for scientific journals so that it would gain status. Therefore, Oshindonga was approved as a subject in matriculation examinations in Namibia. As he was engaged in developing Oshindonga, Tirronen knew all the procedures to be followed in the study of literature and languages, so he was the right person for this position of co-coordinating (Laukkanen 2002:206,207). The Bible Society provided the translators with the texts to be used as a basis. In the translation of the New Testament, the Good News for Modern Man was used as a basis, while for the Old Testament translation, BSSA provided Today's English Version Bible (TEV), which was published in 1972, to be the basis (Laukkanen 2002: 206).

In 1977, the ELCIN Church Council decided to continue its co-operation with the BSSA to get the Old Testament translated into Oshindonga. The Church Council appointed Lutheran church members to the Consultative Group, "which was to give feedback on the clarity and quality of the target language used in the translation" (Laukkanen 2002:206). The Lutheran members of

²³ Toivo Tirronen was an expatriate who served as a teacher at a church school, Oshigambo High School. He developed Oshindonga grammar. He translated much literature into Oshindonga. He also developed the Oshindonga-English Dictionary. He wrote a book *Nakambalekanene* (1977), the history of Martin Rautanen. In addition he was involved in Bible translating as a co-ordinator. Tirronen died in Ovamboland on July 15th, 1982 and is buried at Elim, in Uukwambi tribe area.

the Consultative Group were: Aino Gweendama, Moses Amkongo (director of ELOC Press), Ester Amaambo (a teacher), Linda Kijala, Usko Shivute, Severus Kamati and Laina Kivela (a theologian and expatriate), Toivo Tirronen (co-ordinator) and Hosea Nampala (a pastor); the Catholics were represented by Father Gerard Heimerikx and Stephanus Amushila (a teacher) (Laukkanen 2002:206, 207, 208). The composition of the Consultative Group was well organized because it was inclusive of both men and women and at the same time it was ecumenical. Laukkanen cites Tirronen who expressed his satisfaction and states that:

... it was very important to have women in the Consultative Group, because mothers were the ones who taught the language to children. It was through women that children's vocabulary was enriched, and Tirronen believed that local women had a broader vocabulary than men (2002:208).

In Oshiwambo, people say: *"Elaka we li nyama iho li dimbwa"*, which literally means 'the tongue/language one sucks one never forgets'. This implies that children suckle language from their mothers and therefore mothers play an important role in teaching children their own language, as well as their culture. The researcher agrees with Tirronen on this issue of the relationship between mother and child and the influence of the mothers on the children. There is no father tongue, but a mother tongue. It is only the mother who breastfeeds the child. The child sucks milk from mother's breasts as well as language and culture. In Oshiwambo mothers teach children the system of the way of life as set up by community, even patriarchy, because mothers/women are the custodians of culture.

In the Consultative Group Amakutuwa and Amushila represented the western dialects of Ovamboland, a dialect, which is close to Oshindonga. Their task was to make sure that the vocabulary in the translation was understandable to speakers of other Oshiwambo dialects (Laukkanen 2002:208). This Consultative Group was the platform where linguistic and cultural interaction would take place. The presence of more indigenous people indicates the intended outcome of this translation; making the Bible in Oshindonga relevant and acceptable. Members of the Editorial Committee for the Old Testament translation were: Jason Amakutuwa (the translator), Toivo Tirronen, (the coordinator), Fanuel Shivute (a farmer) and his wife Marta Shivute, and Ester Amaambo (a teacher). Laina Kivelä and Ester Tirronen served as typists. The coordinator, Tirronen expressed his satisfaction with translation team with these words: "the diligence of all people involved in checking the translation decisively influenced the

progress of the work” (Laukkanen 2002:209). This process shows that translatability theory was in place.

Once all arrangements pertaining to the translation had been finalized, the official translating of the Old Testament commenced in March 1977. All stakeholders involved in the process of translating did their level best, from translators, Editorial committee to the Consultative Group. The Consultative Group was expected to make the translation relevant to the Aandonga. A comparison was made with the way Oshindonga is spoken and expressed (Amadhila 2006). The task of the Consultative Group “was the evaluation of Ndonga language [Oshindonga] that was used” in the daily life of the people (Laukkanen 2002:210). The translator had to keep an eye on the TEV text “to make sure that the translation carried the same message and that he had not left anything out” (Laukkanen 2002: 212). The Consultative Group had to report errors or any ambiguity they came across to the Editorial Committee for verification (Laukkanen 2002:212).

The members of the Consultative Group and the Editorial Committee formed a Review Committee. Their first meeting was held at Oniipa in March 1978, one year after the commencement of the translation of the Old Testament into Oshindonga. Invited to attend (besides members of the Committees), were J. L. Reyneke, who looked after translation projects for the BSSA, ELCIN (ELOC) leaders, Bishop Leonard Auala, Bishop-elect Kleopas Dumeni, and General Secretary Petrus Shipena, FELM (FMS) representatives and field secretary Olle Erikson. The presence of ELCIN leaders kept the translation project in touch with local church leadership. During the meeting many adjustments were made to the draft (Laukkanen 2002: 210,211).

Once the draft was finalized, copies or part of the translated manuscripts were sent to the BSSA for storage until the whole translation was completed. Other copies were sent to various parties like the Language Bureau in Windhoek, the Oshindonga Language Committee in Ondangwa, the Bishop and Church Council of ELOC, and to the deans supervising the ELOC parishes in Ondonga and the western area of Ovamboland, who would eventually use the translation (Laukkanen 2002: 213). Tirronen continued reporting on the progress of the translation from time to time, both to ELCIN and to the BSSA. In 1980 the ELCIN Council decided to appoint him as a full-time translator to assist Amakutuwa, to speed up the

translation of the Old Testament (Laukkanen 2002:214). Amaambo already had experience in translating in the Oshindonga language as indicated earlier.

The fifth and last meeting of the Review Committee for translating the Old Testament into Oshindonga was held at Oniipa in June 1980. At this meeting it was concluded that the translation of the Old Testament into Oshindonga, had been completed. Besides the members of the committee, present were Bishop Dumeni, and FELM director Alpo Hukka and his wife Leena who were visiting Namibia. Bishop Dumen expressed his joy with the excellent work that had been done. His remark was: "... the earth and heaven will pass away, but God's word will not" (Laukkanen 2002:217). This remark shows that the Bible in Oshindonga is the Word of God. The chairperson and coordinator thanked committee members and wished upon them God's blessing (Laukkanen 2002:218).

Before publication could take place, the Amaambo New Testament translation and Amakutuwa Old Testament Translation had to be merged. Kivelä who had been a member of the translation committees and who had typed many of the versions in Ovamboland, was asked to continue with the work of proofreading and putting together the Old and New Testaments during her retirement. She finished proofreading in January 1985. At the end of 1986, the modern version of the Bible in Oshindonga was published, financed by the BSSA. The new version of the Oshindonga Bible was entitled: OMBIIMBELI ONDJAPUKI (The Holy Bible) (Laukkanen 2002: 221).

Laukkanen states that the publication of the Oshindonga Bible (1986) was a less auspicious event than that of the *Nakambale* Bible (1954) and other translations in Ovamboland. The older readers of the Bible continue to favour the older version and even many theologians prefer it. But the younger generation prefers the new version of 1986 (Laukkanen 2002:120). According to the researcher the new version of the Bible in Oshindonga is better than the earlier one because it accommodates the language spoken at the present moment and it considers Oshindonga culture more than the earlier version does. *Nakambale* was more concerned with the expression of the language whereas Amakutuwa and Amaambo considered both language and culture.

The *Nakambale* Bible was a one-person translation. There was no translation committee, and no guidelines were set. Many stakeholders carried out the Amakutuwa and Amaambo versions,

because these translations were undertaken after the Turfloop consultation took place, which set out guidelines for new translations of the Bible. Oshindonga has more than one translation of the Bible. It is helpful to the readers that there are various translations available for comparison; that is the *Nakambale* Bible (1954), The Amaambo New Testament (1977), and the Amakutuwa Old Testament merged with the New Testament (1986). There is nothing wrong with having many versions of the Bible. Oshindonga language is not the only language that has many versions; other languages, for example English, have more.

4. 6. The translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama

4. 6. 1 Translation of the New Testament into Oshikwanyama

It seems that it is customary to translate the Bible, starting first with the New Testament and then the Old Testament. Probably this is done for a reasons. One reason might be that the New Testament is short in comparison with the Old Testament. Another reason might be that the New Testament emphasizes the love of God towards the whole of humanity, whereas the Old Testament emphasis on the law and the history of one nation, the Israelites. There is also a possibility that there is a fear that the Old Testament contains Israelite culture with elements and practise similar to those of Africa, and Africans might prefer to stick them rather than what is in the New Testament. Therefore it is better to translate the New Testament first and then the Old Testament. It was one of these reasons or perhaps many others that was the driving force behind the translations of the Bible into Oshikwanyama.

The translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama took place during two eras of missionary work in Oukwanyama. The first era was the German missionary era of the Rhenish Missionary Society (RMS), who did missionary work in the area as from 1891 to 1916, and established congregations at Ondjiva, Omupanda, Omatemba and Onamakunde in Oukwanyama on the Angolan side of the border (Ngodji 2004:33,34). German missionaries were the first to reduce Oshikwanyama language into written form (Ngodji 2004:50). Their translation of the New Testament and Psalms was printed in 1927. The second era was that of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) which took over, Oukwanyama mission field from the Germans in 1920 and translated the whole Bible into Oshikwanyama. This version of the Bible was printed in 1974 (Ngodji 2004: 44), the only translation version in Oshikwanyama to date.

The German missionary Peter Heinrich Brincker of the RMS played an important role in the translating of books into Oshikwanyama, including part of the Bible. He himself never visited the Oukwanyama area. He learnt the language from migrant labourers, but there was no translation committee whatsoever involved. Two migrant labourers assisted Brincker; one of them was Unyule, who came to Oukwanyama as an interpreter with the first German missionaries (Ngodji 2004:52). Although people were reading such translations, they did not find them to be relevant to their context, because they were more focused on the Otjiherero context. Therefore they desired something better. According to Nambala, the translation of a book of the stories of the Bible and the New Testament into Oshikwanyama (*Etamendi Lipe*) by the Germans motivated the Ovakwanyama to have the whole Bible translated into their mother tongue (Nambala 1996:94). The New Testament and Psalms in Oshikwanyama were entitled: *ETAMENTI LIPE l'Omuene uetu Jesus Kristus nomapsalme*.

The Germans thus translated the New Testament into Oshikwanyama, but this version lacked structure and its language was outdated. The translators worked alone and the version was therefore not relevant to Ovakwanyama. The translatability theory that is the best option for making the Bible in vernacular languages relevant was not applied. German missionaries also started with the translation of the whole Bible, but the eruption of World War I ended this effort and they left their manuscripts, which were useful to their successors, the Finnish missionaries and indigenous translators (Ngodji 2004: 52).

4. 6. 2 The translation of the whole Bible into Oshikwanyama

When the Bible in Oshindonga was completed in 1954, the Ovakwanyama felt that they would also like to have the entire Bible in their own tongue. The pastors and laypersons in the Oukwanyama area requested the church leadership (ELOC), to translate the whole Bible into Oshikwanyama. It was also stressed that the translation should be in the language understood by all, the older and younger generation, and not in the archaic language used in the German's New Testament translation of 1927. Laukkanen cites Gurney, the Anglican member of the translation committee, who emphasized: "It must only be the best". It was also agreed by the translators and members of the translation committee that, "the translation was meant for Kwanyama-speaking people, and therefore the language should be as pure Kwanyama as possible"(Laukkanen 2002:64). In order to make the Bible in Oshikwanyama more relevant and acceptable to all groups in the community, Hynonen, a member of the translation committee noted that:

The aim of the translator and the committee was to make a precise representation of the original text, but at the same time the translation should be contemporary, easily understandable language. ... the language of the Bible should be the language heard, understood and spoken by children and young people, because they were the ones for whom the Bible was being translated (Laukkanen 2002:65).

Hynonen's point was valid, but he did not mention the culture of the people concerned. It is not only the language that makes the biblical message understandable and relevant, but also the culture and the context must be taken into account. The translatability theory incorporates language, culture and context, that is why it was the time to apply it to the process of the translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama.

The Finnish missionaries were not in favour of the translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama. They argued that the Ovakwanyama understand Oshindonga and could use the Oshindonga Bible. However, the Ovakwanyama rejected this notion. Finnish missionaries also suggested the use of one "common language or mixed language" for all Ovawambo, but this idea was also rejected (Laukkanen 2002: 39). Senior Ovakwanyama pastors felt that losing your language is losing your culture as well as your identity (Ngodji 2002: 57). There was no other option for the church leadership than to accept the request of the Ovakwanyama and organize the process of translation (Laukkanen 2002: 40). They began to prepare for translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama with new strategies and in a more organized way. The translation of the Bible into Oshikwanyama involved a team of translators, a Review Committee and proofreaders (Ngodji 2004:56. The inclusion of indigenous people in the process of translation made the biblical message relevant and acceptable. This is what translatability principles require.

The people who were engaged in the translation were the expatriate Walter Arvid Björklund, indigenous pastor Natanael Nghatanga, the evangelist Andreas Shapota, and the teacher Sakaria Tuhadeleni. These three indigenous translators had a special gift for appropriating words according to Oshikwanyama culture and tradition, and at the same time they were committed Christians who knew the Bible well (Ngodji 2004: 62-63). The knowledge of other languages and of biblical languages was not a requirement because their co-translator, Björklund, could assist in this regard (Laukkanen 2002:61, 62). Björklund and Nghatanga began to translate the Bible into Oshikwanyama, starting with the New Testament. They

compared it with the New Testament translation published in 1927 by the Germans. For the Old Testament they used as a basis the manuscript by Paul Schulte, also a German missionary, and they worked with indigenous teachers and pastors in Oukwanyama. Bjorklund used the Authorised King James Version as the basis for his translation as well as the Greek text. Other Bible versions available for reference were the English Revised Version, and Bibles in Afrikaans, German, Swedish, Finnish and Oshindonga (Laukkanen 2002:62).

Reverend Josia Mufeti, who studied in Finland and received training in matters pertaining to translation, finalized the work together with Laina Kivelä, who edited it. Mufeti also attended the Turfloop consultation 1967 where Nida's dynamic equivalent translation principle was introduced to Bible translators. The translation was therefore done according to this principle (Ngodji 2004: 67, 68, 86). Besides the translators there was a Translation Committee, which checked the appropriate use of the language and words. The United Bible Society (UBS), which supervised the translation, advised the Translation Committee to eliminate words borrowed from European languages and to stick to indigenous expressions. Another point they made was that the committee should seek the expression in contemporary Oshikwanyama which best suited each context in the Bible (Laukkanen 2002:91, 92).

Translators themselves used people in their surroundings to discover the most appropriate words to be used in the Bible. They wanted to convey the biblical message in the right language and in the context of the people concerned. The translation was conducted in an ecumenical spirit. Roman Catholics and Anglicans also took part in the process of translation (Ngodji 2004:66-67). Although ELCIN took the lead, the translated Oshikwanyama Bible was meant for all Oshikwanyama speakers.

The translation work began in 1958 and was completed in 1974. The official handing over of Oshikwanyama Bible took place at Engela on June 23, 1974. People appreciated the job well done. Oshikwanyama Bible was well accepted for the following reasons: it preserves the Oshikwanyama language; it shows that God hears and speaks Oshikwanyama as well, and it values Oshikwanyama language and culture. The speaker of the day, Rev Vilho Kaulinge, noted: "If God is now speaking in Oshikwanyama who will be against it?" (Ngodji 2004:135). In the Oukwanyama community, as in other communities, the "Bible becomes a reference book for many. In sorrow, it is the source of comfort. In happiness, it is the source of gratitude. In

distress, it is the source of courage and strength. In conflicts, it is the source of problem solving” (Ngodji 2004:136).

Besides the 1927 version of the New Testament translated by German missionaries, to date there is only one Bible version in Oshikwanyama, that of 1974. According to the researcher there is a need for another revision. Some people feel that the Oshikwanyama Bible has become outdated and that certain words need to be reviewed, because the language is also growing. In general, however, the Ovakwanyama have accepted the Bible as their own book, the Word of God.

4. 7. Translation work in Okavango

4. 7. 1 The pioneers of translation in Okavango

The pioneers of the translation work in Okavango were women missionaries from the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), assisted by Ovawambo speaking people and native people of Okavango who studied in Ovamboland, because there were no secondary schools in Okavango that time. The first missionaries to arrive in Okavango were Catholics, but they were not interested in translation. The Bible was not the first piece of writing to be translated into the language of Okavango. The earliest translations were of literature and a grammar book in the early 1920's. According to Laukkanen the first piece of Christian literature printed in the Kwangali language was a Catholic catechism, published in 1932, followed by booklets of stories from the Old and New Testaments (Laukkanen 2002: 115). In the late 1920's the Lutheran missionary activities began translation work in Okavango. They had learnt Oshindonga and when learning Kwangali they mixed it up with Oshindonga forming a mixed language. Otjiherero was also combined with Kwangali because Okavango men were working in central Namibia and picked up Otjiherero words, which they injected into Kwangali. A mixed “Neo-Kwangali” language developed and became prevalent in all of the locations where the FMS had established itself in Kavango” (Laukkanen 2002: 116). Some missionaries assumed that Kwangali was a dialect of Oshiwambo, which is not the case. Some argued that it is only prefixes that are missing from Kwangali but otherwise it is the same as Oshiwambo languages, for example the words for person: *omunhu* in Oshikwanyama, *omuntu* in Oshindonga and *muntu* in Kwangali (Amadhila 2006). However, the researcher argues that Kwangali is a language on its own right because it has many features that are not found in Oshiwambo languages. The mixed language or Neo-Kwangali, which was preferred by

missionaries, is not an authentic language (Laukkanen 2002:116). If there was no Bible version in Kwangali, Christianity would not have taken root among the Okavango people, and the Okavango language and culture would never have accommodated the Christian religion. Mixed languages in translations are not permissible because they will spoil languages. Any attempt to do so must be prevented totally. Translatability does not mean mixing languages; instead one must value the language concerned to make it authentic.

The first Finnish missionary who attempted to produce literature in the Kwangali language was the teacher Maria (Maija) Länsiö. In the 1930's she compiled a Kwangali primer, a catechism and a selection of Old and New Testament stories for baptismal classes. Because her language skills were too shaky, the teachers Tuulikki Jantunen and Martha von Schantz, with the help of indigenous teachers, revised her booklets. The improvement in language was marked (Laukkanen 2002:117). Lahja Väänänen produced a new Kwangali primer after Länsiö. It was Väänänen who changed the use of the letter 'l' into 'r' in Kwangali. Although there were some disagreements on the usage it was later accepted. The indigenous teachers who helped in the development of Okavango literature were Immanuel Shikukumwa and Eino Kudumo (Laukkanen 2002: 117,118,123). Bishop Simojoki encouraged the development of the Okavango language, as he felt that this would benefit Finnish missionaries in future (Laukkanen 2002:121). It is right to note that women were pioneers of translation in Okavango.

4. 7. 2 The translation of the Bible into Kwangali

In 1949 the FMS director, Tuure Vapaavuori, visited Namibia and the Okavango area. He made the following statement against the translation of the Bible into Rukwangali, as quoted by Laukkanen:

... the Kwangali-speaking population was so small it was not worth creating literature just for it. This means that the Lutheran Christians in Kavango, who only had the 1903 Ndonga New Testament and the 1927 Kwanyama New Testament, and from 1954 onward the whole Bible in Ndonga, would have to keep on relying to these Scriptures written in languages that were strange to them (2002:118).

Vapaavuori and Bishop Martti Simojoki, of the Mikkeli Diocese in Finland, repeated the same sentiment in 1954, when they visited Okavango (Laukkanen 2002:120). This statement was questionable. It looked down upon the people of Kavango, their language and their culture. There is no inferior language, and Oshiwambo is not superior to Kwangali. Okavango speaking

people needed to have the Bible in their language as any other people do. They wanted to feel the presence of God among them, because the Bible is the Word of God. Lihongo points out that the translation of the Bible into Kwangali was essential, because Okavango people could not understand Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama. Therefore, in order to grasp the Word of God on their own, they needed to be able to read the Bible in their own language (Lihongo 2006).

Bishop Simojoki favoured the development of Kwangali as a written language. During his and Vapaavuori's visit it was decided that the Gospel of Luke would be translated into Kwangali (Laukkanen 2002:121). The earlier statement was thus revised. They now realized the need for the translation of the Bible into Kwangali. "Three indigenous pastors, Matias Sikondomboro, Gideon Muremi and Elia Neromba, were called to the task" (Laukkanen 2002:121). The translating session conducted by Elias Pentti in Rupara in 1957, became a real starting point for the translating of the Scripture into Kwangali. Another factor contributing to the development of the Okavango languages was the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC), now ELCIN in 1954, under African leadership. The synod of 1958 approved Kwangali as one of the official languages of the Church and authorized the Okavango Deanery to have the New Testament translated into Kwangali (Laukkanen 2002:121-122). In 1964 the BSSA received the news that the Bible was being translated into Kwangali and they therefore encouraged the FMS to continue with the translation. The BSSA promised to support the process financially (Laukkanen 2002:130).

Procedurally the translation process had committees to ensure the smooth running of the work. In 1969 BSSA General Secretary, J. C. Paw, visited Okavango and called a meeting in Mupini to make arrangements for the translation of the Bible into Kwangali. The aim of the meeting was to establish an ecumenical Review Committee for the translation, which included all the churches operating in the area (Laukkanen 2002:133). Pentti Toivanen, Tuulikki Jantunen, Naftali Kangai, Eino Kundumo, Elia Neromba and Natanael Sironko represented the Lutherans. Manfred Förg, Bartolomeus Hauxiku, Romanus Kampungu, Jim Michels, Jakob Noll, Rabanus Muronga, Kallistus Sivambo and Gabriel Mudiui represented the Catholics. Father Alex Dan Scholten, a Catholic priest from Pretoria was also present (Laukkanen 2002:132). Later the twelve members of the committee formed the Consultative Group. The Review Committee, which included Toivanen, Jantunen and Father Förg was also established. It was unfortunate that there was no indigenous person in the Review Committee.

With regard to the composition of the Consultative Group, it is clear that the majority were Africans, therefore it is probable that a dialogue between language and culture took place, and that the final translation would be relevant to the Okavango people. The concern in the Okavango case, as in any other translation, was to give the present readers a message equivalent to that of those who first received it (Laukkanen 2002:134), and this was the aim of the formation of the Consultative Group. The dynamic-equivalent translation approach was deemed best to make the Bible in the vernacular relevant and to ensure translatability. According to Nida the use of a committee in translation is very important in gaining wider acceptance for the translation and eliminating of errors (1961:97).

It was suggested at the Turfloop consultation (1967) that in translating the Bible into Kwangali the TEV be used as a basis alongside the original languages. Later, Jill Smith provided the RSV as a basis, from the Bible Society, who inspected the translation. The translators of the New Testament into Kwangali were unable to use Greek. This is “through the window translation” or “translation of translations”. It appears that there was some confusion, over which version was to be followed as a basis. “The Consultative Group seems to have understood quite clearly that no particular English text should be translated into Kwangali, but the TEV could be used as a tool, and its simple language as a model for translating; the TEV was to be an “organ” in the work” (Laukkanen 2002: 136). Other Bible versions used for comparison were: Afrikaans, German, Swedish, Finnish, and Oshindonga (1954). The texts of the original biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, were not mentioned. (Laukkanen 2002:136). Although many pastors and missionaries in Okavango were involved in the translation of the New Testament, Eino Kundumo²⁴ and Tuulikki Jantunen²⁵ were responsible for most of the work and then sent the draft manuscripts to the Review Committee for checking (Laukkanen 2002:136).

²⁴ Eino Kudumo was born in 1932 in Nkurenkuru, Kavango. After he completed primary education Kudumo went to the Teachers Training Seminary in Ongwediva, Ovamboland and graduated as a teacher in 1954. Kudumo worked as a teacher in Okavango from 1955 to 1957. He worked as a translator from 1959 to 1967. He was involved in the translation of the Bible into the Kwangali language between 1968 and 1987. Kudumo died in 1989 (Laukkanen 2002: 123; Lihongo 2006).

²⁵ Laina Tuulikki Jantunen was born in 1922, in Viipuri, Finland. She graduated from high school in 1942 and became a teacher in 1944. She worked as a school teacher in Finland from 1945 to 1947. Tuulikki attended FMS missionary training in 1947-1948. After finishing her training she was sent to Namibia in 1949 as a missionary. In Namibia she taught at Okahao Teachers' Seminary in Ovamboland and moved to Boy's School at Rupara, Kavango. Jantunen studied Kwangali in Okavango and Bantu languages at Humboldt University, East Germany. She served the FMS in literature work in Kavango. Jantunen participated in the Turfloop seminar for Bible translations in South Africa in 1967 (Laukkanen 2002:119).

4. 7. 3 Asser Kazumbwa Lihongo

The person responsible for translating the Bible into Kwangali was Asser Lihongo (appendix X). Lihongo was born on April 14th, 1932, in Mupini, Okavango. He attended primary school in Mupini, the Senior Boy's School in Rupara, and the teacher's seminary at Oniipa (1952-1954). Lihongo studied theology at several Lutheran theological institutes: Engela (1962), Elim (1963), and Paulinum Theological Seminary at Otjimbingwe (1963-1965). He was ordained as an ELCIN pastor in 1965. He furthered his studies in Bible translating in Selly Oak Birmingham, England (1967-1969), and at the All Africa Theological College in South Africa. Lihongo worked in different services in ELCIN and in the community. He was a teacher in Mupini (1955-1961), and a parish pastor in Mupini (1966). Lihongo's most important work was the translation of the Bible into Kwangali (between 1970 and 1986). Lihongo also served as Dean of the Eastern Deanery (1970-1978 and 1984-1997) (Nambala 1995:118; Lihongo 2006). He is now retired and lives in Mupini, Okavango.

In 1964, the Finnish delegates to Cape Town agreed with the BSSA General Secretary, van Arkel that Rev Asser Lihongo should be sent to Finland for three years, to study Bible translating. Van Arkel promised that the BSSA would finance Lihongo's studies for one year. The idea of sending Lihongo to study in Finland was, however, dropped and he was later sent to Selly Oak College in England. His studies in England "gave Lihongo an opportunity to practice his English, which was useful for the work of translating as well" (Laukkanen 2002:137). The Finnish Bible Society took up the matter of the studies of Lihongo and decided to award him a scholarship (Laukkanen 2002:137). Lihongo was to concentrate first on studying the New Testament, Greek and English at Oak College in England (Laukkanen 2002: 130).

4.7. 4 The Completion of the Translation of the New Testament into Kwangali

In 1971 the ELCIN leadership transferred Toivanen from Okavango to work among migrant workers in central and southern Namibia. Jantunen was appointed to replace him as the new chairperson and co-ordinator of the translation project in Okavango. The translation work was left to Kudumo and Lihongo. Kudumo translated while Lihongo, who was secretary of the Review Committee, reviewed the draft (Laukkanen 2002:144). Apart from certain weaknesses, Laukkanen (2002:145) describes Kudumo as a linguistically gifted person. His work, as far as

the translation went, was considered to be perfect and Heber Peacock of the USB described the Kwangali translation as “one of the best in southern Africa” (Laukkanen 2002:145).

The workload of Lihongo, who was a dean and at the same time a translator, was eased when Rhode Veijo, who received training in typing from the Engela Parish Institute, took over most of the typing and duplicating. Veijo was a Kwangali speaking person, who was able to check that the words and terms were appropriate while typing (Laukkanen 2002:145). Once the translating and checking of the New Testament was finished the manuscript was sent for proofreading.

Jantunen did proofreading of the New Testament manuscripts in Cape Town from the beginning of 1974. Laukkanen (2002:145) noted that the first celebration to mark the publication of the New Testament in the Kwangali language was held on June 13th, 1974, in the German Lutheran church in Windhoek. In Okavango, an ecumenical celebration was arranged on June 30th, 1974 in the Lutheran church in Rundu. Those who attended the celebration, especially the Kavango speaking people, purchased for the first time the New Testaments never before available in a local language. The translation experts of Bible Societies viewed the New Testament in Kwangali as a success, because it was conducted according to the experts’ help and guidance. Laukkanen writes: “According to the Bible translation experts, the New Testament in Kwangali became one of the best translations in the subcontinent” (2002:146). It was titled: *Mbudi Zongwa, Etestamende lyEpe moRukwangali* (Good News, New Testament in Rukwangali) (Laukkanen 2002:146). The researcher believes that what makes the New Testament in Rukwangali the best on the African subcontinent is the involvement of indigenous translators, the Review Committee, other stakeholders from within the area and speakers of the language.

In 1975 Jantunen’s term of work under the FELM ended, and she returned to Finland (Laukkanen 2002:146). Her brave work in Okavango will not be forgotten. Laukkanen writes of the whole process:

Looking back at the translating of the Kwangali New Testament, we see that a foundation was laid by Lutheran and Catholic teachers and ministers who began by translating readings for worship and then entire gospels. The teachers Tuulikki Jantunen and Eino Kudumo remarkably influenced the development of Kwangali as a literary, written language. Their *Bibeligona* textbook series, containing

narratives from both Old and New Testaments, serves as a model for writing authentic Kwangali (2002:146).

The translation of the New testament into Kwangali not only gave Okavango people the chance to read the Bible in their language, but it also contributed to the development of Rukwangali as a written language in the region. After completion of the translation of the New Testament, the Old Testament translation followed suit.

4. 7. 5 The Translation of the Old Testament into Kwangali (1975-1986)

Translating the New Testament was not the end of translation work in Okavango. The Old Testament still needed to be translated into Kwangali. This task fell on the shoulders of Asser Lihongo, Eino Kudumo and others. The work started during the changing of the political situation in Angola with independence in 1975, and the intensification of the armed liberation struggle in Namibia waged by the Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the military wing of SWAPO, against the South African occupation army. The war did not halt the translation work, but it slowed down the whole process (Laukkanen 2002: 148). Kudumo, Lihongo and Forg (a Catholic) were however determined to complete the translation. Bishop Erkki Kansanaho from Finland visited Namibia and the Okavango area, to acquaint himself with the translation project. He asked the translators how they would deal with the war situation. The translators replied: “Let the people over there fight. We translate the Bible” (Laukkanen 2002:149). J. L. Reyneke, the secretary of translation projects in the BSSA also visited Okavango, held a meeting with the Review Committee and took its manuscripts to Cape Town. Because of the situation, the translators and the Review Committee were given a mandate by the BSSA to check everything, make the necessary corrections and send the manuscripts to the BSSA in Cape Town from time to time.

Lihongo was working on the translation part-time. He was at the same time a dean of the Okavango deanery. He could not perform well due to this heavy workload. Because of the agency and seriousness of the work of translation, the ELOC Council released Lihongo from his position as dean in 1979 and allowed him to work full-time as a Bible translator. “Setting Lihongo in full-time translation work was indeed an improvement, and it also demonstrated the value that ELOC gave to Bible translating” (Laukkanen 2002:151).

In 1980 Lihongo expressed his joy to Reyneke at having finished translating the Old Testament, and that corrections could now be made. This was good news to both the BSSA and ELOC (Laukkanen 2002:151,152). Lihongo was asked to check the text and the appropriate usage of the words and phrases in Kwangali. His pastoral work in parishes and congregations in the area helped him to find the right wordings. “In traveling around, he could also ask people for opinions on the choice of words in translation” (Laukkanen 2002:156). This highlights the fact that interacting with people who know the language and culture is the best way to produce a relevant and acceptable translation. This is also why the Kwangali translation has been described as the best in the subcontinent. After checking the whole Old Testament and New Testament, Lihongo tested the proofs by having local Kwangali-speakers read them. He was informed that the font of the Bible was too small, so he requested a bigger font. Lihongo wrote to Reyneke: “People were well satisfied with the language, they could understand the message, but reading the small print was difficult especially for those over fifty years of age” (Laukkanen 2002:157).

To finalize the proofreading work, the BSSA called on Laina Kivelä to assist in checking the Kwangali manuscript. Kivelä was an expert in proofreading of the Bible in other languages (Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama), so the BSSA felt that she could be helpful although she did not know Kwangali very well (Laukkanen 2002:159-160). Tuulikki Jantunen who was in retirement, but knew Kwangali very well, was also requested to help to complete the proofreading. She was invited by BSSA to Namibia in May 1986. She worked on the Old Testament from May to December 1986 in Cape Town (Laukkanen: 2002: 161-164).

Finally, in 1987 the Bible Society of South Africa published the Bible in Kwangali entitled: *Bibeli*. It took ten years (1975-1987) to be completed. The celebration of the publication of the Bible in Kwangali was held on May 21, 1988 in Rupara, Okavango (Laukkanen 2002:165). According to Lihongo people were happy that day. They celebrated the wonderful work of God who made it possible for them to receive the Bible in their own language. The Bible in Kwangali was accepted in the whole Okavango area (Lihongo 2006).

As was mentioned earlier, the translation of the Bible in Okavango, as well as in other parts of Namibia and elsewhere in Africa, went hand in hand with the reduction of the languages into written form and with the development of the language. Laukkanen remarks:

Work to develop the written language in Kavango had not been in vain; it had made Bible translating possible. Although resources for Bible translating in Kavango were limited in comparison to similar projects in Europe, good tools and texts and up-to-date translation methods had further enabled Kwangali translators to produce a Bible version which suited its purpose and was unanimously accepted into use by all churches in the area (2002:166).

There are few things noted if comparing the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in ELCIN. The Bible in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama use the names in the Bible as Europeans whereas in Rukwangali they use the name in the Bible as they speak. For example the name Peter, in Oshiwambo Bible is written Petrus, but when they speak, they say Petulusa, whereas in Kwangali they write Peturusa the way they speak. This is just an example of many. Another different noted in these three versions is that the *Nakambale* Bible 1954 and Oshikwanyama Bible 1974 are the same in language and sentence construction. Oshindonga 1986 and Rukwangali 1987 are more dynamic equivalence translation, however they have the same message. Perhaps this is due to the basis Bible version the translators have used.

Translation is not an easy task at all. Translators have to face challenges in the process of their work. Therefore there were implications around the translations of the Bible in the northern belt of Namibia, which translators tried to overcome.

4. 8. The implications in translation

ELCIN translators in the vernacular languages, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali experienced implications in rendering some texts and books of the Bible in these languages. Sometimes there were no suitable equivalent words in the language and sometimes the context was different, and above all there were cultural differences. Lihongo noted the difficulties he encountered in translating the books of Proverbs and Psalms because the way the Hebrews expressed themselves in idioms and expressions was different from that of Okavango people. The poetic styles are not the same. Therefore it took time for Lihongo to finish translating these books (Lihongo 2006). Laukkanen suggests: "Proverbs, however, require some degree of generalization, conceptualization and indirect expression. In putting proverbs into Kwangali, for instance, translator could have made use of the possibility to derive nouns meaning the one who does something from corresponding verb" (2002:183). According to Jouno Salko, as cited by Laukkanen, Proverbs in the Kwangali Bible is longer, if compared with the original text (2002:163). Amakutuwa also expressed the same sentiments in translating Proverbs and

Psalms in Oshindonga. He also noticed that Jewish poets are like Ovakwanyama in the way they play with words with the same meaning (2006). Therefore it was better to translate Proverbs and Psalms from Hebrew to Oshikwanyama.

Another problem Lihongo came across concerns references made by Jesus, mostly found in the Gospels. An example is the “good shepherd or sheep” (John 10). The sheep were not known or valued in Okavango or in Ovawambo communities. To talk about Jesus as a shepherd of the sheep, is inconceivable among these communities. It is better talk about goats or cattle because these communities depend economically on these animals. In Oshikwanyama the problem is even more complicated, because *odi* (sing) or *eedi* (pl), may mean flies (insects) or sheep (animals). It was disturbing to hear that Jesus is herding *eedi* (flies). How difficult is it to herd *eedi* (flies)? That was also the researcher’s personal problem, probably for others as well who had grown up the same area as the researcher, until he realized that sheep are similar to goats. Another problem concerned was the mountain. Ovamboland and Okavango areas are flat, with no mountains. There are high lands, especially in Okavango, but they cannot be compared with mountains. Those who visited the central and southern part of Namibia saw mountains and they were able to understand this term.

In Oshikwanyama there is a saying that: ‘*ongobe ohai tauluka mwene*’, which literally translates as ‘the cattle overstep the owner or herder’. The meaning is that no one may take away cattle from their owner unless he kills the owner first. The owner of the cattle is ready to die for them. One can compare this assertion with Jesus being ready to die for the sins of the world (John 10:11). This comparison would make sense to Ovawambo as cattle are very important to them, and the number of cattle a person owns measures a person’s wealth.

The problem of inheritance or heirs is another issue to be dealt with by Bible translators. The Hebrew and many western cultures into which the Bible has evolved are patrilineal. The children have the right to inherit from their fathers (Lk 15). In Oshiwambo and Okavango culture it is the opposite, they are matrilineal. Children have no right to inherit from their fathers. In matrilineal societies like these, children have the right to inherit from their uncle, the brother of their mother. The reference in the Bible that believers become children of God and will inherit the Kingdom of God is culturally misleading. It is clear now through culturally sensitive interpretation. These communities have now adopted a patrilineal system of inheritance. The following quotation confirms this: “Traditionally the Owambo has practiced a

matrilineal system especially in matters of inheritance and succession, however in recent years the system has shifted toward a patrilineal society²⁶.

One point noted by the researcher is the translation of John 3:16 in Oshiwambo in comparison with the Greek and English texts.

Oshikwanyama (1974):

*Osheshi osho Kalunga a kala e hole ounyuni, Oye a yandja omona waye **Ewifa**, opo keshe ou te mu itavele a ha kane, ndelenee a kale nomwenyo waalushe.*

English (RSV):

For God so loved the world that he gave his **only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Greek:

*ουτως γαρ ηγαπησεν ο θεος τον κοσμον, ωστε **τον υιον** τον μονογενη εδωκεν, ινα πας ο πιστευων εις αυτον μη αποληται αλλ εχη ζωην αιωνιον (θoην 3:16).*

In Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga and Kwangali, there is no gender as far as the child of God is concerned. Their emphasis is on the **ONLY** begotten child, whereas in English and Greek, the gender of the child of God, the **only SON**, is highlighted. When the researcher asked Amadhila, the co-translator of the Oshindonga Bible, how this verse was translated, he did not elaborate, but simply stated that Oshindonga does not reflect gender (2006). According to Miss Amaambo, the member of the Translation Committee, she said that those who emphasized the Son of God did so because it was believed that a male person was very powerful and important in the patriarchal society (2007). This means that, in many instances, the gender found in Oshiwambo and Kwangali Bible has come from the source language and not from within the vernaculars themselves. These are some of many implications and problems encountered in translation, which is affected by language and cultural differences.

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) in its mission work among Ovawambo and Okavango people realized the importance of culture and language. The researcher argues that the missionaries later considered what they called the ‘interaction between faith and culture’, to be part of missionary work. They recognized the importance of culture in planting faith. In their mission statement they stressed:

²⁶ <http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/population/owambo.htm>

Culture is needed not only in the reception of faith but also in its interpretation. Each culture can enrich the interpretation of faith and makes its own contribution to the world-wide church of Christ. It is thus necessary in mission to search for the most natural means and ways of expressing faith in each culture (FELM 2001:10).

This is what the translatability of Christianity is all about. This is what makes Christianity and its Scripture accepted in ELCIN and elsewhere. Implications in translations show that translators fail to apply the translatability principles in the process of translation and it also shows that the biblical message is ambiguous.

One of the Ondonga kings observed the way the European colonizers were behaving towards his commoners: they took their cattle and land away by force, and treated the people badly. He assumed that all whites were Christians, referring to the white missionaries in Ondonga. He questioned them about their Christianity (Peltola 2002:70). The king criticized the behavior of the Europeans as being inhuman. Although these two forces (missionaries and colonizers) did not completely destroy the culture of Africans, they looked down upon them and regarded them as pagans or heathens. According to the missionaries the concept 'pagan' was the best word to describe unbaptised Owambo. The word 'pagan' is derived from the Latin word '*paganus*', which describes a person who lives away from civilization, from enlightenment, and is therefore rustic, unpolished and unsophisticated (Munyika 2004:293). This term is generally understood among ELCIN Christians to mean an unbaptised person.

There is a story that circulated among Ovawambo during the early years of missionary work in northern Namibia. The story goes that certain people took a journey somewhere. As cars were scarce in those days, they were walking. Apparently they heard the sound of a car coming. They decided to stop the car and to ask for a lift. The car belonged to a missionary. When a missionary emerged he asked them their names. One was Paulus, while the other one was *Hangula*²⁷. It was not clear whether Hangula was baptized or not. The missionary allowed Paulus to get into the car and left Hangula behind. The reason is that Hangula was regarded as an unbaptised heathen. This attitude of rejecting African names has changed, and good Oshiwambo names like Hangula are now allowed to be a Christian name. Nevertheless, the story illustrates the negative attitude of many Europeans toward African culture.

²⁷ Hangula an Oshiwambo name, meaning 'morning'. This means that he was born during the morning time. Ovawambo name their children referring to the event or the time of birth. There are also names with bad connotations in Oshiwambo.

Munyika contributed to the translation and interpretation of Christianity and its Scriptures in ELCIN. He is an ELCIN theologian who attempted to interpret the concept of salvation contextually, as mentioned in chapter one. Munyika contributes significantly to an understanding of the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture with regard to the issue of soteriology. There were many ELCIN members who believed that salvation is a matter for the future. They believed in futuristic and heavenly salvation. Salvation will be achieved in heaven, after this life is over, but never in this life on earth. This is a soteriology brought by the missionaries (Munyika 2004:384). Munyika declares that salvation, which is compatible with the Ovawambo concept, is one that is now and not yet. "Salvation is as a progress experience of relief being accomplished in the present as a pledge for eschatological fulfillment" (Munyika 2004: 384-85). Accordingly salvation is a right relationship between man and God and a right relationship between person and person here, now and in the future. This is what the Ovawambo concept of salvation is all about, and in fact it is a biblical concept too. It involves a comprehensive well-being for all human beings in all spheres of life. The central message of the Bible is God's dealing with human beings in the past, present, and in the future. Nürnberger confirms this idea when he states that:

The Word of God is God's response to all human needs in all dimensions of life. God has a vision for his creation, namely the well-beings of the whole human being, and of all human being, in the context of the well being of their entire social and natural environments (2004:6).

Munyika urges preachers in ELCIN to do away with the concept of the spiritualization of salvation and at the same time not to limit their proclamation to the law, but rather to preach and teach the Christ-event and its implications for the believer here and now and in eternity. The missionaries did their part. They brought a liberated and translatable Gospel of Christ to Africans. They are to be blamed for the current understanding of salvation, but more so the passivity of ELCIN theologians (2004:385). Munyika calls for paradigm shifts from among ELCIN theologians to review their interpretation of Christianity and its Scripture in order to develop an African theology, which will be relevant and effective in the Namibian milieu (2004:385-86).

4. 9 Conclusion

Bible translation by ELCIN has to be understood in two ways. On the one hand missionaries needed to know the language and the culture of the people among whom the interaction took place. It was initially difficult for them to communicate with the people in their own language and to properly understand their culture and traditions. The case of the king of Ondonga who felt insulted by missionaries is one of the examples. Therefore the translation of the Bible was essential. On the other hand Ovandonga, Ovakwanyama and Kwangali wanted to have the Word of God in their own tongue. They demanded the Bible in their own tongues. They were eager to feel the presence of God in their daily life, in a manner relevant and meaningful to them. Having the Bible available in their local language made them feel that God is not disdainful of their language (Bediako 1997:120). In addition their language was imbued with holiness.

It was just the will and not the skills that made translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages in ELCIN possible. Those who conducted the translations were not all academics, but their will and commitment drove the process forward. One cannot underestimate the strength of religion of African communities before the missionaries came, because African religion was the fertile soil in which to plant Christianity in the region.

The translation of the Bible into Oshindonga (1954) motivated other language groups in the northern belt of Namibia (Ovamboland and Okavango) to request to have the Bible translated into their own languages too. The Bible was used as a tool to develop the local languages in writing. As many people in the region had converted to Christianity, they understood the right of everyone to study the Bible on their own, which was what Martin Luther, fought for (Laukkanen 2002: 240-241). ELCIN valued the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages. Apart from German and Finnish expatriates, ELCIN trained translators like Eino Amaambo and Jason Amakutuwa, who translated the Bible into Oshindonga, and Asser Lihongo who translated the Bible into Kwangali and released them to do the work full-time. ELCIN provided people gifted in linguistic and cultural knowledge to assist translators and to be co-translators to make the translation relevant and accepted.

This chapter dealt with the missionary work done in the northern belt of Namibia by missionaries from Finland and Germany. The bulk of the chapter focused on the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga (1954), Oshikwanyama (1974) and Kwangali (1987) respectively,

and how it became relevant and acceptable to the people. For these communities the Bible is the Word of God. The next chapter will deal with the challenges to the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God from Martin Luther the reformer, Lutheran theologians, within ELCIN and by contemporary theologians.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRANSLATABILITY CHALLENGES THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE AS THE WORD OF GOD

5. 1. Introduction

The previous chapter showed how the missionaries and indigenous people invested a lot of time and resources to translate the Bible into the local languages of the northern belt of Namibia. The question this chapter raises is what is the nature and status of the Bible in the Lutheran tradition that would make its translation into local languages in ELCIN, a worthwhile project? This is the central question this chapter will grapple with. In order to address this question, this chapter will firstly analyze the Lutheran understanding of the Bible starting with Luther himself; secondly it will discuss the understanding of the Bible in ELCIN; and lastly it will examine the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God among some African theologians. Particular interest will be paid to the views of the following African theologians: Klaus Nürnberger, Absalom Hasheela, Tinyiko Maluleke, John S. Mbiti, Itumeleng Mosala, Musa W Dube, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro.

The aim of this chapter is to show how the translatability theory challenges the Bible and its influence in the African context. The understanding of the Bible from the theological perspective will also be dealt with, including the views of certain African Christian theologians. All major attributions of the Bible will be considered with the aim of establishing a better understanding of the Bible in ELCIN. One cannot speak about the translatability of Christianity and its Scripture without a proper understanding of the Bible itself. The Lutheran understanding of the Bible will provide the driving force behind the research.

This chapter will also deal with the question of how the Bible is seen from different perspectives. The main objective is to examine the understanding of the Bible in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). The task of the mission work of the church was and is to spread the message of the Bible (Bring 1962:20). Missionaries carry the Bible wherever they go, as it is the book of the Word of God. Bringing the Bible to the people of the world involved both its interpretation and application (Bring 1962:20). The researcher agrees with Obeng who writes:

In view of the relevance of the Bible to Christianity then, a sound grasp of the Bible and its contents by African Christians [Ovawambo and Okavango in particular in this context] is essential (1997:8).

5.2 The Bible as the Word of God

ELCIN, as a Lutheran church, confesses that the Bible is the Word of God, which never errs. The Lutheran church is the church of the Word. This cannot be taken for granted and it needs careful consideration and explanation. This assertion creates problems for Christians nowadays, but it carries truth. Christians speak of the Bible as the Word of God, but they cannot say that the Word of God is the Bible. The Word of God came to human beings in three forms: it came to human beings in written form, in verbal form, that is, in preaching and in Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of God. The Translatability and interpretation theory challenges this assertion. This chapter will focus on the written Word of God, the Holy Scripture, but will not neglect the others forms of the Word of God.

The phrase “the Word of God” declares the divine origin of the Word. It implies that whatever is denominated ‘the Word of God’ is thereby affirmed to be a divine utterance. Therefore the term is applied to the Bible (Packer 1977:85). When ELCIN use the phrase “Word of God”, it is “to make explicit the biblical conception of the Scripture, which is that Scripture is the sum total of divine revelation recorded in a God-breathed written form, and that every scriptural statement is therefore to be received as a divine utterance” (Packer 1977:85-86). To say the Bible is the Word of God is to confess faith in God. It is a statement of faith.

The Scripture is what God has said, what God is saying and what God will say. So the Bible as the Word of God carries the message of what God has said, what God is saying and what God will say, through generations. Lochhead contributes to this argument when he writes: “By calling Scripture “the Word of God,” the church has expressed the confidence that in faithful hearing of Scripture the will of God can, in fact, be encountered by human beings. The qualification “faithful” is important” (Lochhead 1993:138). According to Lochhead, our faithfulness to the Bible is what makes it the Word of God. It seems that believers are the ones who constitute the Word of God. To avoid confusion in this statement Lochhead argues further that “... not every hearing of the word of Scripture is a hearing of the word of God” (1993:138), the fact is that there are human words in the Scripture as well.

Parker asserts that: “the scriptural approach to Scripture is thus to regard it as God’s written testimony to Himself”. He further argues, “when we call the Bible the Word of God, we mean, or should mean, that its message constitutes a single utterance of which God is the author” (Parker 1977:89). One cannot separate God from God’s Word. The Christian doctrine of Scripture as the Word of God depends on our view of who God is and what God does. What God is and what God does can be found only in the Scripture itself and nowhere else. The Scripture tells us that God is the Creator, who created the whole universe and God is present in God’s creation.

The statement that the Bible is the Word of God cannot be taken for granted because the Bible contains human words. Humans are corrupted and therefore they might corrupt the Bible as well. But God used human beings to convey God’s message to human beings. In the Bible there are some elements, which are contrary to the will of God. Sometimes the Bible carries an oppressive message. Sometimes it excludes part of humanity, particularly women. Sometimes it excludes the voices of marginalized and exploited masses. Sometimes the Bible has been used to shape imperialist ideology. It is thus difficult to defend the understanding that the Bible is the Word of God all the time. The Bible is the Word of God when it addresses the situation and the cry of the poor and marginalized in the community. The Bible needs to be approached and read from different perspectives, as mentioned in chapter two, in order to carry the message for all humanity in their context, their cultures and their languages.

Obeng points out the criticisms about the phrase describing the Bible as “the Word of God”. The historical method of criticism led to the conclusion that certain events described in the Bible did not take place as recorded. Textual criticism also led to the discovery of errors and variance in the texts of the Bible. There are also disagreements over the authorship of some biblical books (1997:14). However, biblical criticism in itself is not bad, because it can lead to a clearer understanding of the text concerned. Abogunrin argues: “Biblical criticism is not only permissible, but commendable, if pursued in a relevant and scholarly manner” (2001:55). Biblical criticism is not new, and has been around from the time of rabbis before Christ, during the era of the early church fathers, in the period of the reformers, and up to contemporary times. Abogunrin concludes that:

Objective criticism will help us to appreciate better what the biblical writers wrote. It is not intended to be destructive or finding fault with the Bible, but objectively investigating issues in order to discover the truth in all its ramifications. Genuine criticism does not diminish the

uniqueness of the Bible. It is not we who are criticizing the Bible, but it is the Bible criticizing us in our daily lives. The biblical message comes back to us always (2001: 56).

The Bible may have errors, contradictions, human words and many other complicated issues, but this does not prevent it being the Word of God. It carries the message of God. Therefore the researcher agrees with Obeng who writes:

The Bible is God's word in the sense that through it, God's dealing with people and the world, and his continual saving and judging interventions in the world's affairs comes out clearly. Its theme is God's self-revelation. (1997:15).

The Lutheran understanding of the Bible will throw more light on how people understand the Bible and the Word of God from the reformers perspective.

5. 3. The Lutheran understanding of the Bible

This section will deal with Martin Luther and the Bible, the Lutheran understanding of the Bible and the view of other theologians who contributed to the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.

5. 3. 1 Luther and the Bible

Before engaging with Martin Luther's work with regard to the Bible, a short biography is presented. Martin Luther was a great reformer and an educator of his time. Luther was born at Eisleben in Thuringia, Germany on November 10th, 1483. His parents were Hans and Margarether Luther. He was baptized on St Martin's Day and given the name Martin in honour of Saint Martin of Tours (Bruce 1928:56; Luther 2004: xiv). Luther's parents were of the peasant class. After his birth his parents moved from Eisleben to Mansfeld, a nearby town. Hans Luther was a deeply religious person, a devoted Catholic and showed considerable independence in his religious thinking. He influenced his son, Martin. Luther's mother was a quiet, pious, somewhat superstitious, and hardworking woman. Luther describes his lineage thus:

I am the son of a peasant; my father, my grandfather; my great-grandfather were all thorough peasants (Bruce 1928:56). My father was a poor miner and my mother carried wood from the forest on her back, they both worked their flesh off their bones in order to bring up their children (2004: xiv).

Luther also referred to himself as someone from poor a family that worked hard for a better life. Luther once said:

The sons [and daughters] of poor people must work themselves out of the dust; they must suffer much. And because they have nothing to boast and brag of, they learn to trust God. ...The poor fear God; therefore God gives them good heads, that they may study and learn well and become learned and intelligent, so that they may teach their wisdom to princes, kings, and emperors (Bruce 1928:57).

According to Bruce, Luther's parents were devoted Christians. So he grew up in a strictly religious way of praying, singing and honouring God (Bruce 1928: 59).

Luther's education. Luther's father wanted his children to get the best education. Luther started his schooling at Mansfeld where he, among many things, learnt Latin grammar. At Mansfeld school Luther learned the fundamental truths of the Christian religion, and the use of native language (Bruce 1928:60-61). From Mansfeld in 1497, Luther was sent to a better school in Magderburg. Luther met many challenges at Magderburg, such as supporting himself by singing and begging for his food, and becoming seriously ill (Bruce 1928:62). From Magderburg Luther went to Eisenach to the School of St George for four years. The years he spent at Eisenach were undoubtedly the happiest and most pleasant years of his life (Bruce 1928:63). Thereafter, Luther prepared to enter the university to continue his studies. In 1501 Luther went to the famous university of Erfurt. Erfurt University was a very highly ranked university in Germany at that time. It was directed and supervised by the Archbishop of Mainz and professors were bound by oath to teach nothing contrary to the doctrines of the church. Theology and the canonical or ecclesiastical law were the most prestigious among the studies pursued there. This gave Luther opportunity to study theology deeply. However, the Bible was not read neither was biblical languages learnt, although Latin was studied (Bruce 1928:67). It is at Erfurt University that Luther began to raise questions, saying: "I am so fixed in this opinion that I daily ask Lord, ... that the pure study of the Bible and the Fathers may be restored" (Bruce 1928:68). Luther began to study Hebrew and Greek while at Erfurt.

Luther received his first university degree, a Bachelor of Philosophy, at the University of Erfurt. In 1505 Luther received his second degree, Master of Philosophy. Luther received the degree of Doctorate in Theology in 1512, and then became a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. After completing his doctorate in theology Luther took a traditional vow to faithfully teach and defend the Scriptures. Luther was consecrated as a priest on May

2nd, 1507 (Luther 2004: xvi). He also studied law to please his father who wanted him to do so, but he later dropped it, an action that disappointed his father (Bruce 1928:72, 82).

Luther and the Bible. According to Bruce the greatest discovery Luther made during his four years of study at the University of Erfurt was his accidental finding in the University library of a copy of the Bible, the first complete Bible Luther had ever seen.. He was surprised to learn that the Bible contained so many more texts than the usual Gospel and Epistle texts read and expounded in the churches and found in the postils (Bruce 1928:71).

Luther was for a time a monk at an Augustinian monastery. In the cloister Luther started to study the Bible, the Fathers, and some of the Scholastics. It was here that he was given a complete copy of the Bible, which he used diligently. The Bible was Luther's main textbook, and besides it he studied the Church Fathers (Bruce 1928:74). Luther remarked in 1532: "For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year" (Luther's Work Vol. 54:165). Luther set an example to Christians to read and get to know the Bible.

Luther became a lecturer of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg (Luther 2004: xvi). Luther taught Psalms which attracted many students. Bruce describes the lectures of Luther as follows: "These lectures show very careful preparation, keen insight, and the ability to present truth in a fresh, striking, and interesting manner" (Bruce 1928:83). It was from his lectures on the Bible that Luther began to formulate his peculiar theology (Bruce 1928: 84).

For Luther the Bible was the Word of God and God protected it from perishing. Its story remains the same. Luther insists,

All things that have been, and are, in the world, and the manner of their being, are described in the first book of Moses on the creation; even as God made and shaped the world, so does it stand to this day (2004:3).

According to Luther the Bible survived many centuries and many enemies who wanted to destroy and uproot it. Those who wanted to destroy it have all gone and vanished, nevertheless the Bible remains and will remain forever perfect and entire (Bruce 2004:3). The message of the Bible remains the same, and is fresh and clear even today. Ezeogu employs the word 'Bible' as a dualistic term, claiming that it is both a book and message. As a book it is a collection of the books of the Old Testament and New Testament, which are regarded by

Christians as the inspired Word of God. As a message the Bible is the teaching of the collection of books, which is called the gospel or “Good News” (2000:2).

Luther and Bible translation. Luther was deeply interested in Christian education, and because of this he translated the Bible into German so that every Christian could read and understand the Bible. The translation of the Bible into the German language was Luther’s most valuable contribution to the life of a Christian. Luther’s achievement of translating the Bible into the German language,

gave to his people, and indirectly to other peoples, the Word of God in a popular, readable German language, and laid the foundation for religious, intellectual, social, linguistic, and literary activities, the immediate and remote consequences and significance of which are of such a nature and scope that they defy both attempts at tracing and at limitation (Bruce 1928:132).

Although there were Bible translations before Luther, they were read and distributed only with the sanction and authority of the church in the common language of the people from the seventh to fourteenth century. Therefore Luther was the very first to give his poor, languishing countrymen and countrywomen the Bible in their own tongue (Bruce 1928:134). Bible translation before Luther did not exist without the will and consent of the Church and translations were neither widely distributed nor generally known among the people (Luther 2004:4). Luther’s translation of the Bible into the German language became the most popular and most widely read book of the time and was even used to a considerable extent by his foes (Bruce 1928:138-139). Luther in his translation work of the Bible used Hebrew and Greek versions, as he called them the sacred languages. Scholars commended Luther’s German Bible translation. Bruce describes Luther’s Bible translation as follow:

The excellency of language, faithfulness of rendition, and the tremendous literary and cultural influence of Luther’s translation have been extensively commented upon by scholars of many lands and of all denominations (1928:144).

Bucher (1998) also describes Luther’s Bible version as an idiomatic reproduction of the Bible in the spirit of the Bible. In his Bible translation Luther managed to overcome the then current dialectical confusion in Germany and made the modern High German the common book language. Luther enriched the Bible with the vocabulary of German mystics, chronicles, and poets, and made it intelligible to the common people of all parts of Germany. His knowledge of Hebrew and Greek as well as his own tongue made his translation unique.

Luther published a large number of works between 1516 and 1546, totaling about four hundred titles. These writings concerned reformation and made him a great reformer of his time. Luther's reformation strategies were aimed at the common people in their own language (Luther's Works 1960:281 Vol. 34). In his writings Luther pursued only one goal, that the Holy Scriptures and the divine truth should come to light and that his writings would have only historical value as documents of struggle against the papacy. Luther once expressed: "I wish all my books were extinct, so that only the sacred books in the Bible would be diligently read" (Spitz 1960:282). For Luther, when translating the Bible into German, the intention and hope were that there should be less writing and, instead, more studying and reading of the Scriptures (Luther's Works 1960:281-284 Vol. 34).

Concerning the Holy Scripture Luther insisted that it "constitutes a book, which turns the wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because not one teaches about eternal life except this one alone" (Spitz 1960:285), referring to the Bible. Luther maintained that the Holy Scripture is full of divine gifts and virtues, which are not found in other books and writings. He appreciated the Scriptures as the first and foremost instrument of God for bringing people all the comfort, consolation and power of the Gospel to save all human beings. The Gospel became the center of his preaching the Scripture, and the Scripture became his norm for understanding the Gospel (MacKenzie 2007:1). Other writings do not teach of faith, hope and charity; they present no idea of these things, they contemplate only the present. The teaching of the books of the Bible deal with faith, hope, resignation, and prayer. In other words, Luther continues:

the Holy Scripture is the highest and best of books, abounding in comfort under all afflictions and trials. It teaches us to see, to feel, to grasp and to comprehend faith, hope, and charity, far beyond what mere human reason can ... (Luther 2004:4).

Concerning interpretation Luther warned people to be careful not to blindly follow what the church fathers interpreted. For Luther the true method of interpretation is what puts Scripture alongside of Scripture in a right and proper way. Here Luther means that one cannot put Scripture alongside the teaching of the church fathers, who are human beings and able to mislead people. Therefore the words of the fathers should not be taken for granted, but should be judged by whether they produce clear texts that are faithful to the Scripture (Kerr 1963:18).

Interpretation of the Scripture cannot be done based merely on human reason, but must be conducted diligently and with prayer, meditation and seeking for the meaning (Luther 2004:5).

The Word of God is greater than that of a human being. The Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly. Therefore believers should diligently study God's Word, and know and assuredly believe that God himself speaks unto them (Kerr 1963:10). The Word of God is in the Scripture not in other books. Other books have power to slay, but the Holy Scripture has power to comfort us (Kerr 1963:10). Luther admits that human beings have written the Bible, but emphasizes that it has its origin from God. "The Scriptures, although they also were written by men, are not of men nor from men, but from God (sic)" (Kerr 1963:11).

Luther asserts that those things, which have been delivered to us by God in the Sacred Scriptures, must be sharply distinguished from those that have been invented by men in the church. The writings of the church Fathers must be read to lead people to the Holy Scripture, because they are from God (Kerr 1963:12-13). The Holy Scriptures have preserved the church and maintained its existence and purpose, but not the doctrine and teaching of the Fathers and councils. Luther did not reject the church Fathers and councils; he had great respect for them, but he wanted to uphold the teaching of the Scriptures above all. For Luther the teachings of the Fathers are useful only to lead people to the Scriptures, as they were led, and so then we must hold unto the Scriptures alone (Kerr 1963:14). Luther further held that he accepted the church Fathers only as witnesses to the truth of Scripture and the creeds as statements of what the Bible taught. For Luther, the Scripture alone is the ultimate touchstone of what constituted Christian doctrine, and not the church Fathers (MacKenzie 2007:1). Therefore, Luther urged theologians to have the Bible as the basis of their teaching. He says: "Let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence, in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it" (Luther 2004:6).

Luther in 1519 slammed a Catholic controversialist John Eck who apparently placed church leaders above the Scripture. Luther said: "A simple layman and [laywoman] armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it" (MacKenzie 2007:1; 2004:8). Rosner affirms this statement with his biblical theology, which holds that Scripture was written not for historians and literary critics, but for Christian believers, and for their instruction (2000:4-5). Thus the apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:11: "Now these things happened to

them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (RSV).

Luther maintained that God had given the Bible to people for the sake of their salvation. Therefore, the Bible and the Bible alone must establish the teaching and the preaching of the Church (MacKenzie 2007:2). Obeng argues that the difference between the Bible and other books is that the Bible is the source of truth and revelation of God. The Bible is basically an anthology of writings that bear witness to God’s dealing with his people in the past, now and in the future (Obeng 1997:8). Luther stressed the point that the Scriptures alone are the source and standard for Christian doctrine and practice and that every Christian is responsible for knowing and applying the Scriptures (MacKenzie 2004:9).

Translation of the Bible means putting the Word of God into the language of the people. This was what Luther did when translating the Bible into German the language²⁸. For Luther, the importance of translating the Bible into different languages was for the purpose of communicating the Word of God and that required the clear language which was spoken by the people concerned, natural and plain language for common people, understandable to all (MacKenzie 2004:14). It seems that Luther applied the translatability theory when translating the Bible for common people, because his German Bible translation was for all people.

With regard to the biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, Luther said that God did not despise these languages but chose them above all others for his Word, so we have to honour them above others. He called them sacred languages because they were chosen to be the first languages of the Bible. However, all languages into which the Bible was translated became sacred. That means that Luther placed all languages into which the Bible was translated on an equal level, even Oshiwambo and Kwangali. Luther describes languages as follows:

The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which we carry this jewel; they are the vessel in which we hold this wine; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and as the Gospel itself says, they are the baskets in

²⁸ Luther undertook a great deal of Bible translation into the German language. Prior to his death, 12 more editions of the entire Bible appeared in Wittenberg. Between 1522 and 1546, there were at least 22 official editions of the New Testament; and outside Wittenberg, more than 250 editions of the Bible and portions thereof appeared during the same period. It has been estimated that during Luther’s lifetime a half a million complete Bibles and parts of the Bible were printed in the German language (MacKenzie 2004:13).

which we bear these loaves and fishes and fragments ... (Kerr 1963:17).

According to MacKenzie²⁹, languages are unifying forces that bring together millions of people living in different parts of the globe but using the same vocabulary and syntax to communicate. English is an example in this case. Official languages, although they cannot destroy local languages, cause them to lose prestige as the preferred vehicle for communicating in a public and formal way. Therefore, local languages must be preserved. The contribution Luther made to the German language was the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, which gave it a new prestige (MacKenzie 2004:1-2). MacKenzie points out how the Printing Press played an important role in getting the biblical message across to the whole of Germany and across Europe (2004:3-4). According to Luther vernacular Scriptures proved more worthwhile than what the priests were preaching in the church, because a person can read the Bible on his/her own and understand it in his/her own language. Luther also stressed the point that a good translator has to be an expert in two languages, the original language and his own language (MacKenzie 2004:14; Luther's Work 35:213-214). The knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is what made Luther a good translator.

Luther's love of the Bible was his life-long career. MacKenzie describes his feelings as follows:

Luther taught the Bible, translated the Bible, and preached from the Bible. For him, it was the Christian book par excellence, and he valued it above all others because it brought him the good news of Jesus Christ the Savior (2007:1)³⁰.

Due to his love for the Bible, Luther introduced two steps. First, while in the Augustine monastery, he reinstated Bible study in the monasteries of the reformed Augustinian Hermit, and secondly when the University of Wittenberg was founded in 1502, he established a new professorship in the Bible, which he himself filled until 1512. His aim and achievement was to put the Bible at the level of higher academic institutes of learning (Bucher 2007:1)³¹. For the

²⁹ MacKenzie C, A, 2004. "Luther and Language: The Printing Press and the Bible". This was a presentation at Concordia Theological Seminary (Ft. Wayne) to accompany the exhibit, Martin Luther-the Reformer" March 24, 2004.

³⁰ MacKenzie C. A. 2000. "Martin Luther and the Bible". In *Issues, Etc.* www.issuesetc.org. MacKenzie is a professor of Historical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, In. <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar67.htm> , 2007/05/08.

³¹ Bucher P R, 2007. Luther's Love for the Bible. In *Our Redeemer Lutheran Church*. Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. <http://www.orldutheran.com/html/luthbibl.html>. 2007/05/08

love of the Bible Luther claimed that he had read the Bible thoroughly, that he knew what was on every page. Luther asserts: “If I had kept at it, I would have become exceedingly good at locating things in the Bible. At that time no other study pleased me as much as sacred literature” (Luther’s Works 1967:14 Vol. 54). Reading the Bible again and again as a young man, Luther came to know his way around it (Luther’s Work 54:361).

Luther’s love for the Bible continued up to his deathbed. The note found next to his deathbed carried words praising the Bible and appealing to all to read the Bible with a humble spirit (Luther’s Works 54:476). According to Bucher “one of Luther’s most strongly held convictions was that in the Bible God had the answers to his problems” (Bucher 2007:2). For Luther, the Bible was the voice of the living God, who spoke directly to the needs of His people all the time, in any given situation and in any culture and language (Bucher 2007:2). There was something of worth in the Bible, which attracted Luther to fall in love with it. It was in the Bible that Luther found Jesus Christ and the good news that Christians are justified by faith and not by the works of the Law, and this is, according to Luther, the reason Scripture was written and the reason for reading and hearing it. Christ is the one who is able to give eternal life to all who come to Him and believe in Him. We find Christ in reading the Bible (Bucher 2007:4 [WA 51, 4]). The Bible had been touched by the Greek philosophers (Platon and Aristotel), who influenced its teaching. “Only with Luther and the Reformation did the Bible become free from Greek thought, and its ideas assume their proper supremacy in theology” (Bring 1962:21).

Dealing with Luther and the Bible the next section of this chapter will deal with the understanding of the Bible among Lutherans in response to Luther and the Scriptures.

5. 3. 2. The Lutheran understanding of the Word of God

The Lutheran church claims to be the church of the word, *sola scriptura*. This means that the teaching and the preaching of the Word of God must play the most important role in the Lutheran church. In order to understand the Lutheran concept of the Bible one must begin with Martin Luther himself. Luther’s approach was doctrinal rather than literal. He understood the Bible in threefold: as the living Word of God, as the incarnate Word of God and as the written Word of God. For Luther the Bible must be accessed and read by common people in their language and culture. This means, that the Bible is translatable; therefore, it can be translated into any language and interpreted into any context, to make it relevant.

The Lutheran Church teaches that the written Word of God, the Bible, exists for the salvation of people. There are many questions around this assertion, such as: how can we be certain that the Word of God in the Bible gives life and salvation? Does the Bible and its Word really represent the full truth? These are typical questions of those working from comparative religions' sources where each faith is seen to be much like others. They classify the Bible as one source of religious knowledge with the same relative value as other similar sources (Bring 1962:1). However, for the researcher, the Bible is more than one of many sources of religious knowledge. It is the source of knowledge of the saving work of God. As a Lutheran, the researcher believes that the Bible is the guide of faith. There is no other source from which a Christian can get a message of salvation other than the Bible. We will now examine how the Lutheran theologians tackled some of these questions.

In 1512 Luther became a Doctor of the Holy Scripture, and most of his theological writings are expositions of Scripture. In his times the effort to understand the Bible was an intense struggle to understand the will of God and the Word for humanity and the church (Bring 1962:21). For Luther the message of the Bible was not a single entity, but it covers the message of the whole Bible. According to Luther, one cannot understand single texts of the Bible without understanding the whole Bible. The Bible has one central message. Bring writes:

Luther's view of the Bible, does not refer to just a single aspect of the Bible that he could expound as a learned man. Rather it must have reference to his whole understanding of God's revelation and its continuing activity. His view of the Bible includes his preaching of and obedience to the gospel, which is actually the Word and voice of the living God (1962:22).

According to Luther, the Bible has been written for people who will respond in faith to that which is proclaimed, that is life, righteousness and salvation (Bring 1962:2). Faith is not about rationalizing the contents of the Bible in order to accept them, but rather, in faith one submits unquestioningly to God and his actions, obeying and trusting him always. Faith signifies a submission to the steadfast Word of God, which declares him to be righteous when he judges. Therefore biblical faith goes hand in hand with trust and obedience.

The Bible is the instrument of the voice of the living God and for God's action in modern times. It is an instrument of God when intervening in any situation. Through the Bible God

destroys evil and unrighteousness, and builds up his own righteousness in and among people in the world, here and now (Bring 1962:26). That is why the Bible can be applied to all contexts.

In order to understand God's Word, one must begin with the fact that it is qualitatively different from human words. It should be stressed that God's Word and a human's word are different (Bring 1962:24). God revealed Godself to us through the Bible. The Bible is simultaneously the revelation of God and the incarnation of God. Bring writes:

Thus the Bible is the means of God's revelation. Revelation is God's presence in action, deed, and conflicts; and it is man's participation in God's righteousness. God reveals himself in Christ, who is the Bible's star and kernel. When God came to us, he was incarnate in Christ and he came to us in the Bible. Thus in a certain sense, Luther did not separate the Bible and Christ. The Bible is the Word; Christ also is the Word (1962:26).

Those who treat the Bible as literature distort it; and in the same way, those who treat Jesus Christ as an ordinary prophet or an ideal person, distort his nature. Incarnation is also translation because of the fact that God became human; which was a form of translation (Bring 1962:26). Luther's view of the Bible is that it is translation, incarnation, communication and revelation. This is the essence of the Bible at all times, places and contexts. Failing to translate the Word of God, as God translated Godself into human form, means that God's word will remain irrelevant to people. Nürnberger confirms this notion when he says: "The Word of God was, at all times, a concrete message for concrete people in concrete circumstances ... When we read the Bible the way it was written, we will gain confidence, commitment, power, joy, and hope for our situation today" (2004:2)

The Lutheran understanding of the Bible is not different from Luther's understanding. For the Lutherans the Bible is the living Word of God. It is the Word of God because people inspired by God wrote it. In this way the Bible is also infallible and inerrant. Infallible denotes the quality of never deceiving, or wholly trustworthy and reliable, while inerrant means wholly true. The fallibility and errancy of the authors does not make the Bible fallible. It remains infallible and inerrant because God is infallible and inerrant. These terms "infallible" and "inerrant" express the conviction that all the teaching of the Bible is the utterance of God who cannot lie and whose word abides forever (Packer 1971:95). If we reject that the Bible is infallible and the inerrant Word of God, our faith in God will have no ground whatsoever because the "Christian faith depends on the biblical witness" (Nürnberger 2004:12). The point

is that God uses human beings to convey his message to other human beings, but the message remains God's. The researcher also stressed this point that what is written in the Bible is for human salvation therefore this message must be communicated to the people, as it is, all the time, to all people, as the Word of God.

To further clarify the Lutheran understanding of the Bible as the Word of God, the thoughts of the Lutheran theologian Klaus Nürnberger will now be examined and shed more light on the development of the Lutheran understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

5. 3. 3. Klaus Nürnberger³²

For Nürnberger the Bible is the Word of God, but there is no set theology in the Bible. The Bible is not a theological book. According to him, in the Bible there are many themes and traditions from different eras and situations. Biblical authors had no intention of formulating coherent theological systems. Biblical witnesses draw theology out of the Bible: all theologies are drawn from the Bible, the Word of God (Nürnberger 2002:3; 2005:14).

The Bible is such a complex body of literature that it is virtually impossible to base one's faith and life on every verse found in it. People therefore selected verses and interpreted them according to their own faith assumptions (Nürnberger 2004:14). Luther hates this attitude of picking one verse and regarding it as a message of the Bible. The whole Bible has a single message about Jesus Christ the Savior. Nürnberger wants to avoid the assumption that each single verse in the Bible is the word of God, because some verses are human words. However all verses in the Bible together formulate the meaning of the message of the entire Bible. Bediako supports this notion when he speaks of the centrality of the Scripture as more fundamental. For him "Scripture is more comprehensive and more overarching than just the sum message of Scripture" (Bediako 2001:2).

According to Nürnberger, the Bible is the secondary form of the Word of God. First, the Word of God reached human beings in oral form or as the spoken word and later, people wrote down the word of God according to their own cultures and in their own languages. The Bible is the container where the Word of God is stored and the foundational and seminal collection of documents dealing with the Word of God, as Luther described it. The Bible did not drop ready-

³² Klaus Nürnberger (PHD) is Professor Emeritus and Research Associate of the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He is a Lutheran theologian.

made from heaven; rather it emerged and evolved through history where human beings have been part of the history (Nürnberger 2004:7; 2005:4). However those who believe in the doctrine of inspiration (the fundamentalists) insist that God wrote the Bible. If God wrote the Bible it is supposed not to contain errors (Nürnberger 2005:81), but if it contains errors then human beings were involved as well. Nürnberger, like Luther, does not understand the Bible as identical to the Word of God because the Word of God is more than that, “the Word of God is the living address of the living God to living people” (Nürnberger 2005:4; MacKenzie 2007:2³³).

According to the more liberal stance, the Bible needs to be translated, interpreted and channeled. Nürnberger insists, “The Word of God must be channeled from past history into ongoing history. Those who receive the Word of God are called upon to pass it on. This process passes through human hearts, human minds and human patterns of behaviour. It involves communities and institutions” (2004:7). Luther encouraged the translation of the Bible. He himself translated the Bible into the German language, for the common people. He saved the Bible from the power of leaders and brought it to every person in all parts of Germany. This is an indication that the Bible is translatable into all languages on the globe. Every person needs to understand the biblical message in his/her own language, culture and context.

Nürnberger highlights the complexity, disunity and contradictions found in the Bible. These have caused an uncomfortable situation for believers. Because of the huge complexity of the Bible, believers prioritized certain verses and interpreted them according to their own faith assumptions, a practice that does not safeguard the truth of the Bible. The message of the Bible has one goal, each verse has to be seen in the context of other verses and the entire Bible, not as single verse. Bible criticism is inevitable because it helps people to understand the biblical message better. Many critiques arose about the truthfulness of the biblical text as taken from different perspectives. Nürnberger concludes that:

we dare not take everything written in the Bible as valid and binding for us. We must use critical facilities to discern what the will of God really is. And we must do that together, so that we can enrich and correct each other (2004:15).

³³ <http://www.orthlutheran.com/html/luthbibl.html> 2007/05/08

Nürnberg rejects the doctrine of inerrancy as unbiblical. The trajectories of biblical paradigm revealed to what extent biblical authors felt constrained to reformulate the tradition they inherited. New versions of narratives, laws, paradigms and theological assumptions supersede older ones. The doctrine of inerrancy is, therefore, not based on scriptural analysis. There is textual proof of errancy in the Bible. People should therefore use their intellect when approaching the Bible. Nürnberg argues:

If the Bible as a whole is not inerrant, New Testament texts which seem to claim scriptural inerrancy are also not inerrant. In fact, they would themselves be in error if they claimed inerrancy for the Bible (2002:25).

The reason for the presence of errors in the Bible is that the Holy Spirit works in human beings and through human beings and human beings are not perfect, human beings are fallible and corrupted by sin, and so they corrupted the Bible as well (Nürnberg 2002:27). If the Bible were not inerrant then it would be impossible to translate, because through translation from one language to another it is inevitably changed, because translation is also interpretation. The fact is that the Bible is translatable and each translation in any language and context is authentic for that particular situation (Nürnberg 2002:29). The process of translation and interpretation also brought errors in the Bible, but the errancy of the Bible does not change its message. Its message remains the Word of God in written form for us and for our salvation, now and in the future.

Nürnberg also points out that the Christ-event is at the center of the biblical message. “All Christians believed that God’s Word found its ultimate and valid content in the Christ-event” (Nürnberg 2005:81). The Bible is the Word of God in written form and it remains so for our salvation. It is open for translation and interpretation, in order to serve its purpose, that is, salvation for all humanity irrespective of their language, culture, gender, context etc.

According to Nürnberg the written Word of God, which is the Bible, is secondary; the primary Word of God is the spoken one. He argues that first the Word of God reached people through proclamation and second in was written down. The Scriptures provide a link to God that is still available, while God’s spoken word was only available to those who physically read/heard it. Therefore the Scriptures are of decisive importance, they take us closest to the source, they give us an impression of its original vitality, they keep us on track, and the Scriptures form a bond of unity between all Christians. The Scriptures are indispensable

(2004:4, 5). In this understanding, the Scriptures are the Word of God in written form available for all time.

Nürnbergger shares the same sentiment with Luther that there are human words in the Bible. The Bible is a human product therefore it may carry human words as well. The Bible is the Word of God, but the Word of God is not the Bible. The Word of God is not identical with the Bible. The Word of God is more than the Bible as it has mentioned earlier that it is a living address for living God (Nürnbergger 2005:4). Historical and contemporary theologies derived their directions from the biblical scriptures, understanding that the Bible is the Word of God (Nürnbergger 2005:4). The researcher agrees with Nürnbergger that if there is theology, which is not based on the Bible, it is not theology at all. Therefore all theologies must be based on biblical text to be true theology.

Luther and Nürnbergger have similarities and differences as far as the statement, the Bible is the Word of God, is concerned. In most cases they share a common understanding. They lived in different worlds at different times, with different challenges. Luther lived in the fifteenth century whereas Nürnbergger lives in the twentieth century. Luther was a reformer while Nürnbergger a follower of Lutheran teaching. Both Luther and Nürnbergger understood the Word of God in threefold: as the living Word of God, as the incarnate Word of God and as the written Word of God. Nürnbergger furthers this point that the Bible is the secondary Word of God; the primary form in which God reached people was orally. Luther stressed the point that the Bible must be read by common people in their language and in their culture. Luther believed in the translatability of the Bible, whereas Nürnbergger puts emphasis on channeling the Word of God to concrete situations. The biblical text is written for the salvation of human beings. For Luther the Bible as a whole has one message, the salvation plan of God, whereas Nürnbergger sees the Bible as a complex body of literature, which does not guarantee faith unless it is understood in the whole spectrum of the entire Bible. Both Luther and Nürnbergger hate people who pick one verse in the Bible to be the message of the Bible. Luther emphasised that the Bible is the book of faith not of reasoning. Nürnbergger adds that the Bible is not a theological book, but a book of faith, although theologians can draw their theology from the Bible, the Word of God. Luther noted that the Word of God is different from human words. Nürnbergger did not deny that the Bible is the Word of God, but he stresses that it emerges and evolves through the history of human beings therefore there are also human words in the Bible. Both Luther and Nürnbergger share the idea that the Bible is not identical to the Word of God.

The Word of God is more than that. The Word of God is a living address of the living God to living people. For Luther The Bible is the revelation of God to human beings. For Nürnberger the Bible is the Word of God as Christ is the incarnated Word of God. Nürnberger sees the Christ-event as a central message of the Bible, because Christ is the incarnate Word of God. According to Luther the Word of God remains the same all the time, and Nürnberger shares the same sentiment when he says that the Word of God was at all times a concrete message for concrete people in concrete circumstances. The researcher sees that Nürnberger cemented the teaching of Luther about the Word of God in modern times.

The next section of this chapter will deal with the understanding of the Bible in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN)

5. 4. The understanding of the Bible in ELCIN

The first part of this section deals with the Finnish missionary influence on the understanding of the Bible, and the second part deals with the understanding of the Bible from within ELCIN with Absalom Hasheela representing ELCIN's point of view.

5. 4. 1. Finnish missionary influence

In order to understand the Bible and its interpretation in ELCIN, first it is necessary to examine how missionaries presented the Bible to them. The work of the missionaries was guided by ideas adopted in their native country and church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) (Löytty 1971:20). This means that their mission work was based on the situation of the church that prevailed in their country of origin. In other words what happened in ELCIN is an exact copy of what had happened in ELCF. The thinking and principles of the mission leaders in the northern belt of Namibia among Ovawambo and Okavango people directed the thinking and principles for the workers both in the mission school and in the field (Löytty 1971: 20). Therefore the understanding of the Bible among Ovawambo, Kavango and Oludhimba is based on what was brought to them by the missionaries. This section examines the views of some of the individual missionaries who served in the mission field as leaders.

The mission director during the years 1914-1934, Matti Tarkkanen (1862-1938), stressed the proclamation of the Gospel as the most important form of missionary work. For him the Bible is the unerring revelation of God, and he was thus critical of the exegetic research of his time,

as also of theological liberalism and the social Gospel movement. Tarkkanen took a fundamentalist stand on the Bible (Löytty 1971:21).

Fundamentalism is the movement that counteracts liberalism. Sometimes it is defined as a theological entity: that of adherence to a distinctive doctrine of Scripture. The fundamentalist doctrine views the origin of the Bible through the theory of biblical inspiration, which regards the written words of the Bible as divinely dictated. Fundamentalist theologians hold that every word of the Scripture should be treated as factual truth. They deny the human element in the creation of the Bible (Packer 1977:11-13).

Fundamentalists also believe that no logical reasoning is required in interpreting the Bible: it should simply be accepted “as is”. The central point in fundamentalist thought is that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and that God is solely responsible for every statement in the Bible. This assertion has been disputed, as it denies any involvement of human beings in the process of formulating the Bible. Another problematic aspect is that fundamentalists view scholarship as the enemy of faith (Rowley 1948:21). Packer writes the view of the fundamentalist with regard to liberal as follows: “To demand unquestioning submission to what the Bible says seems to them tantamount to telling men [people] to crucify their reason; such an attitude to the Bible, they think, is superstitious rather than religious, and bibliolatrous rather than Christian”(1977:13). One cannot reject the notion that God inspires the Bible because it is at the center of the Christian faith. However, it cannot be denied that humans played a crucial role in the making of the Bible. Rowley thus warns:

To deny the older connotation of the term (inspiration), while continuing to use it in some vague and unspecified sense, is an offence alike against faith and intellect, and the obligation is laid upon us to redefine the term, and justify our definition at the bar of reason (1948:21).

Another notable missionary leader was Viktor Alho (1878-1963). Alho served forty years among the Ovambo of which thirty years were served as a principal of the Finnish School in Ovamboland mission. Alho insisted that liberal theology could not be accepted by anyone who wished to remain faithful to the Bible (Munyika 2004:275). Alho’s conception of the Bible has been described as being soundly fundamentalist. He was given the task of translating a Finnish textbook written by Aarni Voipio, but when he realized that the book contained some aspects of liberal theology, he declined to continue, as it was, he felt, unfaithful to the Bible. He

explained this concern to the Board of the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS), criticizing the work of Voipio as being unfaithful to the Bible and that it should not be accepted by anyone who wished to remain faithful to the Bible (Löytty 1971:23). It is the researcher's view that liberalism is what the principle of translatability provides, rather than what fundamentalism does, because translatability is not looking into the literal meaning but to give the equal meaning.

Among the Finnish missionaries working among Ovawambo was a woman theologian, Maija Kantele. Kantele served for seven years as a teacher of pastor's courses during the periods 1937-1961 in the Teachers Training Seminary at Oniipa, where some pastors in training undertook further studies for ordination. According to Kantele, "the Bible is the Word of God, where God is speaking through writers inspired by Him" (sic) (Löytty 1971:26). She rejected the scientific research into the factuality of the Bible, which abandons the biblical miracles on rational grounds. She cautioned that often science disproves its own earlier findings. She also rejected liberal theology, which according to her, displaced the omnipotence of God and undermined the reliability of the contents of the Scripture (Löytty 1971:26).

There were also liberal missionary workers like Erkki Lehto (1884-1950). He was said to have influenced Ovawambo pastors among whom he served for thirty years. He was also a principal of the Teacher Training Seminary at Oniipa. His strongly Lutheran understanding of the Bible as the Word of God was in any case more flexible than those of the abovementioned missionaries. What made him different from the other missionaries was his liberal and inclusive approach to the Bible. He considered the culture of the Ovawambo in his approach to the Bible, while others were reluctant to accommodate them and regarded African culture as pagan or heathen. Many Ovawambo pastors appreciated Lehto's liberal approach to the Bible and took him as their role model (Löytty 1971:23-24).

According to Löytty, the fundamentalist tendencies in the approach to Bible studies represented the prevalent view among the Finnish missionaries engaged in the training of Ovawambo pastors. It should be noted here that, in general, Finnish missionaries emphasized the importance of knowing and reading the Bible, self examination of one's own religious convictions, the relationship between God and humans and the responsibility for the care of the soul of one's neighbour (1971: 26,27).

The rejection of the traditional religious practices of Ovawambo, as a taboo, was regarded as a means to the winning of Ovawambo hearts to Christ. It was regarded as transformation and grace as taught by the Bible. Löytty writes: “A transformation leading to the rejection of the taboos of traditional tribal life and other beliefs and to a new life and a new strength are results of an all-penetrating Grace and of counsel and encouragement whose source is the Bible” (Löytty 1971:28-29). It is at this point that the missionaries’ work to make the Bible relevant to ELCIN members failed. The researcher recognizes that the missionaries were trying to achieve the uniformity of Christianity, which is rejected by Sanneh. This means that they wanted to see the same Christianity as in their country of origin, which would not be the case in Africa and elsewhere. For them (missionaries), traditional African elements or beliefs did not provide inroads to Christianity, and thus they wrote off African religious beliefs as a whole as taboos, which was not the case. The missionaries, from the beginning failed, to recognize the concept of the translatability and incarnation of the Word of God being included within Oshiwambo traditional beliefs and practices. Earlier missionaries failed to understand that African religion was a fertile soil for planting the Christian religion.

The researcher’s analysis of the understanding of the Bible among the missionaries, who worked in northern Namibia, reveals that many of them were fundamentalists. They did not want to compare the Bible with other findings, even scientific research. For them the Bible was the Word of God. Their influence was strong because they were present at the key points where pastors were trained. They were trainers and teachers of the pastors. It was easy for their conception of the Bible to spread to all corners of the communities of the area. However, Ovawambo pastors were impressed by the liberal theology of Viktor Alho, whom they regarded as their role model. The fundamental understanding of the Bible has been challenged by translatability, because translatability allows other (African) cultures to be included in the Bible translations into vernacular languages. Finnish missionaries who were fundamentalist were reluctant to do so. Within ELCIN the situation looks the same.

5. 4. 2. Influences from within ELCIN

As a Lutheran church, ELCIN based her teaching on biblical grounds, and regarded the teaching of the Bible as authoritative (ELCIN 2001:11). ELCIN emphasized *sola scriptura* that is the Scripture alone has authority. Rev A Hasheela represents ELCIN’s understanding of the Bible, and how this church’s members were influenced by this understanding. The aim of this

section is to examine how missionaries presented the Bible and the response from within ELCIN.

5. 4. 3 Absalom Hasheela³⁴

Absalom Hasheela is an ELCIN pastor. In his book *Ombiibeli Yetu* [Our Bible] (1980), the first of its kind in ELCIN, he writes about the Bible in Christianity in general, and in ELCIN in particular. The following pages present some of his thoughts about the Bible. Hasheela does not differ from other ELCIN members in the understanding of the Bible.

Hasheela, like many theologians, is convinced that the Bible is the Word of God. The Word of God is always related to human beings. He holds that there are always two aspects when talking about “*Ondjovo ile Eendjovo*” [Word or Words]: the speaker/author and the reader/listener. According to Hasheela;

The word must be spoken and heard and it must be understood. The word is not a word if it is not heard. ... [and] the word is the word because it is spoken, heard and understood or the word is the word because it is written, read and understood [translation mine] (1980:7).

That means the two aspects must always be present in order to make the word a Word. The Word of God is the Word in relation to human beings. It is like the vehicle, which transports the message. It is a bridge to cross the “foreignness” between people who need each other. The word builds relationships. So, the Word of God connects God with his people, through the Bible. There is nowhere else to find the Word of God if it is not in the Bible, therefore the Bible is the Word of God. When a person is reading the Bible he/she hears what God says here and now (Hasheela 1980:8, 9).

According to Hasheela, “*ondjovo*” [the word] is something which is spoken and heard and has meaning. The word is not a word unless it is heard. There must be two corresponding groups, the speaker and the receiver, or writer and reader. The word has certain effects on animals and human beings who can understand it, but not the trees and mountains. So, Hasheela writes:

Ondjovo oyo ondjovo shaashi oya popiwa, oya udika nomatwi noya uduka kutya otai ti shike. ...ondjovo oyo ondjovo shaashi oya nyolwa, oya leshwa noya udiwa ko. [Literally, the word is word because it is spoken; it is heard with ears and is understood. The word is word

³⁴ Rev Absalom Hasheela is a lecturer at the United Lutheran Theological Seminary Paulinum in Namibia. Before he became a lecturer, he was General Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), the largest Lutheran Church in Namibia.

because it is written, it is read, and it is understood, (translation mine)]
(1980:7)

There must be a reciprocal relationship between the speaker and the hearer, thus the word is an instrument of communication between people. The word builds a bridge, linking different people together, and overcoming foreignness. If a person does not understand the language of the people among whom he/she finds himself/herself, there is a sense of foreignness (Hasheela 1980:7, 8).

Based on this understanding the Word of God is an instrument to connect God and people. God speaks, the people listen and people have to respond faithfully to God through prayer and supplications. The spoken word of God is stored in the Holy Bible, thus the Bible is the written Word of God. There is a message for us in the Bible. The Bible, the Scripture, is not just history, but it contains the way of God to humans. The Bible demands a response from humans. Hasheela again writes:

Eendjovo daKalunga odo oshilongifo, osho Kalunga ta longifa okutya sha kufye nena apa paiife. Eendjovo daKalunga odo ewi laKalunga. Omunhu ngeenge ta lesha Ombiibeli Iyapuki, nena ota udu osho Kalunga te mu lombwele. [Literally, the word of God is an instrument that God uses to say something to us, today, now and here. The word of God is the voice of God. When a person reads the Holy Bible, he/she understands what God is saying to him/her, (translation mine)]
(1980:9).

According to Hasheela the Bible has something to tell us. On the one hand it is telling the story about who God is: God for us, and God with us (Immanuel); on the other hand it is telling what human beings are, creatures of God who are unable to exist without him (1980:11,12). This message needs to be communicated to people in a clearly understandable way, in our own words and our own terms and it must be relevant to human beings in their situations. This is what the translatability theory brought to us. To sum up the message of the Bible, Hasheela writes:

Ombiibeli aishe omudidi wayo itai tu longo shimwe shi lili, ahowe, ndelenee otai tu ulikile ashike Kalunga nghe eli pamwe novanhu [The whole Bible does not teach something different, it shows us only God dealing with human beings, (translation mine)] (1980:13).

Hasheela discusses the two distinctive aspects of the Bible namely Law and Gospel. According to him, the Law teaches what God requires a person to fulfill, while the Gospel reveals what

God is doing for that person now and in the future. The Gospel is the central message of the Holy Scripture. The living gospel is what makes the Christian church alive. “Where the gospel is preached the church grows” (Hasheela 1980: 17).

Hasheela does not hesitate to call the Bible a book like other books. What is different however is that the Bible is the “bond of many books” [*oshipandi shomambo*] written by different people with different ideas, styles and purposes (1980:19). Hasheela continues to say that the Bible did not fall from heaven, it is a book written by people, therefore it has human errors. Although the Bible records the history of the people of Israel, it is not a history book, but a book of religious life. Hasheela agrees with Nürnberger that one cannot take one verse or one chapter or one book from the Bible to be sufficient, as the Bible is one entity. The central message of the Bible is that God saves human beings through Jesus Christ (1980:20). If the Bible in vernacular does not carry such a message of salvation, then it is not a Bible, rather a storybook. Translatability and translation theories do not intend to change the meaning of the Bible, but rather to appropriate it in a given language, culture and context.

Although the Bible did not fall from heaven it is a divine book. It originated from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. God used human beings and not the angels, to write down his message in the Bible with their skills. One can say that the Bible is a divine-human book. For the Christians the Bible is the Word of God written by human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit (Hasheela 1980:24).

Hasheela notes that the Bible testifies to its own truth (II Tim 3:5). It is the right of the Bible to build faith and to direct faith. It is correct to call the Bible *norma normas* which means the right guide, and *norma normata*, the guided guide (1980:25). That means that God has guided the message of the Bible and it is guiding people. The Bible is clear in its teaching about the salvation of human beings. Hasheela pointed to the statement of Luther that there is no other book in the world that is clearer than the Holy Scriptures. Comparing the Bible with other books is like comparing the sun with other lights (1980:25). The Word of God is powerful to teach faith. The Word of God has the power to save those who believe (Rom 1:16-17).

Hasheela does not mention the issue of the translation and interpretation of the Bible, nor the issue of culture, contextualization or the Africanization of Christianity. However he does

discuss how the lives of Ovawambo, before Christianity, were threatened by what he called 'paganism'. Hasheela writes:

Osha fa shi li ngaha kutya oupaani wOshiwambo owa li mudjuu unene. Owa li tau hepeke ovanhu. Onghee Evangeli eshi la fika mOwambo ovanhu vahapu ova efa ashishe shoupaani ukulu. Eshi otashi didilikwa luhapu momailikano ovakriste ovakulunhu eshi hava ti: "Ohatu ku hambelele Tate eshi we tu mangulula mo meenghono doupika woupaani". Otava hokolola kutya omunhu nale ka kwali ha fi i na liwa. Ye nakulya mukwao iha fiwa nomwenyo; okOnakupila komukunda waNdingoya!" Nokutya e na okufya. [It seems that Ovawambo paganism was very threatening. It caused a lot of suffering. Therefore when the gospel arrived in Ovamboland people left the old paganism. We discern this from the prayer of elderly people saying: "We thank you Father (God) that you liberated us from the power of pagan slavery". They tell that if a person died, he/she was bewitched. The witch had to be killed, (translation mine)] (1980:26).

That means that the message of the Bible has the power to liberate people from the bondage of paganism and other practices which cause suffering and death such as among Ovawambo. The power of the Word of God is realized in the restoration of the well being of the people. African nations as a whole have accepted Christianity and Christianity therefore penetrated into their heart, during hard times. During suffering, affliction, discrimination, and oppression, Africans trusted and believed in the power of the Word of God (Hasheela 1980:26). The Bible was a useful and powerful weapon, which African Christians used to defend their cause during the struggle for independence in Africa. In the same way that the Europeans used the Bible to get land from black Africans (Dube 2000:3); African Christians used the Bible to get their land back from Europeans.

Hasheela defends the Bible as the Word of God. He is convinced that the Bible is the Word of God, which has the power to change the world. For him the biblical message is enough on its own to save, it needs no supplement. Hasheela's understanding of the Bible as the Word of God is influenced by the Finnish missionaries who worked among Ovawambo and Okavango people, resulting in the birth of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), to which he belongs. Missionary teachers who were fundamentalists have taught Hasheela. In general, the understanding of the Bible in ELCIN is fundamentalist in nature. Hasheela wrote for the members of ELCIN, mainly (Ovawambo and Okavango people) for whom the Bible was translated by ELCIN. He explained what the Bible is from the ELCIN stance.

The researcher argues that the time has come for many ELCIN theologians to take part in the process of the Africanization of theology as a few, like Munyika did, who read and interpreted the Bible into the life and culture of the Namibian people. They need to interpret the Bible using their own skills, tools, culture, language, tradition and context, and to read and interpret the Bible with their own eyes and not someone else's eyes. Evangelist Lot Kaishungu, from Okongo, east of Oukwanyama, also set a good example of reading the Bible into the culture and language of Ovawambo people. For him the Bible is the Word of God because it is God who is speaking through the pages of the Bible. In Oshiwambo³⁵, particularly among the Ovakwanyama ethnic group, if a person is sent by the king, carrying the message of the king, the people who receive the message take it as the word of the king himself regardless of how the envoy presents the message. It is not his/her message, but the message of the king. The envoy would say: "*Onda humbata elaka lohamba medimo*", literally "I carry the message of the king in my stomach". Kaishungu, when evangelizing in parishes around ELCIN, used this expression to preach to the people, saying: "*Onda humbata elaka laKalunga medimo*", literally "I carry the message of God in my stomach". That means he carries the Word of God and not his personal word. In this way the biblical message will become relevant to the people to whom it is delivered.

As observed in chapter three, Ovawambo and Okavango people believe God to be like an elderly person, he is highly respected. Therefore Ovawambo obey the word of God as they obey the words of elderly persons in their society. With this understanding the Bible is regarded as the Word of God who is above all, and it has to be obeyed in the full sense of the word. One cannot tamper with the Bible, because this would invoke the anger of God. Failing to obey the word of an elderly person in society can bring a curse, and in the same manner failing to obey the Word of God in the Bible can elicit a curse from God. The difference between the two is that God can forgive.

There are members of ELCIN, especially the younger generation and those who have traveled widely, who are dismissive of the uniqueness of the Bible and refer it as just a book like other books. Amkongo (appendix VI)³⁶, rejects this idea, claiming that the Bible is incomparable with any other book. It is the book of God, containing God's will (Amkongo 2006). For

³⁵ Oshiwambo is the collective language spoken by people lived in the northern part of Namibia, known as Ovamboland. Oshiwambo has seven dialects.

³⁶ Mr Moses Amkongo is a retired director of ELOC Printing Press. He served on the Review Committee of the translation of the Bible into Oshindonga.

Hambyuka (appendix VI), the Bible is *meme wetu*, our mother, as it guides us in many ways, like a mother. The Bible takes care of us as the mother takes care of her baby. The Bible soothes Christians like a mother (Hambyuka 2006). Among Ovawambo God is referred to as a mother who is taking care of her children, so the Bible and God are put in the same category of parents in taking care of their children. But in Oshiwambo God is more than a mother. This attribute only refers to God and the Bible and not a male person. Oshiwambo expression: "Kalunga ihe ku efa nga nyoko" literally "God will never abandon you like your mother", points to the greatness of God. In times of difficulty mothers can leave their children, but God cannot do that. According to Ausiku (appendix VII)³⁷, the Bible is a refreshing and wonderful book that is valid from generation to generation. The message of the Bible remains the same, though its context and interpretation and application may change. It is Holy. The Bible is a divine power among the people, old and young. Ausiku urges all people to respect it as it was in the past centuries (2006). Because of its nature the Bible cannot be compared with other books whose concerns are worldly and can be revised now and then.

Oshikwanyama Bible carries many local words, which are about to vanish among the younger generation. The Bible does not carry only the Word of God, but also retains the Oshikwanyama language, as stressed by one of the ELCIN members, Nghatanga-Hamunyela (Ngodji 2005:126). According to the newsletter, *Christianity Today*, languages into which the Bible is translated are preserved from disappearing from the world, but those who are not yet translated are at risk of disappearing³⁸. Along the same lines, Namibian MP, Hansina Christiaans, in his address at a graduation ceremony of teachers, urged the graduates to promote indigenous languages in schools. He said: "If any language is neglected, so will its culture die out, since language is a carrier of culture"³⁹. The researcher agrees fully with this statement because the younger generation in Namibia is losing interest in their mother tongues, which will affect their understanding of their culture as well.

The worldwide Christian church designates the Bible as canonical and thereby accepts it as a true guide for faith and life. The Bible is the supreme norm for Christian life, and is a supreme authority in matters of faith (Lindblom 1973:157-159). This concept is what ELCIN has emphasized in her dealings with the Bible in the vernacular languages. So the Bible in the

³⁷ Rev Heikki Ausiku is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). He served on the Review Committee of the translation of the Bible into Rukwangali.

³⁸ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/109/14.0.html>.

³⁹ <http://www.namibian.com.na/2007/April/national/078584A584.html> 2007/04/02

vernacular languages, as in other languages, carries the same message of God, saving us through the Christ-event. Hasheela confirms that we find what we need for salvation in the Bible. He further argues that in matters regarding faith, the Bible does not need to be bolstered by traditions: it is enough in itself (Hasheela 1980:7). Bediako argues that it is Scripture that interprets the tradition and not the tradition that interprets the Scripture. Bediako furthers his argument by saying that "... it is Scripture that provides the ultimate interpretation of who we are, not just as human beings created by God but as human beings in our specific cultural identities" (2001:2). The researcher argues that tradition and culture do not add anything to the salvation message in the Bible, but they make the biblical message accessible and understandable to the people of that particular culture and tradition. More so, they make the Bible relevant.

As mentioned in chapter two, biblical criticism, the method of finding the message in the biblical text, could be recognized as one of the tools of interpreting the Bible. This method, according to Rowley, recognizes all the human processes that went into the making of the Bible, without reducing it to the level of a merely human document. Rowley also acknowledges that scientific study, which is still valued and continued, is not enough. The Bible is first and foremost a religious book, the book to enhance faith (1948:15). This means that it is through the Bible that Christians can see the broad picture of the past and the future of their lives. The Bible carries the hope of believers. Therefore it is a statement of faith. It is not only the Lutherans who accept the Bible other denominations do too. The applicability of the translatability theory allows the Bible to speak and say what it is supposed to say to the people in their language and context. The next section will deal with the views of various contemporary theologians in this regard.

5. 5 Contemporary views on the Bible as the Word of God

There are different views on the Bible as the Word of God among African theologians. Therefore the researcher has selected six contemporary African theologians' views on the Bible. They are; Tinyiko Maluleke, John S. Mbiti, Itumeleng Mosala, Musa W Dube, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro. Each theologian tackled the understanding of the Bible from a different perspective within Africa. All these theologians represent other theologians in Africa, in their understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. The aim of this section is to see whether their views are compatible with the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako and how these views influence vernacularization in ELCIN. The researcher will

concentrate, among many other things, on the following questions: What makes the Bible the Word of God? How can the biblical message be made relevant? How should the Bible be interpreted? Does the Bible carry the same message to all people all the time? What does the Bible contribute to Africans?

5. 5. 1. Tinyiko Sam Maluleke⁴⁰

Maluleke's view on Bible is the complicated. In the past, mission was understood as something coming from North to South, from Europe to Africa, and from Christians to heathens. According to Maluleke this understanding of mission needs to change. He writes:

Instead of mission being viewed as emanating from the North to the South, the new understanding was one of mission as essentially local and in this sense the current of Christians mission could flow from everywhere to everywhere [from anyone to anyone] (2000:88).

Maluleke argues that all Christians are agents and subjects of mission. Therefore missionaries include not only missionaries who came from abroad but also African Christians. In ELCIN for example when people talk about a missionary they refer to Europeans only and this is problematic, because God called all Christians to be missionaries.

Wherever Christian mission work is carried out, it goes hand in hand with the Bible as its primary source. The Bible has been at the center of the transformations encountered in the process of mission work. Thus the Bible was the tool for this transformation. "The shift from a universalist to a local view of mission also implied that local interpretations of the Bible were as valid as other interpretations" (Maluleke 2000: 91). The interpretation of the Bible needs to be freed from "foreignness" to "homeness".

Maluleke states that the Bible is one of the most significant resources in Africa, especially in Christian Africa. It is the most widely available and most widely translated book on the continent (2000:91). Many translators and distributors of the Bible made this possible. ELCIN is one of the contributors and translators of the Bible into vernacular languages in Africa. In most Christian houses in Ovamboland and Okavango, there is a Bible. According to Ndevaetela (a bookseller) (appendix VIII), people buy the Bibles everyday in his bookshop at

⁴⁰ Professor Tinyiko Sam Maluleke is Executive Director of Research at the University of South Africa (UNISA). He is a Presbyterian and an African theologian. He has written books and articles about Black/Liberation theology, African theology and Black economic empowerment. "The Bible Among African Christians: A Missiological Perspective (2000)", in *To cast fire upon the earth*. Okure T (ed). Cluster Publication.

Ohangwena. People buy Bibles more than any other books in the store (2006). People do not buy or own the Bible for nothing: they “recognize something worthwhile in the Bible” (Maluleke 2000:91). This “something” becomes worthwhile, in the researcher’s opinion, when it is made accessible and applicable to the people’s context, through the process of translation and interpretation.

Maluleke points out that the process of translating the Bible into vernacular languages has contributed to the language itself. He writes: “the reduction of the majority of African languages into written form has been closely tied to the translation of the Bible into local languages” (2000:91). It is also true that in Africa the Bible does not serve as a spiritual book, a book about God or a religious book only, but also serves and continues to serve in many places as the most accessible basic literature text, a storybook, a compilation of novels and short stories, a book of prose and poetry, and a book of science that explains the origins of all creatures (Maluleke 2000:91,92). The Bible is also regarded as a partner on journeys: people travel with and talk with it. When people refer to the Bible they refer to the Word of God, not only to a book as such.

Maluleke argues that the Bible allows African readers to develop biblical hermeneutics from within their context. In African Christianity “the Bible has been appropriated and continues to be appropriated as part of a larger package of resources” (2000:95). To interpret and to appropriate the Bible is to make it relevant to and accepted by people in all times and in all places. Therefore in whatever shifts may occur in the history of Christianity, especially in Africa, “the Bible has featured prominently” (Maluleke 2000:96).

As far as African Christians are concerned, the Bible has enjoyed a respected status and place. This is so because it is regarded as the Word of God. For emerging theology in Africa to be recognized and accepted it must have a biblical basis, if not, that theology will not be accepted as theology at all. The emergence of African Feminist or Womanist theology, which regards the Bible as a patriarchal book has also underscored the importance of new interpretations and appropriation of the Bible (Maluleke 1997:14). The researcher agrees with Maluleke, Mbiti and Fashole-Luke that, “the Bible is the basic and primary source for the development of African Christian Theology” (Maluleke 1997:14).

Maluleke sees the need for interpreting the Bible in Africa. He is against those who tried to reject the creative and bold interpretation of the Bible in African theology and accuses them of extravagance (1997:14,15). The Bible needs to be interpreted in African contexts, and with African tools. This is the concern of biblical hermeneutics and is what the translatability theory is striving for. If the Bible is translated into vernacular languages and interpreted into any context and serves its purpose, then it is a relevant Word of God.

5. 5. 2 John S. Mbiti⁴¹

Mbiti's view is that the Bible as a whole or in part has become a universal book, because millions upon millions today are reading the Bible all over the world. Mbiti is grateful to the translators, publishers, distributors, sellers and expounders of the Bible who have made it possible for Africans to read and hear the Bible in their own languages, as many as they are. Mbiti is convinced that Bible readers and listeners get something out of it, be it guidance, inspiration or enlightenment. One cannot read the Bible and remain empty handed. "They understand what they wish to understand. They keep, or use, what they understand" (2005:234). Reading and listening to the Bible in their own tongue gives African people an opportunity to interpret it their own way within their own context.

The Bible is for all nations, although it contains the history of the Israelites, the "chosen people". The Bible includes all nations because it speaks of the God of all the nations (Rom 3:29). Therefore its message is relevant to all people irrespective of race and culture. The Bible, though it originated from the Middle East and was brought to Africa through western culture, is not a western book and neither is Christianity a western religion. The message of the Bible includes the whole world (Bible and Culture 2006:1). That is why reading and listening to it you find something striking you. The Bible is the Word of God because it speaks about God of all nations, and it has a message for all.

Mbiti agrees with Maluleke that the Bible is the most influential book in Africa, because it was taught in public schools in Africa as part of the curriculum. Its influence has penetrated into all spheres of life. Mbiti reiterates Maluleke's view that the Bible is a resource in the works of artists, novelists, dramatists, poets and songwriters (2005:235-236). The researcher agrees with

⁴¹ John Mbiti is a professor emeritus of the University of Bern, Switzerland. He is originally from Kenya, Africa, so he is the son of African soil. Mbiti is considered as one of the fathers of African theology. He wrote books and articles on African theology. Mbiti is an Anglican Priest.

Mbiti because in Namibia people like Abednego L Nghifikwa⁴² (appendix XVIII), a poet and author of much literature in Oshikwanyama, is inspired by the Bible. He makes reference to the Bible in his writings. One of his poems ends as follows:

*All of us have one God
All of us have the same Saviour
All of us are to enter the same heaven
All of us are to receive the same eternal life* (Nghifikwa 2001:29)

(This poem was composed during the height of the Apartheid system in Namibia and South Africa).

Nghifikwa, speaking of the impact of the Bible among Ovawambo communities says that if you want a person to understand you, make a reference to the Bible. The wise person needs to read the Bible in order to gain more knowledge in life (2006). The composer of songs, musician and organist, Toivo Ndevaetela⁴³ has also confirmed that the Bible has influenced him in music and songs (2006). These two people Ndevaetela and Nghifikwa are members of the Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). There are many others in Namibia whom the Bible inspires in their field of work or creativity.

The Bible also has been used to defend and to justify the injustices that have been wrought upon millions of people through Christian slavery, Anti-Semitism, colonization, apartheid, sexism and other forms of inhumane practices labeled as biblical or Christian (Mbiti 2005:236). In ELCIN the issue of the ordination of women was rejected on the grounds of the biblical text. It was regarded as unbiblical to ordain women to ministry. For example in an ELCIN synod, a resolution was passed allowing the ordination of women. The next day one male voting member opposed the resolution because it was unbiblical. The resolution was halted and postponed to another synod. This was an indication that the biblical authority was misused to oppress women even in the Church. Page cites Stanton who writes in *The Women's Bible* that: "it is necessary to be engaged in interpretation of the Bible because it was used as the ultimate sanction against any change in the conditions of women" (Page 1996:18).

⁴² Abednego Lesheni Nghifikwa is a retired teacher and school inspector. He writes many books and other literature and poems used in primary and high schools in Northern Namibia. Some of his books are *Oitevo ya alangata nelaka*, *Oikuko ya wa ongali nomayoo* (Oshikwanyama), *Slaves and death are one and the same* (English), the poems, and *Etumwalaka kovanyasha* (Oshikwanyama).

⁴³ Toivo Ndevaetela is a retired teacher and school inspector. He composed many songs like; *Efyo eenghono da teka*, *Mwenyo hambelela*, *Shito alishe tanga Omwene* and others. He was a music conductor at Engela Deanery of ELCIN. He is an organist at Engela parish.

The evil Apartheid system, which oppressed the African people of South Africa and Namibia, was supported by biblical text. It was alleged that the Whites were given South Africa as a promised land in the same way that the Israelites were given Canaan. Slavery was understood as biblical. The same Bible was however also used to attack the very systems that have brought about oppression and injustices (Mbiti 2005: 236). This means that the Bible can be understood and interpreted in different ways to suit different situations.

It is accepted that Christians are the people of the Book, referring to the Bible. Jewish people are also referred to as the people of the Book, but only the Old Testament. Muslims are called people of the Book too, meaning the Qúran. Christians refer to the Bible as a whole, the Old Testament and the New Testament respectively. Again the same texts or biblical terms are interpreted in different ways depending on the denomination or church tradition. However, the Bible, as the Word of God, plays an important role in the Christian communities in Africa (Sanneh 1989: 211-214).

Mbiti states that the “Bible is a living book, the unique Word of God Almighty, Creator and Controller of the Universe” (2005:238). This approach to the Bible affects the reading and the interpretation of the Bible among African Christians. What took place in others part of Africa also occurred in northern Namibia among Ovawambo and Okavango respectively. African people feel at home with the Bible because they read for themselves in the Bible. The Hebrew culture in the Bible is not alien to African people. Hebrews lived in Africa (Egypt) for many years, and it is possible that they adopted some aspects of the African culture. Mbiti earlier states that in reading some parts of the Bible African Christians find many similarities between ancient Jewish life and African Traditional Religion. “This makes it easy for them [African Christians] to feel that the Bible belongs to them and they belong to the Bible” (Mbiti 1992:190). Africans do not only feel at home with the Bible, but it also enriches their beliefs and gives them new directions for interpreting the world with new ideas from the Bible (Mbiti 1992:190). Bediako confirms that African people feel at home with the Bible because, “the Scripture is a story in which we participate. ...Scripture becomes recognized by us [Africans] as the narrative that explains who we are, and therefore our narrative” (2001:5).

As noted earlier, the Bible was a subject in African public schools (Mbiti 2005:240), which greatly aided the spread of Christianity. In Namibia, the Bible was also studied at public schools. The decision of the present governments (in Namibia and South Africa) to remove the

teaching of the Bible from public schools was a shock to Bible loving Christians, who regularly call on the government to reinstate it. According to Kaishungu, this move, of removing the teaching of the Bible in public schools is a great mistake, because the morality of the learners and younger people has declined and they have no knowledge whatsoever of the Bible (2006). Ausiku shares the same sentiment, and he adds that the Bible helps to equip people with good morals and behaviour. He has suggested that pamphlets containing Bible verses might be produced and distributed in public places for reading (2006).

The Bible in the vernacular languages gives believers a direct link to the Word of God and they can therefore apply it relevantly within their cultural setting as they allow it to either transform or confirm their cultural beliefs and practices. This direct access to the Bible has ensured the spread of the gospel in Africa (Mbiti 2005:223-244).

Mbiti points out that Africans do select verses from the Bible as their personal verses while others memorize particular verses and stories to reflect on them and retell them wherever they find themselves (2005: 245). In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), the situation is the same. The first generation of Christians, knew the Bible verses by heart. There was a practice in parishes called *omaleshelo* [readings], which tested the parishioners to see whether they knew the Bible and other teachings of the church. This kind of programme forced the parishioners to memorize some verses of the Bible and to be familiar with the biblical stories (ELCIN 2001:55). Young adults in African Christianity are obliged to possess the Bible and be fluent in reading it before baptism or confirmation (Mbiti 2005: 237). It is stated clearly in the ELCIN Constitution that, among other things, a person to be baptized and confirmed must know how to read, and know the stories from Old and New Testaments (ELCIN 2001:41, 44).

According to Mbiti, there are two ways of interpreting the Bible, namely an imported interpretation and an indigenous interpretation. Imported interpretation is the interpretation and understanding of the Bible without hesitation as brought and taught by missionaries (2005:245). Mbiti states: “the power of the Bible through imported interpretation and understanding was not enough to quench the thirst of the believers” (2005:245). Therefore reading and listening to the Bible on their own in their own language enabled African people to evolve additional hermeneutical methods of reading and interpretation. According to Mbiti “these seem to have better suited their taste and to address the spiritual hunger which had not

been fully addressed before” (2005:246). This phenomenon is found especially in Independent Churches. According to the observation of the researcher, many ELCIN theologians still depend on imported interpretation, which was brought in by missionaries from Finland. ELCIN needs to transform this kind of interpretation in order to better apply it to the context of its members, and to make its message relevant and situational. There are also challenges now to ELCIN from Pentecostal movements, who claim that ELCIN members do not know the Bible very well, and that they lack the Holy Spirit, which guides people to a true understanding of the biblical message. Mbiti challenges African biblical scholars to take seriously the challenge of reading and interpreting the Bible, not with Western eyes, but using their own African eyes as well. In this way “we take the presence of the Bible in our languages and countries seriously”(Mbiti 2005: 247).

Mbiti highlights the fact that “the Bible in Africa is not a closed book resting on dusty shelves. It is an open book. People are reading it and listening to it within the framework of their understanding” (2005:247). The biblical message has clearly penetrated to the people and they feel at home with the Bible; it has become part of their lives and is not foreign to them. In the same vein the Bible has also found a home in Africa where people fall in love with it and read it (Mbiti 2005: 247). Again Mbiti stresses the point that “nothing can substitute for the Bible” (2005:248), in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The Bible as the Word of God remains the same all the time

In the African context and spanning different regions and eras, the Bible’s impact has been far-reaching. Mbiti concludes:

One can see a similar impact of the Bible in many other African countries, starting with the colonial period and leading up to political independence, in the struggle against apartheid, and in the current defence of human rights, as well as in the transformation of the church life itself (2005:244)

5. 5. 3 Itumeleng J. Mosala⁴⁴

The South African Black theologian Mosala warns against the universality of the expression, “the Bible is the Word of God”. For Mosala this expression must be used in context, not

⁴⁴ Itumeleng J. Mosala is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies in the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Mosala wrote many articles about Black Theology and economic exploitation among the black working class in South Africa. Now he is working in the department of Art and Culture in the government of South Africa.

universally. He has in mind the black working class in South Africa who were oppressed and exploited, and who need to receive the Bible in the context of their oppression (Mosala 1986: 175-199; Mosala 1993: 51-72). The researcher agrees with Magesa and Mosala, that: “the Bible is the Word of God and is meaningful only when it is seen in concrete contexts and when it is used to promote life” (Magesa 1997: 28).

Mosala examines biblical hermeneutics in the context of the struggle of South African Blacks against apartheid and exploitation. He holds that Black Theology became a viable theoretical weapon of struggle in the hands of the exploited masses themselves (Mosala 1993:52). Black theology, as with other theologies, is based on the Bible as the Word of God. Black theology interprets the Bible from the experiences of the black masses, for example in South Africa. Black theology in South Africa served as a weapon with which to criticize white theology and white society established in South Africa under Apartheid against the majority of the Black community. What allowed Black theology in South Africa to use the Bible in the struggle against apartheid and exploitation, is the translatability and interpretation principle of the Bible itself.

Mosala holds that Black theology in South Africa, although influenced by other forces, has its starting point in the notion that the Bible is the revealed Word of God. He writes:

The black theologian’s task is to reveal God’s Word to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world. . . . the Word of God, therefore, represents one structuring pole of the biblical hermeneutics of Black Theology, while the black experience constitutes the other (Mosala 1993:53).

To reveal the Word of God is a difficult task, because it has to deal with many things like white domination, European culture and patriarchal culture, which have dominated the world for centuries. The main task of Black theology is to reveal the will of God in the midst of those hurdles.

According to Parker, the Bible itself is not a revelation, but it is a memorial and legacy of revelation; a record of the observations, impressions and opinions of godly persons involved in redemptive history (Parker 1977:91). The Bible is the means of revealing the will of God. The will of God is equality, justice, love and peace among people. Apartheid and exploitation robbed the masses of black South Africans, during the time of apartheid, of their peace, justice,

equality and love. That is why black theologians like Mosala and others engaged in the struggle of the black working class in South African to reveal the will of God.

The Bible tells us that God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the God of liberation. Therefore the Bible is the resource of Black Theology as well as of other liberation theologies. Ukpong confirms this when he says that liberation hermeneutics “uses the Bible as a resource for the struggle against oppression of any kind [including of women], based on the biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather always stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them” (Ukpong 2001:19).

For Mosala, oppression and exploitation were not only negative toward black people of South Africa, but also they had a positive outcome in that they provided the epistemological lens through which to perceive the God of the Bible as the God of liberation (Mosala 1994:53). In South Africa, the Bible as the Word of God has been used in different ways. Whites used it to support their position of apartheid and exploitation, whereas Black theologians used the Bible as the Word of God to liberate themselves from apartheid and exploitation. Ukpong asserts: “Because the Bible had been wrongly used as an instrument to entrench the apartheid system, it remains central to Black Theology in its struggle for liberation” (2001:21). The question arises: What kind of Word of God is that? If the Word of God is to reveal the will of God, and the will of God is the comprehensive well being (*shalom*) of all people, then Black Theology understands the Bible in the right way. White theology used the Bible to shape the ideology of Apartheid and discrimination against black masses in South Africa and to maintain this status quo (Magesa 1997:29). “Paradoxically, Black theology’s notion of the Bible as the Word of God carries the implication that there is such a thing as a nonideological appropriation of Scripture” (Mosala 1993:53).

The researcher supports Mosala’s approach to the Bible as the Word of God because if the Bible does not address the plight of the oppressed working and exploited class in South Africa, then the Bible is not the Word of God at all. The reason is simply that the biblical God, who was incarnated in Jesus Christ, sides with the oppressed, poor and marginalized. To confirm this Mosala cites Cornel West and Cone who insist that it is a biblical truth that God sides with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. This is not the only biblical truth, but is one of the biblical truths (Mosala 1993:54). The Bible reveals the truth about God, but it does not have

absolute and static authority and truth. Therefore each generation can draw its own truth about God from the Bible.

Kulikovsky supports Mosala in the argument about the truthfulness of the Bible, that the Bible is written revelation and the nature of this revelation is “true truth”. The Bible communicates the Word of God to humanity truly but not comprehensively. The biblical authors claim that the words they spoke and the words of people they wrote about were the authoritative words of God and not their own words (Kulikovsky 1977:3). The question stands: What constitutes biblical truth? When does the Bible speak truth? To answer these questions one has to look into the context in which the text was written and apply it to the context and cultural setting of the particular situation in which it is read. The biblical truth is revealed when the Bible addresses the situation and is relevant to the people concerned. The translators and the interpreters of the Bible knew that in order to make the Bible meaningful and relevant to Black people in South Africa, black people’s experience must be heard and seen within the Bible. Mosala argues further that;

the Word of God cannot be the critiqued in the light of black experience or any other experience. The only appropriate response is obedience. At best, the black experience can be seen in the light of the Word of God but not vice versa (1993:54).

The question here is what come first, is it the Black experience or is it the Bible, the Word of God? The researcher agrees with Mosala that the Bible, as the Word of God, must come first and give light to the Black experience and any other experiences, like women’s experiences. The Word of God cannot be secondary to human experiences. Masenya and other women theologians were also struggling with the same thing. Because there is no universal women’s experience, their final conclusion was that the Bible comes first (Masenya 1999:230-238). Black experience is not universal, the Bible, which is universal, must come first. The message of the Bible is universal because it contains commandments, which transcend all cultural barriers and are binding to all men and women everywhere; therefore its teachings and mandates apply to all cultural and situational contexts (Geisler 2005).

The Bible, as the Word of God, has been has used by the dominant class to persuade other classes in the society to accept its moral, political and cultural values. Therefore the Bible was used to support the ideology of a dominant class. The evidence in the Bible, for that matter, was converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual and economic

divisions (Mosala 1993:55). Magesa contributes to this argument, stating: “sexism, racism, oppression, capitalism and marginalization of various groups and classes of people have all found a safe haven in dominant biblical hermeneutics” (Magesa 1997:29). This means that the system put in place in South Africa was backed and enforced by the Bible, and that failing to adhere to it was compared to failing to respond faithfully to the Word of God. Nevertheless this has changed now. Black Theology denied this kind of interpretation of the Bible and makes the Bible the carrier of the good news for all people. “In this way the Bible becomes an historical, interclassist document” (Mosala 1993:55).

When speaking about the exploitation of working masses in South Africa, Mosala touches the point of the economic liberation of black people, not only political liberation. The Bible, the liberation resource book of liberation theology, points to political and economic liberation in the event of the Israelites being liberated from Egypt, the call of Israel to take special care of the poor, and the practice of justice among all. According to Ukpong, the Bible provides grounding for the hermeneutics of economic liberation (2001:19). Today political liberation and freedom has been achieved, but the struggle for economic liberation continues. Therefore, Mosala argues: “The political, cultural, economic, or historical relevance of this Word of God comes out of its capacity to be applied to the various facets of human life, and in this case of black human life”(1993:56). The sharing of material resources, the sharing of land, the sharing of economy is the sign of economical and political liberation today, and people have to address these problems according to the teaching of the Bible.

Mosala suggested that Black Theology needs a new exegetical starting point, different from the one used by powerful or dominant theologians. The researcher is convinced that the new starting point of exegesis is one that looks at the experiences of the poor, powerless, women, the oppressed and exploited masses of the black working-class. This kind of approach to the Bible will make differences. Mosala further argues:

Such an exegetical point of departure must itself be grounded in a materialist epistemology that is characterized, among many other things, by its location of truth not in a world beyond history but indeed within the crucible of historical struggles. The social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a black theology of liberation (1993:57).

Mosala concerns himself also with the theology of particularism and the theology of universalism. The researcher is of the understanding that theology is neither particularist nor universalist. On the one hand, if theology is concerned only with a section of humanity it does not make sense, because it excludes another part of humanity. On the other hand if theology is always universal, it will neglect the context of a particular society. Therefore theology can be both particularist and universalist at the same time. In many instances contextual theologies make more sense. The researcher agrees with Mosala that the Word of God is not limited it transcends boundaries of culture, class, race, and sex (Mosala 1993:57). Therefore the Bible is an instrument of transforming people, and systems in societies. Nadar cites Masenya, who maintains: “for the average African-South African Christian Bible reader, the Bible is regarded as the Word of God capable of transforming life and addressing different life situations, not simply a scholarly book to be critiqued” (Nadar 2002:115). The translation of the Bible is one of the processes that allow the Word of God to cross the barriers of culture and languages, and make such an immediate and direct impact on people.

Black theology and other forces in South Africa and Namibia contributed to the demise of the Apartheid system in those countries. Black Theology does not end with the demise of Apartheid and the gaining of freedom and democracy in South Africa. It is still needed and relevant in the country. Firstly, Black Theology is still needed to help destroy the legacy of Apartheid for it to disappear completely, a process which will take time. Secondly, the liberation struggle is an ongoing process involving the marginalized in society, who are still economically oppressed. The task of Black theology after the demise of Apartheid in South Africa and Namibia is no longer liberation from Apartheid, but is now liberation from the legacy of Apartheid, which is multifaceted. The end result will be a total liberation for fullness of life, reconciliation and integration (Ukpong 2001:21). The Bible as the Word of God must play an important role in this process.

The world is always in flux from time to time, whether political, social and theological. New ways of understanding and approaches are come and go. Presently the politicians invented the concept of ‘African Renaissance’, which refers to the changing of a paradigm; theologians are speaking of the theology of reconstruction, which implies to “design a new theological paradigm relevant to current socio-economic, cultural, and religious changes in Africa” (Farisani 2004:56). A Theology of reconstruction, according to Farisani, “is to address the current religious, cultural, political and socio-economic condition facing the African continent”

(2004:63). Therefore, a paradigm shift in theological discourse from liberation theology to reconstruction theology is needed in the world of poverty, women's emancipation and in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. African theologians are the ones to make a theology of reconstruction a reality, based on the Scriptures (Farisani 2004:76-77). The translatability theory of the Scripture contributes significantly to the theology of reconstruction because of its inclusive and accommodative nature.

5. 5. 4. Mercy Amba Oduyoye⁴⁵

Oduyoye developed women's theology in Africa and she is therefore referred to as "the mother of African women's theology" (Russell 2006:47). In this thesis she represents the feminist/womanist theological views of the Bible in Africa.

The Bible is a most precious common heritage of Christians all over the world and in all ages. It is not only a precious heritage, but also an open book, a book to be read (1995:33). As Christians, the people of the Book, African Christians read the Bible. Reading the Bible is the distinctive feature of Christians in Africa and elsewhere in the world. In ELCIN, for example, there are guidelines on how members should read the Bible on a daily basis. Devotions have to be conducted in each house, monitored by the pastor (ELCIN 2001:52-34). Each church department or church group selects one book of the Bible for its lessons of the year. *Omukwetu*⁴⁶ for example, records that the Bible lessons of the year 2006 are: for youth, I and II Timothy; for men, women and Bible groups, the Epistle to Romans; and for Sunday School, the text of the Sunday, according to the church calendar (*Omukwetu*, January 15-30, 2006: 4). This reveals how ELCIN is committed to promoting the reading of the Bible in all its departments and among all age groups of the church.

This practise of reading the Bible has brought many Africans to Christianity and allowed Christianity to take root in Africa (Oduyoye 1995:34). This statement reflects the history of the

⁴⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye is an African woman theologian from Ghana. She was a former General Secretary of World Council of Churches (WCC), Geneva, Switzerland. She is a Methodist. Oduyoye is a founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. She is also a director of the Institute of Women and Culture. Some of her articles are: Women and Ritual in Africa, and co-editor of "The Will to Arise", and many others publications.

⁴⁶ *Omukwetu* is the bimonthly ELCIN magazine. The word *omukwetu* is an Oshiwambo word and literally means 'one of us'. The church magazine was established in 1901, in fact it is the oldest magazine in Ovamboland. The original name was *Oshoondaxa*, [Sunday]. *Omukwetu* serves to spread the gospel of Christ and to supply information regarding Namibian society. ELOC Printing Press publishes the magazine at Oniipa ELOC Press.

spread of Christianity in the northern belt of Namibia among Ovandonga, Ovakwanyama and Okavango people who today form the backbone of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN). Once they had access to the Bible, particularly in the vernacular, the people read it and it inspired them; they were convinced and converted to Christianity. They can be described as good Christians. Good Christians are those people who read and relate their lives to the Bible.

According to Oduyoye, among African Christians the Bible symbolizes God's presence and God's protection. Where there is a Bible, God is present and where God is present there is protection. One can find the Bible in bags, cars, and in public places like houses, hospitals and hotels. The Bible is regarded as a source of truth. "It speaks the truth and protects the innocent" (1995:35), therefore it is used in some nations in courts of law to ensure that the truth is told, When people are giving evidence some even have to swear pointing to or touching the Bible (Oduyoye 1995:35).

Oduyoye points out that the Bible is a very popular book in Africa, not only among Christians, but also among the people of other faiths. According to one of the interviewees for this thesis, Nghifikwa, when a healer in Ovamboland is performing his/her healing, beside him/her there is a Bible. The reason for this is that many people believe in the Bible, therefore its presence in the healing process means something to them (Nghifikwa 2006). The Bible is needed in Africa for guidance and comfort, but it is also often the only book available in vernacular languages. Oduyoye agrees with Mbiti that creative literature written by Africans like Ngungi Wa Tiongo of Nigeria, Abednego Nghifikwa of Namibia and many others, often quotes or alludes to the Bible (1995:35).

Oduyoye notices the closeness of the Bible to African cultures. She writes:

...Africans who study the Bible locate themselves within its history, its culture, its structure, and its obvious assumption that the divine is a reality and is involved in the created order (Oduyoye 1995:36).

According to the researcher's informants in Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali, there are similarities between the Bible and their culture, especially in the Old Testament. The stories of creation, sacrifice, birth rites, God calling people such as Abraham, pastoralists and agriculturists, family lives etc. are some examples to which they pointed (Hambyuka 2006; Amkongo 2006; Ndevaetela 2006). Oduyoye concludes "the Bible mirrors life, affirming and

confirming African cultural, social and religious life” (1995:36). The Bible covers the wholeness of life as it is seen in Africa. In African societies there is no separation between religion and culture in daily life. To consider the wholeness of both African life and biblical life in translation will make the Bible relevant in African communities. Because it does not divorce religion from other aspects of life, Africans feel at home with the Bible.

Oduyoye shares with other biblical scholars the view that the Bible is the Word of God. If a person wants to speak with God he/she must go to the Bible. To sum up she writes:

The Bible speaks of God and God’s dealings with the world and environment in human realities. It is the written source of theology, and it challenges, confirms, corrects, modifies, and reshapes the belief in God that informs Africa’s own religion and causes those who read it to try a fresh approach to God, Christianity, and life. The Bible is the word of life (1995:36-37).

The Bible is the source of theology in Africa. If there is any theology in Africa, which is not based on the Bible, it is not acceptable to Christians. African theology is biblical theology. Oduyoye states that the Bible is the only written source of Christian theology, liturgy and practice. It is through the Bible that the Christian church constructs types of ministries and validates the roles of persons in the congregations (1995:37). With regard to the encounter of the Bible with Africans Oduyoye emphasizes “The Bible has brought a message of hope to Africa and African Christians; therefore we [African] hail and love the Bible” (1995:38).

The most distinctive issue Oduyoye engages with is that of the Bible among women. Much has been said about the Bible in general in Africa, but little has been said about women. Women also take part in the reading of the Bible in Africa, although it is regarded as a patriarchal book or a book that originated from a patriarchal society. The first women to appropriate the Bible in Africa did not read it on their own because in the past they did not read: they heard the Bible and its stories retold. Women met God in the form of narrative and passed the message on and even formulated the message in a different form to their respective family members. In ELCIN, the women’s leagues are the backbone of Christian life in parishes and homes. The members of these leagues read the Bible, they know the Bible, and they relate to it as well. These women are called *kakeiwa*⁴⁷, in Oshiwambo. ELCIN statistics each year show that the greatest numbers

⁴⁷ *Kakeiwa* literally means one dresses oneself with a scarf on one’s head. Women who are called are those who carry the Bible at all times and are involved in the church activities. They live exemplary lives among the others.

of churchgoers are women. They participate in most of the church activities. In 2004 the women's league had 10 168 members, compared with the men's league which had 2 832 (ELCIN Statistics 2004:4).

African women in many communities have appropriated the Christian faith from sermons and from reading the Bible on their own. In Bible classes women's faith has been strengthened and they have gained the courage to carry on with their lives (Oduyoye 1995:39). Reading on one's own results in a deeper understanding than does listening. Hambyuka supports the reading of the Bible because according to him, the sermon is just a person's interpretation, which is sometimes biased. In most cases people forget the sermon. However, if one listens to the sermon and also reads the Bible, one will understand the text better (2006).

In reading the Bible women discover some experiences or particular aspects of the society and the church that "could not be the will of God" (Oduyoye 1995:38), but are human-made. Women have a slim chance of challenging oppressive or discriminatory situations openly in the church and in the society. Oduyoye pointed out that only on very rare occasions have African churchwomen challenged African cultures, even when they have judged its practices to be inhuman and unjust (1995:38). As a pastor of ELCIN, the researcher agrees with this statement. In elder's council meetings and in parishes, women suffer under the hands of elders. Women who experience abusive marriages are told to go back home. Some women, who leave their families because of problems in their homes, are regarded as having run away from homes where they should stay. These women often do not speak about their ordeals instead they cry out. It could be argued that male theologians cannot handle these kinds of situations fairly, and that women theologians should tackle them.

There are differences between women theologians in Africa and churchwomen. What is significant is that women theologians reread the Bible to access its meaning for their gender. Churchwomen read the Bible and understand and accepted it literally as the Word of God. However, through rereading the Bible they are empowered by the fact that within the Bible itself there is reinterpretation (Oduyoye 1995:40), which differs from the interpretations of male theologians. According to Oduyoye, women in Africa see affluence and poverty, misuse of political and economic power, the battle of religions in Africa, and many other afflictions, and they go to the Bible in search of a word from the God of justice and peace to solace them (1995:40).

Among the women in Africa the Bible has been a pivotal tool for searching for meaning. “Women have brought their experience into Bible translation, seeking accuracy and inclusiveness” (Oduyoye 1995:41). This point needs to be considered very seriously by the Bible translators. The translated Bible in African languages (and others) must be inclusive. African women have accepted that the Bible is translatable although it emerged from a patriarchal culture. Therefore the Bible must include them in its message. “Reading the Bible among a community of believers becomes a practice for empowering women” (Oduyoye 1995:39). Many African languages do not have articles like he, she, or it, which are exclusive. In Oshiwambo (Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga) if someone is coming they say ‘*Okwe uya*’ or ‘*ye okwe uya*’ [he/she comes]. This does not discriminate against anybody on the grounds of sex. In Hebrew, Greek and English there are articles, she, he or it, *tou, tov, hen* etc. The Bible in African languages in Namibia, however, does carry the sexist connotations of the original languages from which it was translated. The contributions of women theologians to the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages aims at making the Bible relevant to all Africans, including women. This is possible because the Bible is translatable.

The aspects that women seek from the Bible are the texts that encourage them and empower them. The Bible creates hope for many women who sometimes feel belittled by their circumstances. There are concrete examples in the Bible showing that God hears the cries of women and restores their womanness and humanity. In the Bible we read of women who were barren or aging without children, and God opened their wombs (Sara, Hanna, Elizabeth and many others). Oduyoye has experienced childlessness but this did not disappoint her. She said: “For me, it is life lived fully as God would have it, life as a doxology to God, who first loved us” (1999:118). According to Oduyoye women also seek for a word from God that validates them apart from their role in child bearing. Again they look for strong women of the Bible as their role models (1995:41). Among the members of ELCIN there are women carrying the names of biblical women like Sara, Hanna, Pennina, Maria and Elizabeth, but rarely names like Delilah. There is a saying in Oshiwambo: *Edhina ekogidho*, meaning, if you carry the name you will be like your namesake. Therefore Ovawambo people do not want to carry names with bad connotations, but only names of exemplary people.

African women believe that the purpose of God is comprehensive well being for all human beings irrespective of their sex. The Bible testifies that God wills all humans to live in the

fullness of life, including women. African culture discriminates against women and biblical texts also originate from a patriarchal society, thus women aim to draw from the Bible the affirmation of the dignity and the full humanity of women. African women theologians conclude that what is not liberative in the Bible cannot be of God. This means any biblical text, which portrays the inferiority of women is not liberative, therefore, it cannot be of God (Oduyoye 1995:41). The good news the Bible has for women is the liberating and empowering work of God. Women also recognize the oppressive elements of the Bible, and want to be free to critique them. At the same time that the Bible oppresses women it also liberates them (Oduyoye 1995:42).

African women theologians reiterate with Oduyoye: “We read the Bible knowing that no one has the last word on the word of God” (Oduyoye 1995:43), as opposed to what church tradition has tried to advocate. No doctrine is above Holy Scripture. Oduyoye thus writes:

Women are committed to fullness of life in Christ [who is at the center of the biblical message]; therefore, they are involved in life-enhancing activities and courses. Reading the Bible, they bring all this experience with them and reflect on the word from God as it comes to them through the Bible. Women’s approach to the Bible is anchored in faith in God who acts continuously in the affairs of creation. ... From the Bible, generations have protested many forms of injustice. Today, when African women enumerate the “texts of terror” both in the Bible and in the real life, they include cultural texts, racist texts, imperialist texts, colonial texts, and neocolonial texts, but they continue to hold on to the Bible because in it, also lie embedded the texts of love that empowers (1995:44).

For African women theologians the Bible should not be rejected as such but should be constructively critiqued. It is the source of their theologies, but they have to point out the “texts of terror”⁴⁸ in the Bible. The Bible is the Word of God and it must remain so always, and it must remain an open book for all. The Bible has been read and interpreted in different stages and at different times; the Post-colonial era is one of the stages of reading the Bible. The works of Musa Dube will show how the Bible was used to shape the ideology of imperialism in Africa, and how it can free people from this during post-colonialism.

⁴⁸ Texts of terror are the biblical texts which portray human inferiority and human mistreatment especially by others.

5. 5. 5 Musa W. Dube⁴⁹

Dube in her work *The Postcolonial Condition and the Bible* (2000) points out how the Bible was used by imperialists to rob the land from Africans in Africa. The following story shows what happened. The story goes like this:

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible (Dube 2000:3).

This story demonstrates that the Bible was used to take the land from African people. It shows that the Bible is a powerful tool used by colonizers to get the land from black Africans. Dube analyses this story as follows:

It explains how colonization was connected to the coming of the white man, how it was connected to his (white man) use of the Bible, and how the black African possession of the Bible is connected to the white man's taking of African people's lands (2000:3).

This was the fulfillment of the vision of the missionary David Livingstone of "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization" which he brought to Sub-Saharan Africa (Dube 2006: 51). Livingstone, like many other missionaries was a doctor, botanist, explorer, ethnographer, and mapmaker (Dube 2000:5). He prepared the way for the coming of the white man to Africa. In Namibia, in Ovamboland the missionary Martin Rautanen took a similar path and had a similar approach (Tirronen 1977:147).

This story shows that the Bible was connected to Christianity and Christianity to imperialist power. Christian missionaries were part and parcel of the colonizers therefore, "missionaries and other imperialist agents were all informed and influenced by the same culture, which includes the biblical faith" (Dube 2000:4). Missionaries with the Bible in their hands were mediators and representatives of their colonial countries of origin (Buys and Nambala 2003:39). Livingstone affirmed this when he said: "My food is to do the will of England who sent me and to complete the work of the God" (Dube 2006:53). Dube concludes that the Bible, although it has become a book of Sub-Saharan Africa, has an inheritance that will always be linked to and remembered for its role in facilitating European imperialists (Dube 2000:3).

⁴⁹ Musa W. Dube is a professor at the University of Botswana in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. She teaches the New Testament. Her research interests are gender, feminist theory, the gospels and postcolonial studies. She is a Methodist. She has written books and articles that reflect on theology and social issues such as; *The Postcolonial Condition and the Bible 2000*, Co-editor of *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women 2001*, *Talitha Cum*.

Language and culture play an important role in influencing the lives of the people. The language carries the meaning of the culture. The English language, which was spoken by colonizers and missionaries, was saturated with Christian ideas. So the English language, which carries the way of English thinking, its ethics, and its perception of reality as a whole is heavily informed by biblical ideas. Christian ideas are based on biblical faith. Ultimately this means that the biblical texts have informed and inspired imperialist violence (Dube 2000:5).

Dube points out how the Bible was used during Apartheid, in South Africa. The Bible as the Word of God shaped the ideology of Apartheid and exploitation in South Africa. A part of humanity in Apartheid South Africa was robbed of land, which is the source of all wealth, and was excluded and oppressed by others in the name of the Bible. Dube states:

Apartheid, a violent and exploitative ideology of racial discrimination, was propounded by Bible readers and supported by their institution, based on biblical texts. But apartheid only followed the dispossession of South African people of their lands and property by white settlers, who claim to be a chosen race (in the model of Israelites) with the right to take the land, to settle on it, and to displace the natives in the best way possible, which, in this case became apartheid (2000:6).

Can the Bible, which was an instrument in the hands of imperialists, be called the Word of God? If it is the Word of God, then it is supporting the imperialist, then God is also siding with the imperialists. But the biblical God, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ, is a liberating God and a God for all nations. Thus God never sides with the imperialist, nor does he support imperialism and colonialism. Despite the support the Bible gives to imperialists and oppressors, liberation theologies maintain that the biblical God is a liberator God.

According to Dube, the Bible occupies the minds of African Christians in activities among writers, poets and music composers. Among African writers, Dube mentions Ngungi wa Thiongo. Ngungi is concerned with the use of English literature and language in colonized sub-Saharan Africa. The African worldview was replaced by a European worldview. Europe was the center of the world. Dube concludes that the employment of imperialist literature was an integral part of colonization, alienating the subjugated from their own languages, religions, and environment and cultures (Dube 2000:7). Ngungi shows how the Bible plays an important role, in bringing the light to darkest Africa. He was told that Jesus used the English language, which never happened. The colonizers wanted African people to make the English language a 'holy

language or biblical language, and to make it more serious, they compare the English language with Jesus Christ who is portrayed in the Bible. So the colonizers and the colonized writers make no difference between English and Christianity, they put them on the same footing (Dube 2000:8). The Bible was limited to such an extent that it only served imperialist. The Bible was thus added to the other weapons used by the colonizers, like language and the sword (Dube 2000:8). If the Bible is the word of God, it cannot be part of the weapon of the colonizers instead it must be the liberative Word of God.

Dube discusses the theologies of African theologians among whom are Kwesi Dickson and Canaan Banana. It could be stressed that the Bible is for all humanity black and white, poor and rich, men and women. It belongs to all people in their various categories. There is no Bible just for very important people (VIPs). However Dickson writes “the church through its movement from continent to continent, country to country, and people to people, has seemed particularly exclusive” (Dube 2000:12). That means that the mission of the church was exclusive from its outset. Dickson, thus states that exclusiveness is the doctrine which maintains that the culture of those being evangelized cannot be looked upon in any way as a basis upon which to build” (Dube 2000:12), therefore wherever Christianity is to be planted the culture, language and religion has to give way for the new religion, together with its culture and language. The colonized lost not only their religion and culture, but also their land to the colonizers. Dickson sees this as contrary to the mission of the church and the researcher agrees with him. The mission of the church must be inclusiveness and not exclusiveness. The church must preach the gospel, which includes all people irrespective of their colour, race, gender, culture and language. According to Dickson, the church is continuing with what the Bible did from Old Testament to New Testament and the researcher supports Dickson in maintaining that the Bible has attitudes of both exclusiveness and inclusiveness toward people of other nations.

Christianity was identified with Western culture, which makes it difficult for non-Europeans to understand the Christian faith at a deep and meaningful level (Dube 2000:13). Christianity in Africa cannot be understood in its packaging of European culture, rather it must be understood from within African culture and language to make sense. Mugambi regarded missionaries as culturally arrogant because they did not want to take Africanism seriously, and this arrogance remains the greatest shortcoming of Christian missionary activity in Africa and elsewhere (Mugambi 2004:12). This is one of the problems addressed by translatability. It does not make sense if Africans have to leave their culture and adopt European culture in order to become

Christian. Africans must remain both African and Christian. That is why Bediako holds that Christianity is an African religion too. This is what translatability is trying to bring to the attention of the people. The God of the Bible is the God who gave the gift of different cultures, and he declared it to be very good. So the Bible, as well as Christianity, has to be understood in any given culture, language and context. However, the Bible is the Word of God for Africans only if it is translated into African languages and if it is addressing Africans in their culture and context. The understanding of mission as a process of Westernization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was inseparable from European cultural imperialism (Dube 2000:14), and was misleading.

Canaan Banana, although he recognizes the importance of the Bible and the Church as embodying a liberating message, "...holds that no matter how we emphasize the liberating and correcting strands within today's Bible, there remains the sense in which, unless one embraces the Christian concept of God, one is not fully a person of God" (Dube 2000:14). That means that accepting the Bible as the Word of God does not make a person fully a Christian, because those who brought the Bible and Christianity to African acted contrary to the will of the God of the Bible whom they proclaimed. It is God himself who must also be embraced. According to Dube, Banana calls for an inclusive Bible including not only religious inclusivism but also dealing with the concerns of gender, race, apartheid and colonialism. An inclusive Bible takes the diversity of God's creation seriously. Banana also calls for editing, revising, and adding to the Bible, because "the history of the Christian church is a catalog of exploitation in the name of Christ"(Dube 2000:14). The researcher agrees with the point Banana makes about the need for editing and revising the Bible, but differs on the point of adding to the Bible. The Bible is a finished document. On this point the Bible defends itself to keep its purpose (John 21:25). The Bible is the Word of God if its message is inclusive and is liberated from imperialist ideology. Therefore new translations and new interpretations of the Bible are needed all the time. Translatability is the only key to appropriating the message of the Bible in all contexts. The following section of this chapter deals with the message of the Bible in the context of sickness, as understood by the theologian Musimbi R A Kanyoro.

5. 5. 6 Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro⁵⁰

Kanyoro tackles the Bible as the Word of God from a women's and an HIV and AIDS perspective. It is shown statistically that women are more vulnerable in contracting HIV and AIDS. In her Essay: "*Reading the Bible in the Face of HIV and AIDS*," Kanyoro holds that women theologians of The Circle of Concerned African Theologians are engaging in making a contribution to the education of societies, to advocate for justice through theology and Scripture, and to empower women to confront the HIV and AIDS pandemic through a better understanding of the foundation of their faith as is presented in the Bible (Kanyoro 2004:viii). This statement indicates that the main source of their teaching is the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible, the foundation of faith in God, will be at the center of education in the search for justice and health in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

According to Kanyoro resisting injustice is the central theme of the biblical text (Kanyoro 2004: viii). God is a God of justice and God demands justice to prevail among people. God wills justice and hates injustice (Amos 2:6-7; 5:24). Resisting injustice, as shown in biblical texts, is God's option and it must become our (women's) option in the face of HIV and AIDS (Kanyoro 2004:ix). Kanyoro suggests that young women and girls who read the Bible today need to have at their disposal necessary tools, skills and other ways of reading the Bible (Kanyoro 2004:ix). This means that young women and men need other resources and new eyes or lenses with which to read the Bible. In this way they will find new meanings from the Bible, which will empower them in the face of HIV and AIDS. For Kanyoro the writings of women theologians are helpful, because they liberate the Bible from male dominated interpretation. She points to the book "*Grant Me Justice!*" as a "resource book written by women for women and about women" (Kanyoro 2004:ix). This book is the product of women theologians as they realize that there is very little literature written by African women about themselves (Phiri 1997: 68).

The researcher agrees with Kanyoro that a book like this is valuable and that other helpful books and essays written by men and women should not be neglected either. These other resources can be read together with the Bible.

⁵⁰ Musimbi Kanyoro was the former General Secretary of the World YWCA up to 2007. She coordinated the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians between 1996 and 2002. She initiated the Circle's work on HIV and AIDS . She has written many articles and books about HIV and AIDS in relation to the Bible and the Church. She is a Lutheran.

The root cause of unjust practices that make women vulnerable as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned are laws, culture, and church traditions and some are derived from the Bible itself (Kanyoro 2004:ix), because every reading of the Bible and its interpretation is contextual and ideological (Mugambi 2004: 22-25). If the Bible also fuels the injustice practiced in the world, then how could it be the Word of God? Humans can create an unjust system and support it with the biblical text and make it acceptable. This is what happened with women. Injustice is not in the Bible but in the hearts and minds of human beings. The Bible needs to be liberated from unjust systems in the world, especially as regards women. Women themselves have to take up arms to fight injustice in society. Those (men and women) who are infected with HIV and AIDS have a unique contribution to make in strengthening the response to the epidemic at all levels and in all sectors (Kanyoro 2004:ix), and to resist the injustice that leads to infection and the injustice that results from infection.

The Bible is the means of transformation. With the Bible changes are possible. The factors that made women vulnerable in the face of HIV and AIDS, according to Kanyoro, are amendable to change, given sufficient attention, commitment and resources. The Bible is a valuable resource in this regard. Kanyoro asserts: “We can use the same hope found in these texts to apply to the situation of HIV and AIDS and preach commitment, leadership and determination to bring about change” (2004:ix). This is possible because the biblical message is ambiguous, and at the same time the Bible does not have one message, it has a variety of messages for each given situation and culture. The biblical message is needed to transform the HIV and AIDS pandemic, for a better life. There is no better resource in this world than the Bible, which women theologians may use in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The Bible, in any language, and in any culture, is the only book to restore hope and to make change possible.

Hope for the future plays an important role in the message of the Bible. Christians have hope in Christ for a better future. If there is no hope, there is no future at all. The biblical message is about hope. Hope in Christ is never despised. What helps women to have hope is reading the Bible contextually because the particular text has an impact on them although the texts are not speaking directly about HIV and AIDS (Kanyoro 2004:x). The biblical texts referred to are those speaking about contagious diseases, and long illness. What is striking in these stories is the fact that Jesus healed them and restored the lives of the sufferers to normality. The messages from these stories are clear: “that nothing is impossible, not even death has the final

say. Facing HIV and AIDS from a faith perspective means finding every possible thread of hope that will keep us from giving in and giving up on ourselves”(Kanyoro 2004:xi).

Challenging the culture is one of the tasks that the women theologians are facing. Culture may be a biblical culture, national culture or a religious culture. Any culture, which causes vulnerability in women, must be challenged. Challenging and resisting cultural practices is one of the most urgent tasks in the face of HIV and AIDS. Social subordination, failure to recognize the basic human rights of women and the growing levels of poverty, to mention some, expose many women to a high risk of infection (Kanyoro 2004:xi). The Bible is part of the culture, which oppresses women; therefore, its culture, language and interpretation must be challenged. “Women have to challenge gender norms, which legitimize the inferior status of women”(Kanyoro 2004:xi). If the Bible remains unchallenged, it will be irrelevant in providing hope and if it becomes irrelevant, it ceases to be the Word of God, because the Word of God is a living address to living people (Nürnberg 2005:4).

5. 7. Summary

To summarize the views of contemporary theologians in Africa about the Bible as the Word of God the following observations are made. All theologians dealt with in this chapter hold that the Bible is the Word of God. As the Word of God, the Bible needs to be translated into the languages of people and interpreted to address the situations and the problems of particular people in a particular context, in a particular culture and in a particular language. The problem is that a person cannot be meaningfully addressed outside his/her culture, but only within his/her culture and that is why women theologians suggest the reading of the Bible within cultural experience. Luther, a reformer, translated the Bible into the German language and at the same time he freed the Bible from the hands of powerful leaders of that time and gave it to the common people. This is what translatability is meant to implement. The Bible is the Word of God only if it is relevant to the people concerned. Nürnberg’s approach to the Bible is that people must use their critical facilities to discern what the will of God really is. The Bible is the secondary form of the Word of God. First, the Word of God reached human beings in oral form or spoken word and later, people wrote down the word of God according to their own cultures and in their own languages. Interpretation is needed in order to discern what the Word of God is. Furthermore the Bible needs to be translated, interpreted and channelled. Hasheela adds that the word of God is the Word in relation to human beings. The Word of God connects God with his people. The message needs to be communicated to people in a clear and understandable

way, in our own words and our own terms and it must be relevant to human beings in their situations.

Contemporary theologians dealt with in this chapter have similarities and differences, as far as the statement the Bible is the Word of God is concerned. For Maluleke, the Bible is at the center of mission work. The Bible is a primary source of missionary work because it is the Word of God. Mbiti emphasised that the Bible is a living and unique Word of God Almighty, it is an influential book and a means of transformation of communities. As far as interpretation of the Bible is concerned Maluleke and Mbiti assert that local interpretation of the Bible using African tools and skills is more valid than other imported interpretations. For Mbiti imported interpretation and understanding is not enough to quench the thirst of African believers, because it is not in their context. While Maluleke asserts that the readers of the Bible recognize something worthwhile in the Bible, Mbiti affirms that the readers of the Bible get something out of it like guidance, inspiration and enlightenment.

Maluleke and Mbiti emphasise that in Africa the Bible does not only serve as religious book, but also as literature and a story book, because it is used in different forms by different people. This means that the Bible is not only the Word of God, but a package of resources as well. As the Word of God the Bible needs interpretation to suit any context. Mbiti shows how the Bible was used to justify the injustice system of Apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, whereas Mosala holds that Black Theology, as part of liberation theology, uses the Bible in the struggle against apartheid, exploitation and oppression of the black working class in South Africa. As far as Black theology is concerned black masses in South Africa were the context of reading the Bible, so Black theology interpreted the Bible from the experiences of the black masses in South Africa. That means that contextualization plays an important role in interpreting the Bible. Maluleke, Mbiti, Mosala and Nürnberger, as well as the researcher, agree on this point of contextualization of the biblical message, because it is the only way to make it relevant and acceptable to the people concerne. Ukpong confirms this point as he writes about two sides in contextual reading of the Bible: "... how we read texts, that is, the meanings we get from texts depend on all these: readings are responses to these contextual "ingredients" facilitated by the method we use" (2004:25). Ukpong gave an example as to how the Exodus story was used in South Africa to legitimate the Afrikaner's Apartheid system, and by Black South Africans in their struggle against Apartheid. It shows clearly that each side used a different ideological position for its own particular reading of the Bible, and it was contextual (Ukpong 2004:25).

Mosala also points out that the biblical message must be a liberative message because the God of the Bible is a liberating God from any kind of suffering and oppression.

Oduyoye holds that if a person wants to speak with God he/she must go to the Bible. According to her the Bible has brought a message of hope to Africa and African Christians; therefore we [Africans] hail and love the Bible. The Bible mirrors life, affirming and confirming African cultural, social and religious life. She also points out that the Bible symbolizes the presence of God and God's protection. The Bible is the source of theology in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Oduyoye joins Maluleke and Mbiti in saying that the Bible is a resource book in Africa. The Bible strengthens women's faith in the midst of oppression by males. Oduyoye and Mosala stress the point of liberation and contextualization of biblical messages although they differ on the approach. Oduyoye emphasises women's oppression by men, while Mosala put emphasis on black exploitation. Oduyoye speaks of women experiences while Mosala speaks of Black experiences which ought to be read in the Bible to make it a Word of God. For the researcher both experiences are needed in interpreting the Bible meaningfully. The meaningful interpretation of the Bible is when its message is inclusive and liberative.

Dube joins Maluleke, Mbiti and Mosala with the view that the Bible is for all humanity, black and white, poor and rich, men and women. It belongs to all people whatever their categories. Therefore, although the Bible was used by the White man to rob the land from Black Africans and by imperialists to shape their ideology, in the same vein it was used by the Black theologians in Africa, to get back their land from whites and get rid of the Apartheid system in South Africa and Namibia. The Word of God is to reveal the will of God, and the will of God is the comprehensive well being (*shalom*) of all people, so Black Theologians use the Bible in the right way. Dube, like Maluleke and Mbiti points out that the Bible occupies the minds of African people in their activities in writing, poetry and music composers. With Mosala, Dube holds that the inclusiveness of the Word of God that transcends boundaries of culture, class, race and sex, it is not limited.

Kanyoro, from a feminist theology and HIV and AIDS perspectives, maintains that the Bible as the Word of God is the main source of women theologian's teaching in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Kanyoro, like other contemporary theologians, also notes the contextualization of the biblical message emphasising the context of women and HIV and

AIDS. In the context of HIV and AIDS there is no other book which women theologians can use in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Kanyoro agrees with Mosala that the Bible is the foundation for resisting injustice against the oppressed and marginalized people. The God of the Bible is the God of justice. Kanyoro, Mbiti, Maluleke and Mosala agree on the point that the Bible is a powerful tool to transform society, because the Word of God is powerful. Kanyoro and Oduyoye share the same sentiment that the Bible carries the message of hope to women and to people living with HIV and AIDS. The social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class and peasantry constitutes the only valid hermeneutical starting point for a black theology of liberation. The Word of God transcends boundaries of culture, class, race, and sex.

All theologians dealt with emphasised that the Bible is the Word of God. Its message must be inclusive for all people irrespective of their class, sex etc, and it can legitimately be used as a weapon for struggle in the hands of all the oppressed, be they black exploited workers, women or those infected by HIV and AIDS. Therefore the Bible as the Word of God must be all-inclusive, and the translatability method is the answer to this.

5. 8. Conclusion

The Bible is the Word of God and it remains so, and as Luther said that God saved the Holy Scripture from those who wanted to destroy it. Translation and interpretation of the Bible is essential because it makes the biblical message relevant to people in their own language, culture race, gender and classes and context. This chapter dealt with the concept of the Bible among African communities in general and Namibia in particular. The facts that there are different perceptions show that the Bible is a highly adaptable book. The understanding of the Bible depends largely on who introduced it, how the receiving community accepted it and how it is used in the community. Therefore Christian missionaries played a role in the way the Bible has been accepted in Africa. The paradigm shifts in the understanding of the Bible have also been discussed.

The Bible, to be truly the Word of God, must be inclusive, it must accommodate all culture, it must be free from all kinds of racial and gender discrimination, it must carry a liberating message, and it must be free from ideologies of imperialism, and above all it must advocate the God of all nations. The translators, interpreters and readers of the Bible must allow the Bible to talk to them as well and not only vice versa. The Bible should not only be an instrument in the

hands of the powerful, but a resource for all lives. The Bible as the Word of God reveals to us that God is the source and the destiny of reality as a whole, and also that God establishes and maintains a wholesome communicative relationship between God and creation. The Word of God cannot be confined to the written document only it is more than that. In all its forms “the Word of God is God’s redeeming response to this deepest of all human needs, the need that underlies all other needs” (Nürnberg 2004:6).

African theologians Nürnberg, Hasheela, Maluleke, Mbiti, Mosala, Oduyoye, Dube and Kanyoro shed more light on the new understanding of the Bible, as the Word of God. According to their views there is no way to simply call the Bible the Word of God. The Bible is only the Word of God when it addresses people’s problems within their context, culture and language. The views on the Bible of these African theologians are acceptable to ELCIN and make the translation process of the Bible in vernaculars possible. Ultimately, therefore, the aim of the translation and interpretation of the Bible in the vernacular languages is to allow all nations in the world to hear the salvation message in their own tongues, culture and context, and to make the message relevant to them. The Bible, which contains God’s dealings with people, is a statement of faith, and it remains so at all times, to all people.

We have dealt with how the translatability theory has challenged the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. The next chapter will focus on dialogue in the biblical translation into vernacular in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), specifically dialogue between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity.

CHAPTER SIX

DIALOGUE AS TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY IN NAMIBIA.

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the challenges that translatability posed to the understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. The views of African theologians from different disciplines were discussed at length. This chapter will focus on dialogue between Oshiwambo and Okavango African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity in the process of vernacularization, and dialogues between religion and culture. It will also look at behaviours that support dialogue, Christianity and other faiths in dialogue, translatability as dialogue and how dialogue took place in the form of concepts, terminology and appropriateness of words in African Christian theology and the Bible in vernacular languages in northern Namibia. The aim of this chapter is to look at how translatability and interpretation theories were applied in the process of the translation of Christianity and its Scripture into the vernacular languages in The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN), and at how this process was a dialogue. Translatability helps to maintain the African heritage in Christianity and in the Bible in the vernacular languages. What then is dialogue and why is it needed? This chapter will answer the question: Is there any dialogue between ATR and Christianity in Northern Namibian languages and culture, which features in Christianity and its Scripture when translated into vernacular languages? To answer this question, the following issues will also be discussed in this chapter: the dialogue between religion and culture, Christianity and other faiths in dialogue, dialogue in the use of terms and concepts and the appropriateness and implications of concepts and terminology in ELCIN. The next section deals with the dialogue between religion and culture.

6.2 The dialogue between religion and culture

It is obvious that there must be dialogue between culture and religion when they come into contact. According to the understanding of the researcher, since its inception, Christianity has been engaged in dialogue with other faiths it has encountered. In doing so it accommodated them and allowed for mutual enrichment. According to Walls, Christianity moved from Christendom to World Christianity. There was a time when Christianity was a Western

religion, but through its expansion to the non-Western world, through its principle of translatability, it became world religion. Walls writes:

Events so welded Christianity and the West together, and the domestications of Christianity in the West was so complete, the process of acculturation there so successful, that the faith seemed inseparable from the categories of European life and thought (2005:49).

Although in the past Christianity was bound up with European civilization, today there are many countries in the world where the Christian faith is dominant and where it permeates all spheres of life, including culture. Among Ovawambo and Okavango Christian communities it is difficult to separate Christianity from their daily life, as it was difficult to separate religion from daily life. Christianity has become part of African culture in that region. Thus Mbiti, Sanneh, Bediako, and Maluleke have argued that Christianity is an African religion too (Mbiti 1992; Sanneh 1989; Bediako 1997; Maluleke 1997). The great scope of religion is encapsulated by the following passages, which also indicates how closely bound it is with culture.

The following explanations of dialogue will provide a clear understanding of what it entails. Glenna Gerard (1995) describes that dialogue concerns:

what we value and how we define it. It is about discovering what our true values are, about looking beyond the superficial and automatic answers to our questions. Dialogue is about expanding our capacity for attention, awareness and learning with and from each other. It is about exploring the frontiers of what it means to be human, in relationship to each other and our world⁵¹.

Linda Ellinor (1996) adds that,

dialogue is a foundational communication process leading directly to personal and organizational transformation. It assists in creating environments of high trust and openness, with reflective and generative capacities⁵².

In religious terms the concept of dialogue is

A conversation among persons or groups who differ on a subject, the primary purpose of which is for each party to learn from the other. Religion (or its functional equivalent, ideology) can be understood as

⁵¹ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

⁵² <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

"an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly. Religion, or ideology, is at the source and sustaining core of every culture⁵³.

In the present age, human beings are in the process of moving out of a very long "Age of Monologue," of communicating mainly within their own socio-cultural communities into a new era, the "Age of Dialogue," wherein humans are increasingly learning to dialogue with those who are religiously/ideologically, and therefore, culturally, different from them. In order to do so successfully, they are beginning first to listen to "the other" in order to learn from them, and then respond. Dialogue also allows people of different faiths or ideological backgrounds to live together peacefully and share a common life. It also allows very different people to discuss and tackle issues of common concern such as justice, peace, human rights and other issues that concern the entire society⁵⁴.

Academically dialogue is important and takes place when, for example, exponents of different religious faiths meet and discuss the theological/philosophical bases of their traditions. In this way a common understanding of the way in which each religious tradition has sought to explain and approach reality can be reached. Dialogues help to overcome prejudices and misconceptions accumulated over a certain period. "Dialogue enriches, enlarges, challenges and corrects the way some religions have understood and approached religious life in other traditions"⁵⁵.

The necessity of dialogue with other religions in African Christian theology enables the inclusion or accommodation of elements from other religions that are in harmony with the biblical message. Munyika put it rightly when he writes:

There is a need for the inclusion of some elements of other cultures and religions into Christian tradition as long as these are in line with the intentions of the biblical God (2004:404).

These elements have also the effect of enriching the Christian tradition.

Dialogue is not discussion, although discussion takes place in the process of dialogue. It is not focussed on winning or convincing others that we are right, but rather on learning, collaboration and the synthesis of points of view. Most important, dialogue focuses on

⁵³ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

⁵⁴ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>; <http://www.pcusa.org/pcusa/wmd/eir/dial.htm>.

⁵⁵ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

community, partnership and inclusion. People engaged in dialogue have felt their own faith challenged and deepened by the new dimensions of religious life which they have observed, and many find in interreligious encounter a new impetus for doing theology and reviving spirituality⁵⁶.

According to Anderson, dialogue is simply and solely a matter of sharing, a means of getting to know one another better, of gaining a greater understanding of the faith by which one lives and of exploring some of the pressing problems that face all people in the contemporary world, in the light that each of these faiths may be able to contribute to the solution (1984:188). The primary aim of dialogue is not to evangelize, because this aims at conversion, although dialogue could prepare the ground for evangelism, but it strives for a number of other worthy and useful purposes (Anderson 1984:189). The researcher agrees with Anderson because using the vernacular concepts and idioms has made evangelism and conversion possible in the northern belt of Namibia. Religion and culture in an African context are inseparable and the language is the expression of culture.

Christianity is particularly enriched by dialogue in that it produces “a new apprehension of the difference between the essential gospel and its incarnation in empirical Christianity” (Anderson 1984:191). Thus the core truths of one’s faith, as opposed to its outer presentation, are made clearer. Dialogue allows a person “to distinguish between the essence of his faith and its empirical manifestations” (Anderson 1984:191).

The three main aims of the missionaries who came to Namibia and other parts of Africa were to save souls and to win many people to Christ (Mugambi 2002: 142), to establish an institutional church, which reflected the church from which they came (Anderson 1984:193), and to spread the culture of their countries of origin (Mugambi 2002:142). Therefore ELCIN is a “copy” of the Lutheran Church in Finland. To make this work, missionaries used the mission station approach (Anderson 1984: 193), where the converted people stayed at the stations as *ovakalele*, [servants] and were taught “Christian behaviour”, making them culturally different from the rest of population (Peltola 2002:99). The researcher agrees with Mugambi who asserts that, “most of the work of winning converts to the Christian faith was achieved by the African catechists and teachers who had been trained and [taught] at the mission stations where the missionaries resided” (Mugambi 2002: 142). Therefore local people were recruited to continue

⁵⁶ (<http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>).

the three aims listed above. The “people’s movement approach” (Anderson 1984:193), which involved indigenous people, was implemented at a later stage and it ensured the success of the evangelism and made the Christian message more readily acceptable and relevant to many Africans. It ultimately resulted in the birth of African Christianity. The researcher argues that a people’s movement approach represents the essence of dialogue and encapsulates the aim of translatability. There is certain behaviour necessary that supports dialogue to take place smoothly.

In order for dialogue to take place certain attitudes must be considered. Krieger, when talking about intercultural religious communication, listed four ways that people identify themselves when meeting people of other cultures: some people identify themselves strongly with their own religious culture, other people identify themselves with the religious culture of the other and forget about their own; other people identify themselves with none of the religious cultures and live in a “cultural no-man’s land”, while other people create an intermediate set of beliefs and practices which offer a synthesis between the two⁵⁷. Although all options can work the last one is the best for dialogue to take place, because it accommodates others.

Judgements have no place in dialogue. The suspension of judgement when listening and speaking opens the door to expanded understanding. Differences in dialogue must be respected, thus:

Grounded in the belief that everyone has an essential contribution to make and is to be honoured for the perspective, which only they can bring. Therefore, all participants and their contributions are absolutely essential to developing an integrated whole view. No one perspective is more important than any other, because dialogue is about power with, versus power over or power under (Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue 2006:1).

In dialogue, everyone’s perspective is of value and deserves consideration. Instead of focusing on convincing others that we are right, the approach taken should be one of inquiry and discovery. It is important also to note that the practice of dialogue is often entirely unconscious. It simply begins to take place as people begin to interact. The intention is to bring forth and make visible assumptions, relationship, and gain new insight and understanding. We

⁵⁷ http://www.ru.nl/nim/chair/research_programme/ pg 1

often tend to advocate and convince others of our positions. Therefore a good place to start is to practice bringing more inquiry into the conversation (Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue 2006: 2). There are other behaviours to be mentioned but suffice to mention the above for our discussions. The next section will deal with the dialogue between Christianity and other faiths.

6.3 Christianity and other faiths in dialogue in Namibia

The term dialogue is derived from the Greek word *dialegomai* or *dialogizomai*, which describes the encounter of the Christian faith with other faiths in the New Testament and in the apostolic era (Rajashekar 1984:8). In the context of this research the term is used in a broader sense to describe the engagement between language, culture, tradition and Christianity, and other faiths, specifically in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. There are three major religions in Africa namely African Traditional Religion (ATR) which originated from within Africa, and the two major mission religions Christianity and Islam (Parrinder 1969:8; Mbiti 1992:182). In the northern belt of Namibia during the time of the translation of the Bible, there were only two major religions: the African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity. The Muslim and other faiths have found their way into Namibia at later stage. Although Christianity was described by Mambo as being aggressive towards ATR, dialogue did take place in this part of the country between Christianity and ATR (Ovawambo and Okavango beliefs).

The manner in which Christianity was introduced to Africans in Namibia had a great impact on the process of dialogue. According to Mbambo, the Christian faith was brought into Namibia aggressively. Therefore the carriers of the Christian religion were “convinced that they are the only ones who had truth and nothing but truth” (2000:115). However it is generally acknowledged that each religion has truth in itself, as Munyika insists. Therefore religious truth is relative and can be found in all religions equally (Munyika 2004:240). Because of this claim of ultimate truth the Christian missionaries described ATR in Namibia as pagan, heathen, primitive, barbaric and superstitious. Therefore the main task of Christian missionaries was “to Christianise Africa and to win souls for the Lord” (Mbambo 2000:117) and in doing so to destroy the indigenous beliefs. For fundamental dialogue to take place, however, Christianity must understand and accept a person of another faith as a person and not as a pagan, and

“move emphatically from the confessional to the true reality, seeking the stance in dialogue” (Anderson 1984:184).

Oduyoye defends Christian faith when it encounters with other religions, and the researcher complements her on that: She argues: “It opposes, it adapts, it adopts and it transforms, while it is itself opposed, adopted, adapted, challenged and transformed by the host cultures” (2001:27). A healthy dialogue is what allows, accepts, rejects, challenges and accommodates other religions, as stated above by Oduyoye. This is what translatability principles advocate as proposed by Sanneh and Bediako.

The attitude of missionaries in denouncing African religion, arguing that they did not want to plant the Christian religion on the rotten foundation of paganism, was derogatory. The term “pagan” is not acceptable in religious usage if it refers to African people. The term referred to unbaptised Africans and its use implied that Africans (Ovawambo and Okavango in this context) had no idea of a true God, and not even of the hidden God of Luther (Munyika 2004:293). This is not the case, because, as argued in chapter three of this study, Ovawambo and Okavango people knew God before the missionaries came. It is God who brought the missionaries to Namibia not the other way around. This attitude changed after the missionaries began to interact with indigenous people and learn about ATR. For example missionaries realised that the biblical God is the same as *Kalunga* of Ovawambo and Okavango people, therefore they adopted the use of the name *Kalunga/Karunga*.

It was not an easy task to establish dialogue, for the missionaries regarded Ovawambo and Okavango peoples as pagan, with no contribution whatsoever to make to the Christian faith. However, this was a misconception. Through examining these terminologies and concepts, the parallels between Christianity and ATR and the way they can enrich each other will be revealed.

As mentioned earlier in chapter four, during the time of the missionary endeavour in Namibia, only two religions were encountered: Christianity and ATR. Namibia is not an island, it is part of the larger continent of Africa, and events in Namibia mirror what took place in the rest of Africa. Therefore, when speaking of religious dialogue we mean these two religions, although we have in mind other faiths that emerged in similar processes. Internationally there are dialogues taking place at international and national level, but the focus here is on the local level

(Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue 2006:1). Many programmes are being run at all levels, in order to encourage dialogue, leading to the establishment of a common understanding. These programmes could be applied also in Namibia, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).

It should be noted here that each religion is unique and has gone through a different process of historical and cultural change within and without (Rajashekar 1984:7). ATR among Ovambo and Okavango communities is no different. Despite the uniqueness of ATR, missionaries realised that there are indeed homologous or analogous ideas and concepts and overlapping religious experiences that the indigenous religion shares with Christianity. It is not Christians alone who have wrestled with the meaning of God, the Supreme Being, in their lives. Other faiths including ATR, in their own way, have wrestled with similar questions (Rajashekar 1984:7).

The Christian approach to people of other faiths has a long history as reflected in the Bible. It can already be seen in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, Peter, responding to the realities of a multi-faith context, says to the gentile Cornelius, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10.34-35). This basic understanding of God's direct access to all people also echoes what is asserted in the Hebrew Scriptures by the prophet Malachi when he says, "For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering for my name is great among the nations says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 1.11). This shows how dialogue took place in the Bible itself.

It is in this light that people within the modern ecumenical movement have been trying to grasp the meaning of their obedience to the gospel in a world of many religions and cultures. Historically, these concerns have been pursued from the perspective of mission and evangelism, beginning with the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh (1910), then through the International Missionary Council, and later within the World Council of Churches (WCC) through the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (Mugambi 2002:142). However, the early missionaries in Namibia took a 'less dialogue' stance with regard to other religions. Abbey argues, "All African ideas of religion were thought to be irreligious and superstitious and for Christianity to flourish, these ideas had to be put to rest" (2001:147). The

rejection of African religiosity by Western missionaries was an error because ATR is a fertile soil for the Christian faith.

Recognising the cultural aspect of dialogue is very important. In Europe, Christianity was moulded by European culture. African Traditional Religion is also built on its own cultural orientation. Thus, for effective translatability, the cultural context must be considered. Through translatability and interpretation theories, the church is able to truly respect the culture of each community.

In offering the Gospel message, the Church does not intend to destroy or to abolish what is good and beautiful. In fact the church recognises many cultural values and through the power of the Gospel purifies and takes into Christian worship certain elements of a people's customs. The Church comes to bring Christ; she does not come to bring the culture of another race⁵⁸.

Dialogue must be loyal to culture meaning that Christianity and ATR need to have dialogue developed in relation to culture. "A culture should not be romanticized nor made into a false absolute but it may often challenge and enrich the expression of the Christian faith" (Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue 2006:2)

What happened with dialogue in the Asian situation may be applicable to the situation in Namibia. Rajashekar describes the Asian context:

Theology in dialogue in Asia therefore implies that a meaningful theological articulation must move away from this posture of total self-reference and explore a lively theology of cross-reference. It is in the process of dialogue, or mutual engagement, that we may be able to articulate the meaning of our faith. Dialogue is here understood to be more than a bare methodology which is often employed in theological articulations. ... It [dialogue] is more of a commitment than a discussion. It is a commitment in the sense that the intent of dialogue is neither to silence the other nor to win an argument. ... It [dialogue] is a commitment to explore honestly one another's conviction and faith, to strive to expand one's self-understanding in the company of others in order to enrich one's own faith through active encounter. ... Theology in dialogue is a commitment to do theology in an inclusive way (1984:9).

This statement shows how dialogue took place in the context of Asia and in Africa where many faiths, cultures and languages are present today.

⁵⁸ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

Walls' term for "cross-reference" is "cross-cultural diffusion", and describes what happens when dialogue takes place. He argues that cross-cultural diffusion has been necessary to Christianity because it has been its life's blood, and that without it the Christian faith could not have survived. He further states: "since the inception of Christianity it initiated cross-cultural diffusion because Christian faith advocates that Jesus Christ has something to say to any nation. From the beginning the Christian church has in principle been not only multiracial, but also multicultural" (Walls 2005:67), as converts penetrated into Christianity so Christianity penetrated into their culture. This is the essence of dialogue. Dialogue has practical results in that it transforms the lives of individuals and communities. "Christian community is a part of human community and therefore Christians in dialogue with other communities need to reflect upon the nature of the community they mutually seek. ... Faith and life cannot be separated" (Rajashekar 1984:13).

Differences between denominations are also diffused by dialogue, as a process, which occurs particularly during the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages. Through the projects of translating of the Bible into vernacular languages, "the new and active sense of ecumenical solidarity has grown between Catholics and Protestants and this has worked to enlarge the scope of mutual understanding in Africa" (Sanneh 1989:168). In Namibia this has also been the case. Protestants took the lead in translation projects in Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali, but the Roman Catholics and Anglicans joined them to make the whole process of Bible translation ecumenical (Laukkanen 2002:19; Ngodji 2004:66,67).

It therefore appears conclusive that the theology of cross-reference or translatability is the only suitable kind of theology in a pluralistic context. This theology gives African Christians room to develop African Christianity, a process, which requires a true appreciation for the terms and concepts of both ATR and Christianity. As Walls states, African Christianity is shaped by Africa's past. God has a vernacular name in Oshiwambo and Okavango and in other African languages as well, which indicates that the God of Israel and the God of the Scripture, is also the God of Africans (Walls 2005:120).

The translatability theory makes dialogue possible, therefore in northern Namibia the translation of the Bible into vernaculars contributed a lot to the process of dialogue between Ovawambo and Okavango people with Christianity. The Bible translation process not only

includes language and culture, but also the meaning and the message carried within the religions concerned. Translatability enables translation to pass the message to another language and culture or other religion without destroying the other. Therefore when doing translation the message from one religion is being transferred to another, which brings the religions into dialogue. At the same time cultures are brought into dialogue. Language is an aspect of culture and it is an important carrier of meaning, because it includes the whole personalities of a person individually and communities (Doran1989:578). Nida furthers this argument that language is the means of communication and that it has power in itself. The Bible also uses language for enhancing power. On the divine level God speaks and it is done, and on the human level the king commands and his/her servants perform (Nida 1979:224-225). The translation of the Bible into Oshiwambo and Okavango languages benefited both Africans and foreign missionaries. However, the Finnish missionaries in Northern Namibia seem not to have considered African languages as an integral part of African culture. They taught that African culture was “heathen”, but at the same time realized that they could not communicate their teachings in their own tongue. What they condemned at the earlier stage later became a useful tool for African converts to communicate the Christian message to others (Mugambi 2002:142). Language and culture are thus intertwined and are both crucial elements in translatability and dialogue.

Translatability overcomes the suppression and dismissal of other religions (Munyika 2004: 240) and creates room for dialogue. The translatability principle makes it clear that ATR, which was condemned even by Africans themselves, shared many features with Christianity. So these two religions, Christianity and ATR, become allies. One has prepared the ground for the accommodation of the other (Mbiti 1992:190). Christianity and ATR are partners in dialogue, and through dialogue they have influenced each other. The dialogue is centered on the accommodation of terms and concepts like God, salvation, God dealing with human beings, hope for the future, worldview and moral ethics (Mbiti 1992:190).

The researcher agrees with Walls’ view that translation also means incarnation. Incarnation is the divine revelation of God, and the divine revelation of God takes place in the form of a dialogue. “Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord...” (Is 1: 18 KJV), is one example. This means that in the Scripture God is continually revealed, seeking people out to converse with them. The entire concept of the covenant of God with people is predicted upon two-way communication, even though it is God who initiates, while humans accept (Nida 1979:225).

Dialogue also continues in Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word of God. As Nida states: “In Jesus Christ the dialogue of God with man (sic) is evident in all of its fullness...” (1979:225). If dialogue is meant to communicate, then translatability is also a communication between God and human beings in their different languages, cultures and contexts. Walls’ concept of translation as incarnation could also be understood as indicating that through translation, ideas that were formerly abstract and vague to a particular community, become concrete and defined.

According to Nida, translation is not always absolute, because it is part of the biblical revelation, which is also not absolute. Although revelation is not absolute, it remains true, and mysteries are completed in Christ. Biblical revelation is essentially incarnational because it does not come only in words, but in life. Truth has no validity until it has been translated into life. Words are nothing in themselves they must be lived out. That is why in the incarnation of Christ, the Word became flesh and concrete (1979:225). In the history of the Christian church and through the many translation processes that have taken place God chose to use different kinds of incarnation. Nida confirms this when he writes:

... God has constantly chosen to use not only words, but human beings as well to witness His grace; not only the message, but the messenger; not only the Bible, but the church (1979:226).

Ovawambo and Okavango peoples have cultural terms and concepts, which are also found in the Bible and in Christian usage as a whole. These terms and concepts express the same meanings as in the Christian faith. The translatability principle, which makes dialogue possible, has allowed these cross-references to occur, which in turn has made the word of God incarnate for the Namibian people.

The following section will deal with the concept and terms used in Christianity, which are also used in the Bible and Christianity at large. These terms and concepts form a great part of the dialogue between Oshiwambo and Okavango religious practice and Christianity.

6. 4 Dialogue: terms and concepts and the implications thereof in ELCIN

This section will deal with dialogue in the form of terms and concepts. The researcher will provide the meaning and the usage of the words or concepts in the traditional context before relating them to Christianity and biblical use. To do this, the researcher will rely heavily on the interviews conducted with elderly members of African communities, as shown in chapter one on the section of research methodology.

The terms like God, sin, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, salvation, redemption, eternal life and others will be discussed from the perspectives of both ATR and Christianity. The questions and interviews form part of the appendix of the thesis (Appendix IX). Among other questions, the concepts of these terms, the concepts and the relationship between ATR and Christianity will be discussed from an African cultural perspective, following the advice of Mugambi who insists that a person who is born and bred in the culture is best suited to carry out meaningful academic research on that culture (2002:188).

Ovawambo and Okavango people use these terms and concepts either in religious settings or in their daily life. They are now accommodated within the Christian religion and are used by translators in the process of translating the Bible into their vernacular languages. It has been noted that ATR is “the fertile soil” (Mbambo 2000: 116) for planting Christianity, removing the fertile soil will make the result fruitless. According to the researcher these terms and concepts form part of a dialogue between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. The translatability of Christianity in Namibia reduced the negative attitude of Christians with regard to African religion and allowed each to enrich the other (Mbambo 2000:117-118).

The terminology and concepts used by Ovawambo and Okavango peoples revealed how God manifested Godself to these people. As Munyika argues:

What God has revealed to Ovawambo may be used together with the divine revelation in Jesus Christ. ... Anything that does not contradict his mission to achieve comprehensive well-being of the people of God in this life and beyond may be used in his [God] project of salvation. ... Any element [concepts or terminologies] that seems to be useful must be tested against the love of God revealed in Christ. The identification of those fundamental religious elements which can assist theologians to make Christianity and its message of salvation more relevant to as many people as possible demands special attention from... theologians (2004: 241-242).

Therefore these concepts and terms are good vehicles in which to transport the Christian message to people in their own language, culture and context. These terms however must be tested against the criterion of whether or not they mirror the core truths of Christianity, which is the Christ event. Some caution is needed in implementing these concepts and terms. As Bediako warns, it is not the culture/tradition which must define the message, but the Scriptures (2001:2). Therefore dialogue and mutual understanding has to take place. Some of these

concepts in ATR, which have become important issues in contemporary international interaction, can now be discussed in order to reach common understanding.

6. 4. 1 God (*Kalunga, Karunga or Hompa*)

According to Mugambi, the term “God” has been the subject of theological and philosophical reflection for a long period (2002:59). For Ovawambo and Okavango people in particular, the name God, *Kalunga*, cannot be tampered with. In many African communities God has relative or descriptive names. Several ethnic groups use the same name for God. The Ovakwanyama, Ovandonga and Okavango peoples in the northern belt of Namibia, use the same name, *Kalunga/Karunga*, for God. That name refers to a being whose power extends beyond any ethnic territory to the whole world and who forms an integral part of the cultural and religious heritage of the community. According to Enquist, *Kalunga* has been reinterpreted as the ever-present Christ, the shepherd of his new tribe, the Christian community in Ovamboland and Okavango (1990:58). This is what Mugambi refers to; that if a name for God is adapted from one language or community to another, new meaning has to be added to the name to make it relevant in its new context (Mugambi 2002:60), therefore God is understood in the way God manifests to the community. “In translating the Bible, liturgical literature and Christian teaching, such missionaries had to adopt the traditional African names of deity in order to communicate the new ideas to African peoples” (Mugambi 2002:61). Translators of the Bible into vernacular languages in ELCIN used the same adaptations. Here follow some examples of how Africans comprehend God in their religion.

In Ovawambo and Okavango belief God is regarded as Father, but there are some attributes to God as the mother, as mentioned in chapter three. According to Abbey, traditional Christians accepted the image of God and portrayed God as a male without question (2001:140). Because of translatability as a dialogue between faiths, this conception needs to be reconsidered. In African Traditional Religion, however, there is a place for the conception of God in completely feminine terms. This means that the African concept of God is not altogether masculine. In many parts of Africa, God is conceived as male, but in other parts God is conceived as female. The Ndebele and Shona ethnic groups in Zimbabwe have a triad made up of God the Father, God the Mother, and God the Son. The Nuba of Sudan regard God as "Great Mother" and speak of him in feminine pronouns. Although called the Queen of the Lovedu in South Africa,

the mysterious "She" is not primarily a ruler but a rainmaker; she is regarded as a changer of seasons and the guarantor of their cyclic regularity⁵⁹.

There are mixed feelings about a female God in many societies in Africa and in the world at large. This is because the dominant image of God is male. As Abbey writes:

The idea of God as female is nothing but a joke to some people. For some others, it is more serious than a joke; it borders on heresy. However, for an ever-increasing number of people, the femininity of God is neither a joke nor heresy (Abbey 2001:140).

God is neither a male nor a female. The maleness and femaleness of God is defined not by what God is, but by what God does.

Among the Ovawambo God plays the role of father and of mother. When God plays the role of a mother, then God is a mother and when God plays the role of a father, then God is a father.

The following Oshikwanyama song indicates the motherliness of God.

Oshikwanyama	English
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye omukulunhu wetu</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our senior
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye omuwiliki wetu</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our Leader
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye omukwatelikomesho</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our Guider
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye meme wetu</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our Mother
<i>II</i>	
<i>Meme Taliwashele natu fimanekeni</i>	Let us honour Mother Taliwashele
<i>Meme Taliwashele natu hambeleleni</i>	Let us praise Mother Taliwashele
<i>Meme Taliwashele natu mu peni omake</i>	Let us applaud Mother Taliwashele
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye meme wetu</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our Mother
<i>III</i>	
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye enyamukulo</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our answer
<i>Meme Taliwashele le'emhumbwe detu adishe</i>	To all our needs
<i>Meme Taliwashele natu mu peni omake</i>	Let us applaud her
<i>Meme Taliwashele oye meme wetu</i>	Mother Taliwashele is our Mother
(Erastus Kalola Eelu 2004) ⁶⁰	(Translation mine)

The characteristics found in this song, which Eelu applied to *Taliwashele*, are applicable to God. No human being has these characters. *Taliwashele* is the name of the mother. The characters found in this song and the honour to be given to her are the same as those given to God. This song implies that there is no problem whatsoever in Oshiwambo, Oshikwanyama in particular, in calling God a mother. Eelu knowingly or unknowingly creates the image of

⁵⁹ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>.

⁶⁰ Erastus Kalola Eelu, is a member of Tanduleni Choir. He is a young man from Ohauwanga, Omundaungilo parish. This song is found in the first album of Tanduleni Choir 2004.

Mother God. This is the right image of God, which can be used to describe God among Ovawambo people. There are other African people who have no problem calling God, mother.

For the Ga people of southern Ghana, God is traditionally known as *Ataa Naa Nyonmo*. According to Abbey, this name does not only mean Father Mother God, but it also implies and stresses the maleness and femaleness of God. To accept God as both a father and a mother, expresses the creative power of God as opposed to the macho image that only offers the idea of controlling power (Abbey 2001:141). Feminist theologians are trying to rediscover the motherhood of God, which will of course make Christianity more relevant to all Christians, and women in particular. The researcher argues that the time has come to make God more universal than local. It is the researcher's opinion that God must be thought of as genderless. Translatability will help theologians to establish this, especially from the African perspective. Western theologians and western Christianity have failed to do so, but the African traditional concepts may well pave the way for a widely accepted genderless God.

African women theology's critique is that the biblical characters of God are more patriarchally oriented. Even the language, (the biblical language) is more patriarchal. There is a need for a matriarchal language, because "the language of the Christian community as a whole – be it in worship or about God – is male" (Abbey 2001:142).

Among matriarchal societies God is often invoked as Mother. As noted above, the southern Nuba tribe use feminine terms to describe God. They even refer to God as "Great Mother" who gave birth to earth and to humankind. Among Ovawambo tribes there is the saying "The mother of pots is a hole in the ground, the mother of people is God" (Munyika 2004:167). The invocation of God as female is found among those whose "social organisation is centred on the home and position of the mother". The Ewe people have the powerful female-male combination of Mawu/Lisa as the Supreme beings. Mawu who is female is often spoken of as the Supreme Being. She is gentle and forgiving. Indeed it is said that when Lisa punishes people, Mawu grants forgiveness⁶¹. This is not far from the Ovawambo belief in God as either father or mother. *Kalunga* of Ovawambo has the character of a father and a mother. One cannot understand God as Father or mother in human terms (Oddie 1984:111-113), but Ovawambo and other people name and define God in such terms. In most African communities God has been given relative or descriptive names, depending on how God revealed Godself to

⁶¹ <http://www.security-one.com/isizoh>

these communities. Human beings compare God to what they know. They know the character and the role of the father and that of the mother from their cultural perspective, and therefore they compare God with them. Oddies foresees the danger of the comparison of human beings with God, as he writes:

The use of analogical or simply comparative language about God is useful and inevitable; but it cannot by itself take us far towards him, since the ideas thus compared are within the existing boundaries of our understanding (1984:113).

It is also important to point out that the biblical God is referred to as mother because God is a compassionate God. The word compassion is derived from the Hebrew word *rehem*, which means womb or uterus (Hosea 2:21) (Abbey 2001:143). It is only a woman who has a womb. God is also depicted as a woman in labour, gasping and panting. Another metaphor of God as a mother is that God carries her children (Is 46:3-4). It is rare in Africa to see a man carrying a child, especially an infant, only the mother does this. Although there are many texts in the Bible referring to the motherhood of God, they have been overlooked because they challenged the patriarchal nature of societies (Abbey 2001:143). The time has come to retrieve these texts about the motherhood of God from hiding and to make a difference to our own theology of today.

It seems to the researcher that there are thus a growing number of researchers who think that the concept of God as mother, as found among some African peoples, needs more careful attention from theologians. The idea of God as mother could have some very interesting and transformative implications for Christianity. Ovawambo and Okavango peoples have faith in God, *Kalunga*. *Kalunga* of Ovawambo and Okavango peoples is either Father or Mother. It is interesting that the languages of these people do not emphasis gender.

According to Okavango people, God, *Nyambi*, is the source of everything. When people pray for rain they use the name *Nyambi*, but in daily matters they use the name *Karunga* (Hambyuka 2006). Speaking of God using vernacular names has more significance than speaking of God in a foreign language. In the Oukwanyama language when people use the terms, such as *Pamba* or *Namhongo* of God, it touches their hearts more deeply (Kapewangolo 2006; Kaishungu 2006). *Kalunga* is also called *Kalunga kaNangobe*. *Nangobe* is one of the founder ancestors of Ovawambo (Munyika 2004: 156). According to Ngodji Sr, *Kalunga* is a tall and powerful person, stretching from earth to heaven. *Kalunga* sees everything and knows everything on

earth. People have to obey him in order to survive (2006). This means that God is personified rather than being an abstract idea. Ovawambo have expressions to describe *Kalunga*, for example: “*Kalunga iha dipaelwa ovana*”, meaning, “You cannot kill the children of God”. In other words, humans belong to God, you cannot bother them, otherwise you will be punished. “*Kalunga ihe ku efa nganyoko*” meaning “God cannot leave you like your mother”. This implies that God never leaves his/her people, even in difficult situations. It is believed that it is rare for a mother to abandon her child, so God is even more devoted than that. “*Kalunga iha kwatelwa ngeenge ta tenge*” meaning “God needs no assistance”. God does things his/her own way. This expression is usually used when people want to blame God or want to direct God.

Ovawambo and Okavango peoples consider *Kalunga*, as do other African people, as an elderly person who has high authority and wisdom and is not bothered with the daily activities of the people as long as things in the community go smoothly. *Kalunga* is however ready to help out people in difficult situations (Mugambi 2002:62). In this, the beliefs of Africans differ from Christianity, which teaches that God is always available and is present in every sphere of life.

Translatability as dialogue makes the understanding of God as mother or father possible, to the extent that when the name *Kalunga/Karunga* is spoken and read from a Christian point of view, in Oshiwambo and Kwangali, it helps African Christians to feel that the Christian religion is their religion as well. The aim of translatability is to bring the biblical message home and make it inclusive. The researcher agrees with Abbey that if the Christian message is to liberate, if there are concepts of God in ATR that are biblical and make the message of God more relevant, attention must be paid to them (2001:148). Therefore translators and interpreters of the Bible have much to do in this regard.

6. 4. 2 Sin (*oulunde/ enyono*)

The concept of sin is not common among Ovawambo and Okavango people: it arrived with Christianity. According to Lihongo, the word used in Kwangali is *mulunde*. *Mulunde* is a person who trespassed the law or guidelines set for the people. It is not right to call a person a sinner unless he/she did something wrong (Lihongo 2006). *Mulunde* is a person who does evil: murder, adultery and stealing. Sin is more to do with acts, rather than a state of being. This may probably be what theologians called actual sin. There is no inherited sin in Oshiwambo and Okavango communities as portrayed in the Bible (Ps 51: 5). According to Hambyuka, you cannot call a person *mulunde*, (sinner) unless you know what sin he/she committed (2006).

Mzo, another word for sin, means that you have wronged your fellow human being. If you take someone's wife or you have killed someone you committed sin (Ausiku 2006). Sin disrupts the good relationship between people and people, even those who have gone before us, and between people and God. In Oshikwanyama *oulunde*, (sin), is *owii*, (bad), and the person who commits sin is *omulunde*, (sinner). Again, it is an action, not a state of being. Some sins classified by Ovawambo include murder and criminal activities (*oukolokoshi*) (Ngodji Sn. 2006). In Oshindoga the word sin, *uulunde*, was not used. For them *omulunde* (sinner) is a bad person, with bad habits and bad behaviour. It is the Bible, which brought the concept of sinner to the understanding of these people (Ekandjo 2006). Some preachers use to say: 'you sinners', because in the biblical understanding all human beings are sinners, and need someone to save them, because being a sinner is a state of being. Amkongo reiterates Hambyuka saying that it is unusual to call someone a sinner, unless one knows what he/she has done that made him/her a sinner (Amkongo 2006). *Oulunde* [sin] is bad behaviour. A sinner is an evildoer, a wicked person is not a state (Amadhila 2006).

In Oshikwanyama the word *oulunde* or *omulunde* was not used in common language, but if a person committed crime like murder or theft then the phrase "*okwa kaula onyanga*", was used, meaning that he/she committed sin. Thus sin is connected with bad actions, but it is unusual to call a person a sinner (Nghifikwa 2006). According to Ndevaetela, sin is *ekaulonyanga*, (committing a crime) (2006). According to Kaishungu sin is disobedience. People used to say: "*Ou likeuka*", meaning, "Look around you". This means that there is something wrong in your vicinity or with you. Kaishungu agreed with others that it was not necessary to point out someone or to refer someone as a sinner (2006).

Biblically, sin is connected to the law of God and therefore any infraction of the law is an offence against God. Sin separates a person from God. In the Old Testament sin is a broken relationship with God. Hebrew has three terms for defining sin: firstly, *het*, which means "missing of the mark". This does not indicate the particular sin committed. Secondly, *avon*, which is translated as "iniquity", meaning "to make perverse or crooked". It refers to wrongdoing against one's fellow human being. Thirdly, *pesha*, means to "break away", "to rebel" against God, implying a willful departure from the authority of God (Wigoder 2005:898). These Hebrew terms sum up what is called sin. They show that sin is failing to hit the mark placed for you, or failing to do what is expected of you. Sin is committing a crime against one's fellow human being and also deliberately defying God. The Greeks shared the

same understanding of sin as the Hebrews. Sin, as missing of the mark, is central to the Christian definition of sin.

Ovawambo and Okavango concepts of sin correspond with *avon* because they are more concerned with the wrong or crime committed against a fellow human being, and not necessarily just against God. Mugambi confirms this when discussing the need to maintain positive relationships in the community. He writes:

The strong belief in the maintenance of the balance of relationships also implies that any action leading to the breakdown of harmony between God and man [humans], spirits and man [humans], ancestor and man [human], and between man [person] and man [person], within the physically living community was considered to be at the same time an offence against all those beings who formed this network of relationships (2002:62).

This means that all people must maintain good relationships in the community, with the ancestors and with God at all times. The intertwined nature of humanity, ancestry and divinity means that a sin against one is a sin against all. It is also believed among Ovawambo that if a person is destroying nature or making a powerless person or a sojourner suffer, punishment from God will come upon him/her, because they belong to God.

According to the Bible God hates sin, but loves sinners (John 3:16). Sin affects the entire cosmos. The penalty of sin is death (Rom 6:23). God willingly allowed Jesus Christ to suffer and to die because the shed blood of Christ pays the penalty of sin. So, Christ had to die because of the sins of all human beings⁶². None is able to redeem the universe and all the creatures. God who is the creator of the universe is also the redeemer of the universe, through Jesus Christ (Wigoder 2005:370). Sin estranges us from God. It breaks our fellowship with God, as is shown in the Bible. It is only God who can restore this lost fellowship. In Oshiwambo if a person commits sin in the family, especially murder or stealing, he/she violates the well-being of the society and family, and thus he/she needs healing. Such a person will be delivered to a healer for cleansing. The cleansing will include the whole family as well. Of course forgiveness and payment has to be made (Ndevaetela 2006). This practice does not differ from Christianity, because it is believed that it is only through forgiveness that the relationship between person and person and person and God will be restored (Mugambi 1993:267). The practice of old Ovawambo and Okavango people is now accommodated in the

⁶² <http://www.thercg.org/articles/jwis-html>

new religion. Translatability is what makes this process of adoption and accommodation of religions possible.

6. 4. 3 Repentance (*elidilululo/eitedhululo/ kulitekulula*)

The concept of repentance exists in African communities. Among Okavango people, *kulitekulula* refers to repentance after the separation and reunification of husband and wife. If a husband abuses his wife, and she leaves to go to her parents or relatives, and then decides to return to her husband, she is referred to as having repented. There was nothing in the African community like legal divorce, which requires legal procedures. Someone has to mediate in this case (Lihongo 2006). *Litezululo* also refers to a person who has committed a crime and has been advised to correct the wrong, and has done so. Repentance is regarded as *kudiruka*, literally meaning to change or move from one place to another. Therefore repentance means the changing of the mind from bad to good, so repentance refers to the transfer from bad to good (Hambyuka 2006). Ausiku shares Lihongo's sentiments on the issue of divorce. He confirms the practice in Kwangali culture where a woman who has left her husband later (through the mediation of a third party), returns to him. Ausiku adds that both (husband and wife) must be called to repentance. The husband has to make a promise in the presence of the mediator and his parents' in-law not to repeat the same mistake that led to the wife's departure (2006).

According to Amadhila, repentance occurs when a person who was doing wrong has been told by others that his/her actions are not right. If he/she rectifies his/her behaviour then repentance has taken place. Amadhila gives the example of a man the denying fathering of a child, but after the child begins to grow, he comes to his senses and accepts the child as his own. In this case a ritual has to take place. An animal has to be slaughtered and its blood smeared on the child. The big issue is that he has to give the child a name. From that moment the child has a father (2006).

In Oshikwanyama thought, repentance is to "turn around" from evil and do well. Sometimes the trespassers are beaten or taken to a traditional healer, for healing, because trespass is regarded as a sickness and each sickness requires healing. There are, for example, healers who claim to heal theft (Ngodji Sn 2006). Repentance involves turning back, *okulyaaluluka*. For example, if a child makes a mess in the house, she/he comes to apologize to his/her parents. True repentance is linked with apology (Ndevaetela 2006).

In Oshindonga culture repentance refers to a changing of the mind or the ways (Ekandjo 2006). Amkongo supports Ekandjo in this. According to him, if a person decides to follow one path and people try to prevent him/her from doing so because they foresee danger, but the person decides to go on regardless, only to change his/her mind later, that person has repented, '*okwe li galuluka*', and followed the right way (Amkongo 2006). Repentance, in Oshikwanyama thinking has the same meaning as in Oshindonga, meaning changing of the mind (Nghifikwa 2006).

There is a saying in Oshiwambo: "*Nima iha lombwelwa. Namuhalombwelwa ohai nonyata povanhu*", which literally means, "He/she does not listen. The non-listener goes with a stick with shit among the people". There is a story circulated amongst Ovawambo that a certain area contained a lot of lions. People fear lions. So, one day a particular person went behind the bush for a nature call. When he was about to finish the lion roared behind him. He ran away with the cleaning material, the stick. Because the lion terrified him, he could not understand what people were telling him. He was told that he had a dirty stick. Instead of dropping the stick, he said: "If it (the lion) has the stick, it has. I did not see it clearly". So, he went with the stick with shit among the people. Thus, if one does not listen to what people are saying, then that story is referred to: "The non-listener goes with shit stick among people" (Kaishungu 2006). If a person does not repent and listen to the advice of others he/she will meet difficulties or will be shamed at some point. Thus, repentance is very important in our daily life (Kaishungu 2006).

In the Old Testament a person who did wrong had to repent to secure divine forgiveness. There is no forgiveness without repentance. It is not enough to hope and pray for pardon. A repentant person must humble himself/herself, acknowledge his/her wrong and resolve to depart from sin as David did (II Sam 12:13). The Hebrew word for repentance is *shuv*, which means to turn from evil and turn to good. Repentance means turn away from wrongdoing and direct your heart to God. Inner contrition must be followed by outward acts, remorse must be translated into deeds, ceasing to do evil and doing good work instead. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoēō*, meaning, to regret, accompanied by a true change of heart. Repentance signifies a change of mind after the contemplation of past acts indicating regret for what was done and resulting in a wise view of the past and future (KJV 1991:1738). The Hebrew word *shuv* and Greek word *metanoia* convey the same message of "turning". "The motion of turning implies

that sin is not an eradicable stain but a straying from the right path, and that by the effort of turning, a power God has given all men [people], the sinner can redirect his [or her] destiny” (Wigoder 2005:817).

Ovawambo and Okavango people have the same conception of repentance as that found in the Bible. The Oshiwambo word *elidilululo*, and Kwangali word *litezululo* correspond with the Hebrew word *shuv* and the Greek word *metanoia*, both indicating ‘turning from’. Therefore both Ovawambo and Okavango people and the Bible emphasize the turning back from evil, moving from the wrong path to the right path, or changing the mind from bad to good, as an important move towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Therefore a dialogue exists between ATR (Ovawambo and Okavango beliefs) and Christianity, in their common understanding of the concept of repentance. There is no contradiction whatsoever in translating repentance to mean *elidilululo*. The translatability theory overcomes many obstacles, which confront translators in vernacular languages, and allows local meaning and concepts to be applied to biblical concepts. Repentance precedes forgiveness, which is the next concept to discuss.

6. 4. 4 Forgiveness (*ediminepo/ediminafanepo*)

There is no life without the possibility of error and there is no error without the possibility for amendment. Forgiveness is to mend the broken relationship. Ovawambo and Okavango people, like others, have a concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness is meant to restore broken down relationships. Among Okavango people the concept refers to two people having a dispute. The dispute may end in *dongwenene po*, or forgiveness. Then they stop antagonizing one another and start to live a good life together again (Lihongo 2006). According to Hambyuka, you forgive the one who wronged you. There is a need for a mediator to facilitate the process of forgiveness. After a person has been wronged (by murder, or stealing someone’s cattle) forgiveness and reconciliation are needed and if the process goes well, the protagonists begin anew (2006). For Ovandonga, if you offend a person, you must ask for forgiveness, and then you make friends again, if that person accepts your repentance (Amkongo 2006). There are certain offenses that require payment. If a person commits murder, payment has to be organized in the form of cattle. A ritual involving a tobacco pipe has to be performed at which all people present smoke from one pipe. From that day on people and clans have reconciled. None will take revenge. That peace will last long. Ndevaetela describes how there was once enmity between Ondonga and Oukwanyama. These tribes were fighting each other. They made an agreement at *Ondobeyomhumba*, (this place exists between Ondonga and Oukwanyama).

They met and discussed the issue between them and decided not to wage war against each other any more. They smoked from one pipe, killed cattle and ate *omhumba*⁶³. This agreement remains to this day (Nghifikwa 2006). Ndevaetela confirms the pipe smoking saying that if people anger each other, they smoke from one pipe as a sign of forgiveness (2006). Forgiveness depends on repentance. Each offence has to be punished, and repentance must be accepted (Kaishungu 2006).

Although repentance and forgiveness were practiced among Ovawambo and Okavango communities before the arrival of Christianity, according to Kapewangolo, the Bible deepened the understanding of forgiveness among African communities. In the past, it was hard for people to forgive. Among Ovawambo pregnant girls were burnt to death; among Damara speaking people in central Namibia, pregnant girls were forced to drink poisonous water from a certain river; in Okavango they were thrown into a deep spot in the river to drown and be eaten up by crocodiles. There were also certain places to which people ran for salvation, but if a person was not fast enough, then he/she would be killed. People were killed or chased away from their community or family as punishment. However, under the teaching of Christianity, the offenders are forgiven and accepted into the community (Kapewangolo 2006).

Forgiveness has its significance in both ATR and Christianity. In the African understanding smoking from one pipe demonstrates the acceptance and recognition of each other as people, while in Christianity the Holy Communion demonstrates God's unconditional acceptance of human beings as sinners. Both understand these events as a restoration of the relationship between people and people and between people and God. In many instances when Ovawambo forgive each other or reconcile with each other, they slaughter an animal and the blood has to be sprinkled or smeared somewhere. The blood of the animal plays a role in forgiveness. In Christianity and in the Bible, the blood of Christ washes away the sins of all humanity. In the African community there is a need for a third person to mediate the process of forgiveness, while in Christianity Jesus Christ is a mediator between people and God. There is thus a dialogue in the concept of forgiveness between the two religions, although Africans are more concerned with the peace between people, whereas Christianity tends to focus on peace between people and God. It should also be added that in African understanding, the relationship between God and human beings is always there, maintained by ancestors, and not

⁶³ *Omhumba* is a special piece of meat, it is known as the "bible". The place where this agreement took place is called *Ondobeyomhumba*. It still exists on the border between the Ondonga and Oukwanyama.

by ordinary people. In society life cannot continue without forgiveness; more so in Christian life, because forgiveness of sins is the way of Christian life. Barth states that living by forgiveness is never by any means passivity, but Christian is living in full activity (Barth 1949:149, 152).

The concept of forgiveness [*ediminafanepo*], plays an important role in Christianity as well as in ATR, among Ovawambo and Okavango communities, because it is serving the same purpose of keeping and maintaining peace in the community, so it is acceptable by both religions.

6. 4. 5 Reconciliation (*etambulafano/ etaambathano*)

Reconciliation is another term, which shows how dialogue between Christianity and ATR took place among Ovawambo and Okavango people. The concept of reconciliation is close to that of forgiveness, because reconciliation follows forgiveness. According to Ndevaetela, reconciling involves mainly the people of the same clan. If something goes wrong among them and their relationships are broken down causing their physical, emotional or spiritual departure from one another, they call someone to be a mediator, to reconcile them, because they cannot do it on their own (2006). Kaishungu reiterates that reconciliation requires a mediator. Two people who fall out cannot constitute reconciliation because there is enmity between them. According to Kaishungu, someone who knows the circumstances surrounding the matter is the right choice as a mediator. The mediator is also the witness to the issue. In Christianity Christ is our mediator to connect us to one another and to God (2006).

Bishop Sindano contributes to the effect of reconciliation. According to him there are steps to be followed in homes, among neighbours and in countries (politics), in order to make the process of reconciliation a success. In home the relationship between husband and wife can be broken down if one of them goes out of the house and has an affair with another man or woman. In this regard the one who caused the problem must give something the other partner in order to bring about peace between them. The other partner has to accept the payment and from there they forget the past and start a new relationship. The mediator is needed in that case as Kaishungu mentioned earlier. In families and relatives relationship could be broken down. The elders in the families or clans have to sit down and discuss the issue in order to solve the problem. If they agree on the point the two parties have to reconcile and make peace. If the elders fail the matter has to be taken to the headman and, further, to the king. In all cases the

guilty party has to pay a certain number of items to the offended as well as to the king. From there they are required to reconcile and to live in peace. If the broken relationship is between the person and the ancestors, the living dead, blood is required, so people slaughter an animal and sprinkled the blood all over to appease the ancestors (*ovakwamhungu*). There is no need of a mediator between the person and spirits of ancestors. Biblically the priest also has to offer sacrifices to establish the broken relationship between the people and God. In Christianity we believe that the blood of Jesus was meant to take away the sins of the world and reconcile person to person and person to God. This is salvation because salvation is a right relationship with God and a right relationship with another person (Sindano 2009 [Appendix XIX]).

Politically reconciliation is used to reconcile two warring parties who are involved in conflict whether by words or by armed conflict. In order to stabilise the country and to develop the economy of the country reconciliation is needed. Reconciliation, politically, means to forget the past and develop the future together in peace. A mediator is needed in this case. Many countries in Africa, as well as in the world, adopt the policy of reconciliation to make life possible again and to remove enmity. The researcher experienced an event that took place at Omundaungilo ELCIN parish, where one of the former members of 32 Battalion confessed in front of the parishners that he was one of the soldiers who served in the area and caused suffering among the people of Omundaungilo and surrounding area. What happened at Omundaungilo was that people were beaten up, their belongings were destroyed and some people were killed in cold blood. After he confessed, he was accepted back into the community and was forgiven. On his side he felt relief. For the researcher this was a true reconciliation from the bottom of the heart.

The concept of reconciliation plays an important role in healing clans, communities, races and nations. Political leaders use policies of reconciliation in order to create peace and stability in their countries. Reconciliation helps those African countries that were engaged in war during the liberation struggle to unite and forgive each other. Biblically, Christ reconciled humanity to God. It was easy to translate the term from Oshiwambo and Okavango to Christianity because it carries the same meaning.

6. 4. 6 Salvation (*exupifo/ ehupitho/ eparu, ezowora*)

The concept of salvation is always situational and contextual. In Okavango people apply the term salvation to a person who is saved from danger, which was about to take his/her life.

Lihongo describes a river alongside the Okavango region. People cross the river to visit their relatives, and sometimes they fish in the river using a canoe. Sometimes when they are in the middle of the river the wind or a crocodile or another form of danger appears: '*shiponga sha wiza*', meaning 'the danger has come'. In this situation they can do nothing to save themselves. They need someone to save them. If people around see the danger they come to save them. This is what salvation means in Okavango (Lihongo 2006). According to Hambyuka, if you come across a lion or a crocodile, which attacks you and someone rescues you, then that is salvation. To make this point clear Hambyuka tells a story of how his uncle was saved miraculously. A crocodile attacked him, but instead of throwing him into the river, it tossed him onto the riverbank and in this way he was saved (Hambyuka 2006). Lions and crocodiles were a common danger among Okavango people. As noted above, salvation is always situational, and not general. According to Ausiku, during the Okavango slave trade, if a person sold to slavery was bought back, and then he/she was saved from slavery (2006).

The concept of salvation is also used in the Oshindonga language, especially in situations such as the capture of a person in war or raids. In this case the relatives have to organize a payment to get back that person. After payment the person is saved from the hands of enemies (Ekandjo 2006). Amkongo explains that the person to be saved is he/she who is experiencing danger or misfortune, which has brought the threat of destruction or death. A person may fall into deep mud and someone may save him/her, so, he/she was saved. If he/she is rescued from this situation, then this is salvation (2006).

In Oshikwanyama the person who has the last word regarding salvation is the king. If a person runs to another kingdom or area he/she is saved, because no one is allowed to cross the border in pursuit of another person. Crossing the border of another kingdom is an offence in itself, unless a person is running for life. If a person about to be killed runs and holds fast onto the leg of the king (*okuulu kwohamba*) no one can harm him/her, so, he/she is saved even if the king wants him/her to be killed. Another means of salvation is the calabash pole (*omalimango*). If a person holds the calabash tightly no one will harm him/her. Jesus is referred to as *okuulu kwohamba*, meaning 'the leg of a king' (Nghifikwa 2006), because whoever believes in him will be saved (Jn 3:16). Ndevaetela reiterates that to save is to deliver someone from danger. If a person was about to be killed by a lion and someone killed the lion first, then he/she has saved the person (2006). Kaishungu, pointing to the places shown by others (*okuulu kwohamba* and *omalimango*), emphasizes that we have salvation now through Jesus Christ. The opposite

to salvation is eternal death. A dead person cannot get lost, (as people used to say: a person will be lost after death,) only a living one gets lost. Kaishungu shares Ndevaetela's understanding that *exupifo* (salvation) is the equivalent of the calabash pole and the leg of the king (Kaishungu 2006). Little children regard *ondjuwo*, the main room in the house, as the place of salvation, to which they run when threatened. These places are where Ovawambo locate salvation.

Humans need salvation because they live in situations of fear, misfortune, hunger, barrenness, evil spirits, witchcraft, danger, suffering, wars, sicknesses and death, all common problems among Ovawambo and Okavango communities (Hambyuka 2006; Amkongo 2006). Thus, "salvation itself is a response to human needs" (Munyika 2004: 245). God saves humans from these crises through Christ. According to Hambyuka, Lihongo and Kaishungu, salvation among Ovawambo and Okavango people is focused on this life, while biblical salvation is a matter of this life and the life beyond. There is a conception among some Christians that this world is not good, but humanity belongs to this world and must enjoy the life in this world and improve the lives of others. They will then go on to enjoy the world beyond. The theology of heaven is not African nor biblical, because biblically God is dealing with people here on earth and not in heaven (Bediako 2001:3).

Although Africans believe that God has the power to save, human beings also save others. One cannot let another starve if one has food. If one knows how to swim, one cannot watch another person drowning. The Oshiwambo proverb: "*Mukweni mu udila ta li ndele ino mu udila ta lili*" literally means "don't heed your friend eating, but heed him/her mourning". It means that you can be absent from a party of your friend, but you cannot be absent if someone close to him/her has passed away. Death is a crisis so you need to be there to comfort your friend in this difficult situation. A friend indeed is the one who is there for you in the time of trouble.

Kalunga is powerful and is the source of everything, but he uses human beings to channel things to others (Munyika 2004:249). Biblically, salvation entails wellbeing for the whole of creation including humanity. The concept is similar to that of Africans. It implies that a person who is in great distress, or is in danger from enemies or disasters, needs a deliverer or saviour.

The Hebrew word for salvation or to save is *yasa*. The emphasis here is to concretely save a person in real-life. Thus, *yasa*, salvation, is also (as in its African usage) practical and

situational. The Greek word for salvation is *sozo*, meaning to save or rescue from life-threatening danger. The emphasis is on salvation from the effects of sin and from evil spiritual powers, which is similar to the Christian understanding. The Biblical salvation expresses the conviction that it is God and God alone who can save humanity. It also focuses on the relationship between God and humanity. God might use a human agency to carry out salvation, but ultimately the power lies with God. Another Greek word for salvation is *soterios*, which together with *sozo* reveals God's action in Christ to deliver humanity from the power of sin, death and Satan, which drains life on earth of its joy and threatens each person with eternal loss (Richards 1985:540, 541).

It is only God or Jesus Christ who can act to save believers from danger threatening not only physical life, but also their prospects of eternal life. Salvation implies human helplessness in the face of life-threatening danger. Deliverance must come through the action of another, not from your own action. The source of salvation is God (Richards 1985: 541). Richards writes: "The believer can look with trust and confidence to the Lord, expecting that God will act and expressing the joy that comes with the assurance that God is the Saviour" (1985:540).

Ovawambo and Okavango concept of salvation is similar to that of the Hebrews and Greeks. Both put emphasis on the deliverance from imminent danger. Salvation is always contextual. Okavango people speak of the deliverance from a river or a crocodile, which are life-threatening for them. Ovawambo speak of deliverance from lions, hunger, danger and other life-threatening situations. Salvation according to Kaishungu is here and now. "Salvation is where you are now, not in the future" (Kaishungu 2006). He further emphasizes that salvation from a critical situation is immediate and imminent (Kaishungu 2006). Therefore that is how Africans understand the concept of salvation. The researcher argues that salvation, in the African understanding, is focussed more on this world, whereas Christianity focusses on heaven. The person needs salvation in this world, both now and in heaven.

Although translators may render an appropriate word from the source language and culture to the target language and culture, interpretation is the best way to contextualize the biblical message. Ovawambo and Okavango people differ in their emphasis with regard to the term salvation, because while the Bible focuses on God as the deliverer, Africans put emphasis on human beings as the agents of salvation. The Bible also points out that God might use a human agency to carry out salvation. The African expresses salvation as occurring here and now

whereas the Bible focuses on this life and the life hereafter. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ removed the effects of sin and death, and brought salvation and hope to humanity. In the dialogue between the biblical concept of salvation and that of Ovawambo and Okavango people, one can find clear parallels and contrasts, which through mutual understanding and respect, can enrich each other, and deepen our common understanding of what it means, “to be saved”. ELCIN theologians must utilize the African concept of salvation to express human relationship with God and with one another and its implications for life here and now and in the future (Munyika 2004:390).

6. 4. 7 Redemption (*ekulilo*)

Redemption and salvation in Oshiwambo languages have the same meaning. In Oshindonga language one finds the concept of *ekulilo*, redemption. Amkongo explains that wars and raids used to be carried out among Ovawambo tribes. In war some people were captured as prisoners-of-war and were taken from one kingdom to another. The clan or family gathered its valuables and sent an important person to pay ransom for the release of the prisoner. When that process has been completed the person has been redeemed. If a person wronged the king (*omukwaniilwa, ohamba*) the same procedure had to be followed to release him/her. This is called *ekulilo*, redemption (Amkongo 2006). This concept is the same in the Oukwanyama kingdom. In Oukwanyama people collected cattle and beads and other precious items to pay ransom for the prisoner-of-war. On release, the person is redeemed. If a person is not redeemed he/she will become a slave. Practically the prisoners-of-war (POW) in Oshiwambo were kept tied to a special stick with one foot through a hole. In this way the person was unable to walk away. This stick or pole is called *eti* (big pole). Once someone is ransomed the pole has to be broken to release him/her. Redemption in Oshiwambo is “*okwa mangululwa meti loupika*” meaning he/she is released from the pole of slavery (Nghifikwa 2006; Ndevaetela 2006).

The Hebrew word for redeem or redeemer is *gaal*. It implies to buy back, rescue or deliver. Yahweh is the agent of redemption from bondage, from death and from enemies in ancient Israel’s context. The word *geullah* (noun) is derived from *gaal*, meaning “redemption” or “right of redemption” and refers to the right of redemption for a person who is purchased out of slavery. Another Hebrew word, *padah* indicates redemption that involves human agency. The word *pidyon* refers to a ransom paid by the victim’s family. In the New Testament there are also many usages of the term redeem or redemption. The word ‘*exagorazo*’, refers to Christ’s work of redeeming people from the curse of the law by reconciling them to God and removing

the impact of divine judgment against them. *Lytrosis* (noun) from *lytroo*, meaning redemption, is the same as salvation. *Agorazo* meaning, buy or purchase, implies ransom (Renn 2005:792-794; KJV, 1991:1692-1693). There is a connection between the understanding of the concept of redemption in Oshiwambo and Okavango and in the biblical usage. The Hebrew words that are similar to Oshiwambo terms are *padah* and *pidyon* because they involve people and payments, while the Greek word *lytrosis* and *agorazo* also carry a similar message. The difference is that Ovawambo redemption is focused on this life now in this world, whereas Christianity is focused on the present life and on the life beyond. For Christianity this is the work of Christ Jesus alone whereas in Oshiwambo and Okavango redemption is the work of human beings. It is just horizontal redemption.

In Hebrew tradition the priest has to offer a sacrifice for the remission of sins. In Christian faith it is believed that Satan puts people into slavery. In this case there is no need for sacrifice, neither to collect valuable items to ransom people from Satan. Jesus Christ is himself the ransom and the price offered by God to release people from the power of Satan. Jesus replaces all sacrifices once and for all. So, Christ released us from *eti loulunde*, (the power of sin) with his blood (Heb 9:12-14), and not with the blood of cattle and beads. The Small Catechism of Luther is translated contextually in Oshikwanyama as follows:

*...Jesus okwa xupifa nge momatimba aeshe nomefyo nomepangelo lasatana. Ye ina kulila nge neengobe ile noilanda, ndelene nohonde yaye iyapuki ...*⁶⁴ [Jesus redeem me from all sins, death and dominion of Satan. He does not redeemed me with cattle or beads, but with his holy blood... translation mine]

In Christianity, redemption and salvation are the work of God, through Jesus Christ. When this concept of redemption was translated into ATR it carried the same understanding as in their practices. The difference is that Ovawambo understood redemption in concrete experiences marked with good health, fortune and material prosperity, here and now, while in Christianity redemption carries an eschatological meaning (Munyika 2004:226).

⁶⁴ Okatikisa Kanini kaMartin Luther paShikwanyama. [Martin Luther's Small Catechism in Oshikwanyama] 1992. Namibia: Eloc Printing Press, p 14.

6. 4. 8. Eternal life (*omwenyo waalushe/mwenyo gwanarunye/ omwenyo gwaaluhe*)

Both the Bible and ATR speak about life after death. The Bible speaks of eternal life while ATR speaks about living dead. That means that eternal life is not clearly conceptualized among Africans, but there is an intuition that death, which is opposed to eternal life, is not the end of everything (Mugambi 1993:277). In Okavango understanding if someone dies, he/she becomes *mudimu*, the spirit of the dead. This is not a good spirit because it causes misfortune and curses among relatives. *Vadimu* (plural, spirits) remain on in the world (Lihongo 2006). *Ovakwamhungu*, the spirits of the living dead are believed to exist. These spirits visit the living in the form of sickness and curses. This means that the dead people are living somewhere, from where they come and visit the living and cause trouble (Hambyuka 2006). To avoid the inflicting of punishment upon the living, a proper burial has to take place (Mugambi 1993:277). In the past, among Okavango people, the focus on ancestral spirits was very strong but now it is observed in minimal terms (Hambyuka 2006). My father told me that in Oshikwanyama there was a story that circulated among the people. The village was full of people. The great giant (*ekishi*) swallowed the people of the village. Fortunately, unknowingly it left one man, who clung to a tree. The giant started singing: “*Moshilongo omu aame andike ndi li mo*”, meaning, “I am the only one in this village”. The man in the tree responded: “*Ofye naave tu li mo!*” meaning “I am together with you!”. When the giant heard the voice it went to the tree and asked the man to come down. The man jumped into the belly of the giant with his tools. Inside the giant he found other people. He started a fire in the belly of the giant. The giant became thirsty. When it came to the water point, the water dried up without its thirst being quenched. Later the man cut open the belly of the giant and all people inside came out alive. For my father that is eternal life because these people were still alive (Ngodji Sn. 2006).

According to Ndevaetela, Ovakwanyama believe in God, *Namhongo* who lives “up there”. *Namhongo* or *Kalunga kaNangobe* [God of *Nangobe*] never dies. If a person believes in *Namhongo* who is everlasting, he/she also will not die. Ndevaetela thus connects eternal life with faith in God, who is eternal (2006). Jesus also says that he/she who believes in Him will have eternal life (John 3:16). In the Oshindonga understanding the departed go to another world, but still have a connection with the living. They are still part of the community. The Bible brought a new understanding of the whereabouts of those who have departed before us (Ekandjo 2006).

According to Amkongo, there is no direct word for or concept of eternal life, but there is an understanding amongst Ovawambo that the spirit of a person never dies. The spirit of a dead person takes on another form, or it goes to another world (2006). Amadhila differs with other informants because, according to him, there is an indigenous Ovawambo concept of eternal life, called *omwenyo gwembwengelela*. He bases this on the speeches during funerals, at which there is a saying: “Put the water in the shade, we are also on the journey”. This implies that there is life beyond this, although it is not made clear. Death is not the end of life. In the Oshiwambo understanding people believe that there is life after death. They have a dualist concept of a person as soul and body, as Jews and Greeks do. The soul or life of a person is eternal; once a person dies his/her spirit/soul goes to another world, the world of ancestors. Again the details of eternal life are unclear. In the case of the king, he must be buried with a girl, so that she can serve him. However, according to two informants the term eternal life was created during the Christian era (Amadhila 2006; Nghifikwa 2006).

Kaishungu has a different concept of eternal life. As was mentioned earlier, according to him it is the living that can be lost. One cannot be lost if one is dead. Eternal life is for all, whether you believe in it or not (Kaishungu 2006). Kaishungu stressed that eternal life is here and now, not in the future. It seems that he has been influenced by John’s Gospel (John 3.16,17), where it is stated that judgment is for the living not for the dead. God is dealing with the living people not the dead ones. In the translation of the Small Catechism of Martin Luther dealing with John 3:16, the word “perish” was rendered “*ekelwashi*” literally meaning “thrown away”. The reason given by Kaishungu for becoming a Christian is that he does not want to be “thrown away” after death (2006).

For Kaishungu, sickness is close to death. Therefore when someone is sick, she/he is to be asked what he/she needs. In fact, it is not the sick person, who is asked, but *ovakwamhungu*, the ancestral spirit, who answers through the sick individual. If the sick person demands something, he/she will be given it, but not necessarily him/her, but rather the ancestral spirit will be given it. The sick person will be cured because of the blood of the animal that was slaughtered as a result of the ancestor’s demands. Therefore ancestors never die, but go into darkness, from where they return now and then to visit the living (Kaishungu 2006). According to Kaishungu, the difference between Ovawambo and many other African peoples on the issue of ancestors/*ovakwamhungu*, is that while Ovawambo do recognize the *ovakwamhungu*, they do not serve or worship them (Kaishungu 2006). Jonsson agrees with Kaishungu that “the dead

are not worshipped, but there is a deep sense of communion through symbols; they do protect and reinforce ties among the living and serve as intermediaries” (2001:127).

The new teaching brought by Christianity is that Jesus Christ brought eternal life. Those who believe in Christ have eternal life. Again here there is clear room for dialogue between the indigenous notions of eternal life and the Christian understanding. Although they differ they have something in common as far as eternal life is concerned. More research needs to be done on this issue. Suffice to say that Christianity and ATR share significantly on this point that the life of a person does not come to an end after death.

6. 4. 9 One family (*epata limwe/ ezimo limwe/ ekoro limwe*)

There are various terms describing the family in African languages because it is an important social unit in each society. Okavango people use the term *ekoro limwe* to describe the family. There are many clans among Okavango people and each clan has a totemic clan name. If any person, including someone from a different area or kingdom carries a particular clan name, even if that person is not a close relative, he/she is accepted into the clan with the same totem name. The term *vandambo* refers to a well-known person who does not belong to that particular clan (Lihongo 2006). *Ekoro limwe* means that people share a common ancestor. If they do not have one shared ancestor they are called *vandambo* (relatives). If an outsider from another area comes to Okavango, he/she can join the clan with the same totem name, and will become a member of that clan forever (Hambyuka 2006). Ausiku supports this, saying that anyone with the same totem name belongs to one family or clan, *ezimo limwe*, and that anyone from a different area, but with the same totem name, also becomes a member of that clan, no matter what (Ausiku 2006). Hambyuka however emphasizes that Christians are *ekoro limwe*, not *vandambo* (2006), in other words they have a shared ancestor.

In the Oshindonga setting the same concept exists. Each person belongs to a family or must join a family. The understanding is that your personality is seen within the family circle and of course a person is born from a family. In Ovawambo and Okavango communities, there are three entries for a person to become a member of a family: through birth, through capture in war and through asylum seeking. The first means of entry into the family is clear, but the others are more complicated. If a person is captured as a prisoner-of-war and remains a captive without being ransomed he/she will become a member of a local family. If a person has fled from his/her area to another, seeking asylum, he/she will join the clan with a similar clan

name. A person cannot be isolated; he or she must have relatives (*ezimo*). It is a common practice among Ovawambo tribes to accept or accommodate a person into the family, and in the long run, that particular person will become a permanent member of that family (Ekandjo 2006). Amkongo confirms this practice: if a person was a prisoner-of-war for a period and no ransom was paid, then he/she would later become a member of a certain clan. Even if a person has fled one area due to having committed a crime, after being tried, he/she will be incorporated into a clan, eventually becoming part of that clan or family. There are many examples of this in the Ondonga kingdom (Amkongo 2006).

In Oshiwambo language there is a saying: “*Ovalumenhu ova ina imwe mofuka*”, meaning, “Men belong to one mother in the forest or far from home”. When you are deep in the forest or far away from home or from your family or relatives, you can help each other. A difficult situation forces you to unite. Difficulties unite people. That is why Amadhila asserts that friendship is better than richness (2006). Ovakwanyama have a common practice together with other Africans, to accommodate a person from elsewhere. Many former slaves from different tribes, become part of a clan, even to the extent of having inheritance rights (Nghifikwa 2006). Kaishungu shares this understanding but adds that a ritual of incorporation was performed when necessary (2006).

The Christian idea of family thus resonates well among Ovawambo and Okavango peoples because they have the same practices. The Christian church is understood to be a community of believers, accommodating all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. According to Mbiti, the Christian idea of the church has parallels with African traditional life in which kinship and extended family play a central role. The church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ. The church also includes both those who have died and those who are living. In the African understanding the bond of the family is never broken, even by death. The connection is always there (Mbiti 1992:190). Among Ovawambo, a dead person is not buried far from the house. There are specific places where each member of a family is to be buried. Thus, the husbands are buried in the cattle kraal, the girls at the pounding area, the boys at the calves’ entrance, the wives at the main room entrance etc. The system of having a common gravesite for all people far from the individual’s homes is not well accepted culturally; therefore there are small gravesites around houses instead of using the cemeteries at churchyards. As a Christian family, believers have a connection with departed family members and therefore parishes have their own cemeteries in ELCIN. The problem is

that unbaptised people are not buried in Christian graveyards, only the baptized family members who belong to the Christian family. The reason is that they do not belong to the Christian family.

There was an incident whereby an unbaptised infant was buried outside a parish graveyard. The pastor was attacked severely. People nowadays have mixed understanding on this issue. One group is in favour of the practice because it separates members of the church from the unbaptised. Others feel that one should not judge people, judgment belongs to God, while others are of the opinion that biological family members cannot be separated in this way. This has caused many controversies and has been disputed in the church on a parish level. Some parishes have changed this practice, but others maintain the separation of burial sites for baptized and unbaptised people. In the African understanding of family, burying someone outside the graveyard in which some of his/her family members were buried before, is to separate the family, therefore it is not a good practice at all. This practice needs critical observation.

To conclude this section, the researcher reiterates the need to examine the above terms and concepts thoroughly for a better understanding. African theologians must fully utilize these concepts in order to formulate an African Christian theology. Lihongo expresses the great need for indigenous interpreters to interpret the Word of God so that people can understand it well. Only through interpreters can African Christians “own” and understand the Bible more deeply (Lihongo 2006). The translatability and interpretation principles are the starting point for developing a better understanding of the link between the Bible and African languages and cultures. This involves dialogue between ATR and Christianity including dealing with cultural, social and religious issues. Thus dialogue includes more than just the formulation of the new understandings of terms and concepts such as those discussed above. As Kapewangolo notes, liturgy is also affected by culture. African songs and melodies are often better received by African Christians rather than Western melodies (2006). Appropriation of terms and concepts has caused implications in application, and this needs close investigation.

6. 5. The appropriateness and implications of the concepts and the terminologies

6. 5. 1 The case of women and marriage

In Ovawambo culture women are distinctive members of the society. They have specific names or terms to define them according to their status or level in the community. Some of the terms applied to women are not respectful. They are called *omukulukadi* (wife), *oshikumbu* (concubine), *ehengu* (single-mother), and *ombwada* (harlot or prostitute). These terms will now be defined and their translation in the context of the Bible discussed.

Omukulukadi is a married woman. The term's usage is *omukulukadi wa* (the wife of). *Oshikumbu* refers to a young woman who is not married or who was married and is divorced or widowed (English-Kwanyama Dictionary 1977). *Oshikumbu* often refers to a concubine of one or more men, but she may marry. *Oshikumbu* could be a woman who has a house and partner, but is not officially married. If such a woman is brought into a house she becomes a wife. There is a relation between the word *oshikumbu* with the English word "girlfriend". *Ehengu* or *omusimbakadhona* is a young girl who is pregnant or gives birth before undergoing initiation, which introduces girls into womanhood, or just an unmarried girl. *Ombwada* is used to refer to a sex worker or harlot. *Ombwada* is also described as promiscuous. In the Bible these terms or names are found in the so-called texts of terror (Trible 1985). Clearly, some of these names are derogatory, because they rob women of their dignity. *Oshikumbu*, *ombwada* and *ehengu* are not respected people in Ovawambo communities. There are restrictions attached to them and to their children.

The Bible has similar terms to those of Ovawambo as far as women are concerned. Phiri thus argues that the patriarchal structure of African culture is reinforced by the patriarchy of the Bible, and that both African culture and the Bible play a central position in shaping the lives of African women (2002:20). The Bible is now becoming a tool of enlightenment for women, as they read and reread it. According to Kapewangolo (appendix X)⁶⁵, an ELCIN woman theologian, the authors of the Bible have not been inclusive. The Bible is not overtly

⁶⁵ Aino Kapewangolo is a female pastor in ELCIN. After she completed her theological education at Paulinum Lutheran Seminary in 1976, she remained a theologian because the church had not decided to start ordaining female pastors. Since she was married to a pastor she just assisted him in his work. She was ordained as ELCIN pastor in 1992. She served as a local pastor at Omuthiya parish and at the same time she was elected as the first woman dean in ELCIN at Omuthiya Deanery.

representative of women. One needs to read between the lines in order to read it as a woman (2006). That is why Kanyoro asserts that the translators of the Bible deviated from the original text. If the recent translators were faithful to the original text, the original text was not faithful to their source. If they were faithful to their source then the source was not faithful to itself (Kanyoro 2001:87).

6. 5. 2 The women in the Bible and women in the Oshiwambo culture and tradition.

The way in which translation and its principle of translatability have influenced the dialogue between culture, language and context in the case of the issue of marriage will now be examined. The appropriateness of the terminology for African culture will be focused on in particular. As regards the term “polygamy” in Oshiwambo language, this refers to a man with many wives. There is nothing like a woman with many husbands, polyandry. Polygamy is a common marriage style in the world today, and it seems to have been a practice among the Hebrew people among whom the Bible originated (Kanyoro 2001:88). The Bible tells us that among the patriarchs there were polygamists. Among Ovawambo and Okavango communities, polygamy was a common practice until the missionaries came and introduced monogamy, which, however, is still not widely accepted. In the Bible and in African culture there are terms used to define wives and concubines, but sometimes it is not clear who is who.

According to Genesis 20:12 and 24:4, “a prospective wife was chosen from the clan of the prospective husband with a view to protecting the family’s inheritance” (Kanyoro 2002:89). This was the case with Sarah and Abraham, and with Isaak and Rebecca. It is an accepted practice amongst Ovawambo and Okavango people to marry one’s uncle’s daughter. This is similar to Hebrew practice. Culturally there is no problem with this marriage although it is illegal according to civil laws. In Oshiwambo culture it is the parents, who know the clans that arrange marriages (Amadhila 2006). There are similarities between Ovawambo and the Hebrews as far as marriage is concerned. Marriage transfers the identity of a woman from her father to her husband. As Kanyoro writes: “Before marriage, a woman did not have an independent identity. A woman was regarded as the daughter of her father. After the marriage she became the wife of her husband” (2001:89). Two similarities between Hebrew and Ovawambo (Ovakwanyama and Ovandonga, the other Ovawambo tribes, do not have *lobola*) are that the marriage must be accepted by the man’s and woman’s families and that the *lobola*, *mahar*, *oyoonda*, the bride price, must be paid to the women’s family (Kanyoro 2001:89). The marriage ceremony marks the physical bonding of two individuals as sex partners, the

covenantal bonding of two families, and the transfer of the authority over the woman from her father to her husband.

In many African communities bearing children is very important in marriages (Oduyoye 2001:13). In Oukwanyama culture, if the woman does not conceive, the *lobola* will be returned. The researcher himself witnessed a man chasing the *lobola* cattle from the kraal of his father-in-law in their village. It was a shame, because they had stayed together so long. Later the woman gave birth to a child with another man. It was clear that the problem was with the man, not with the woman. Many marriages break up because they fail to produce children, and even in the church, women are always blamed.

In Ovamboland men can marry many wives, who range in status. They all stay in one house, each with her kitchen area and sleeping hut (room). One woman, *munyalombe*⁶⁶, is the head of all the wives. There is no concubine in the house as all the women are wives. A concubine is a woman who has an affair with a man, but stays at her own house (*okaumbo*). According to Kanyoro, the Hebrew term *pilegesh*, which is translated as “concubine”, refers to a woman who cohabits habitually with the same men; she does not appear to have the rank of a wife and there is no indication that the union is permanent. Sometimes a concubine is called half-wife or slave wife (2002:91-93). The Hebrew term for “concubine” and Oshiwambo term for *oshikumbu* are not related. In Hebrew culture the concubine stays at the house together with the wife and husband. One can compare Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16) and King Solomon (I Kings 11). The story of the wives, princesses and concubines of King Salomon appears to be exaggerated. How could one person marry such a huge number of wives? It is practically impossible. There is a clear distinction between wife and concubine in Oshiwambo tradition, but in the Hebrew tradition it is not clear. One can conclude that wife, concubine, and *oshikumbu*, all are women of the same man, because of their children having the same father.

The case of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16) is now analyzed particularly with regard to how it can be understood in an African (Ovawambo and Okavango) context. First Abraham married Sarah as his wife. In some instances he called her sister, but this is not our concern at this point. Hagar was an Egyptian servant of Sarah. Abraham and Sarah were a rich couple, blessed by God, but they had no child, especially no son, to inherit their possessions (Kanyoro

⁶⁶ *Munyalombe* is the first wife. Her kitchen is located at the corner of the south east of the house and the main room (her bedroom) is in the centre of the house facing the *olupale*, sitting place.

2001:93,94). Sarah was growing old, and she therefore gave her servant Hagar to her husband Abraham, to be his wife, to bear him a child. This practice also occurs among Ovawambo and Okavango people. If a woman does not bear children it is an indication that she was cursed for being unfaithful during her youth (Kapewangolo 2006). Only women are blamed, even though sometimes the problem of infertility lies with the man. Hagar gave birth to a son for Abraham. Things changed: the status of Hagar changed from that of a slave to that of wife. Now Hagar became the second wife of Abraham. According to Kanyoro, in polygamous societies, like that of the Hebrews, the older wife participated in organizing the marriages of their co-wives. This is what Sarah did. This is common among African societies too. Hagar here would be considered as a wife, because Sarah gave her to Abraham (2001:94). Ultimately Sarah and Hagar became wives of Abraham and Abraham became a polygamist (Kapewangolo 2006).

In the African understanding there is no problem with this. The only problem is the threat of jealousy. It would be wrong in the African context to call Hagar a concubine or *oshikumbu* of Abraham because she lived in the house, not elsewhere. In the African setting if the first wife grows old she has to give way to the second wife or the younger wives, but she is still in charge of the household (Kapewangolo 2006). This issue of polygamy presents a challenge to translation. The translators have to consider the cultural practice of polygamy among Ovawambo and Okavango communities in order to produce an acceptable and meaningful biblical message within their culture and context. Translatability, the principle of the translation of Christianity and its Scripture is the only way to make deeply accessible translation possible. To render Hagar as the co-wife of Sarah is appropriate and understandable in the African context.

6. 5. 3 The rendering of the phrase “the Kingdom of God”.

There are implications within the African languages (Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama) themselves regarding the way the phrase “kingdom of God” is translated. The term “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” has been used in various ways, even among the authors of the Gospels. The Gospel according to Mathew refers to the “Kingdom of heaven”, *ouhamba weulu* (5:3). Mark uses the phrase “Kingdom of God”, *ouhamba waKalunga*, (1:15). Luke also uses the term *ouhamba waKalunga* (6:20), while John uses simply “kingdom”, *ouhamba* (8:36). Other biblical writers use the term “kingdom” to mean rule, sovereign or power of judiciary, especially in the Old Testament (Ps 103:19b).

In the Oshikwanyama language the phrase “kingdom of God” is rendered *ouhamba waKalunga*, which means, the “full reign of God” or the “dwelling place of God”. In Oukwanyama the palace is also called the “kingdom” and the whole tribal area of *Ovakwanyama* is also the “kingdom”, the “Kingdom of *Ovakwanyama*”, *Ouhamba wOvakwanyama*. God is supposed to live in the “kingdom” (the palace) and “to reign over the kingdom” (the area or country). It is only the king (overlord) who is able to live in the *ouhamba*. In Oshindonga language the situation is different. The phrase “kingdom of God” is rendered *Oshilongo shaKalunga*, literally meaning the “country of God”. For them God does not dwell in a palace, *ouwa*. God is not restricted to a certain area; rather, he is present in the whole Ondonga region. According to Ovandonga, the king rules the whole of Ondonga, but Ondonga belongs to all Ondonga speaking people. The palace, [*ouwa*], also belongs to the whole Ovandonga community and not only to the king. Because God is regarded as the ruler of the whole area, *oshilongo*, the *oshilongo* belongs to God, the overall ruler (Nambala 2006). The difference between Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga languages are that Ovakwanyama confine God within the palace (*ouhamba*), whereas Ovandonga make God the overall king (*oshilongo*). Nevertheless, they all understand what is meant by the phrase “kingdom of God”, that is, God is the sovereign ruler of the whole of reality. Thus, there is a parallel between Ovawambo and the biblical understandings of the phrase the “kingdom of God”.

6. 5. 4. “Brethren” as an address, (*ovamwameme or ovamwatate*)

The Hebrew word for brethren is *ach* (Gen 14:16, 29:12, 15), which means near relation, relative, cousin, countryman or a fellow male. *Ach* expresses general relationship whether by blood or affinity. *Ach* is also a general term of affection. In addition, it carries a meaning of companionship, collegueship, or comradeship. *Ach* is used as a polite term of address (Gen 29:4, Judges 19:23). The Greek word for brother is *adelphos* (James 2:1), and for sister *adelphie*. These terms refer to the brother or sister from the same womb (*delphus*). *Adelphos* denotes, in general, commaraderie based on common origin, for example a member of the same ethnic group, or a countryman and countrywoman. It also came to designate a community of love based on the community of believers due to the work of Christ (Mat 12: 50; Mark 10:29,30; Acts 12:17). All the members of the same Christian community are called brothers (John 21:23; I Cor 7:12). All the usages, wether, in Hebrew or in Greek, seem exclusive. Although expressing a close relationship, they imply masculinity rather than femininity. The issue here is to discover whether such ways of addressing ‘brothers’ or ‘brethren’ are appropriate in African culture.

The terms *adelphos* or *adelphe* are more appropriate in the African context, because they refer to men or women from the same mother, *mumwameme* (KJV 1991:1597, 1682). As Ovawambo and Okavango people are matrilineal, to render the term “brethren” as *ovamwameme* has a strong resonance, because women are more dominant in the clan bond than men. In these African communities the man is nothing as far as the clan is concerned, but the woman has status. In order to be closer to Christ, Jesus must be our “brother”, *omumwameme* on our mother’s side, and not our “brother”, *omumwatate* on our father’s side. Unlike in the English language, the all-inclusive “brethren” is not appropriate in the African languages under discussion. The best way to address people inclusively in English is to say ‘brothers and sisters’ and not ‘brethren’ (James 2:1).

Translatability and interpretation theories open the door for dialogue in religions to observe and consider the usage of terms in religions and cultures from a cultural perspective. Lihongo points out that ELCIN needs theologians to conduct more interpretation in order to appropriate terms and their meanings so as to make the biblical text relevant to ordinary African people in the community (2006).

6. 6. Concluding remarks

In this chapter dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, was dealt with, in particular focusing on Ovawambo and Okavango. The way in which Oshiwambo and Okavango terms and concepts have influenced and influence Christianity has been examined. It was revealed that there are more similarities than differences in the concepts. The best way for dialogue to take place is to recognize the personality of the person including language, culture and gender. All these aspects must be treated equally, because they are all important in conveying the relevant message. Christianity came to Africa, including the northern belt of Namibia among Ovawambo and Okavango people, in a Western cultural vehicle. It has to be transferred to an African cultural vehicle in order to be relevant to Africans. The translatability of Christianity and its Scriptures opens the way for dialogue, as translatability is also dialogue. Dialogue is an ongoing process, which respects different religions and cultures as having an equally valid contribution to make. African terms and concepts that appear in the Bible are best understood in vernacular languages. African Christians must eliminate the countless views of early missionaries that the African heritage has nothing to contribute to the Christian faith

(Mugambi 2002:142). Rather the African heritage must be embraced as part of global Christianity.

Dialogue transforms religions and cultures, and thus Christianity is now an important facet of African culture in Namibia. At the same time, African culture is now part of Christianity on the continent. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages in the northern belt of Namibia by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) makes this a reality. Oshiwambo and Okavango terms and concepts find their way into the Bible, the Word of God in written form. This allows the people to experience at a deep, relevant and meaningful level, the full message of the Gospel. The next chapter will deal with the challenges to the translators, in particular the issues of gender and HIV and AIDS in ELCIN. How can these challenges be accommodated into the process of the translation of the Bible? The translatability of the Word of God will again be the answer to these challenges.

CHAPTER SEVEN
THE CHALLENGES TO THE BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN AFRICA:
WOMEN AND HIV AND AIDS

7.1 Introduction

The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in Africa is not exempted from the challenges of the present time. Among the many challenges facing Bible translation the researcher has decided to focus on two, namely women and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. These challenges were not present during the era of the formation of the Bible, but they are now major social issues, which need more consideration. This chapter examines how women and culture, HIV and AIDS have challenged the translation of the Scripture. The Bible emerged from a patriarchal society in which women were deprived of their rights. Kanyoro points out that women-related terminology was not appropriate in various cultures (2001:88), and this caused them to be excluded from the vernacular Bibles. The challenges of women to biblical translations and interpretations are also examined. In the section about women the issues of women and the Bible, women's liberation theology, women and biblical authority, biblical language, biblical interpretation and challenges to translation from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians are discussed.

HIV and AIDS also were not present when the Bible was written; nevertheless there were other diseases around. Now HIV and AIDS has to be accommodated in Bible translations and interpretations. Christian faith states that God is in control of everything in the whole creation. Many Christians believe that the Bible is an authoritative book, and it continues to be read for guidance and inspiration, for comfort and for obtaining wisdom (Stiebert 2002:175). In the section on HIV and AIDS there are questions like: What does the Bible says about HIV and AIDS? Is the Bible a useful tool to address the HIV and AIDS pandemic? These are examined in this chapter. The researcher has chosen these two challenges to biblical translation because Christianity, supported by the Bible and by culture, has deprived women of their rights for so long. HIV and AIDS is threatening human lives on a huge scale, in Africa in general and Namibia in particular with a population of 1.8 million. The statistics of the effect of HIV and AIDS will be shown in the section about HIV and AIDS in this chapter. The aim of this chapter is to see and examine how a translatability and interpretation theory has been applied to the translation process of the Bible into vernacular languages in northern Namibia.

The following section will deal with the challenges posed to the translation of the Bible by women, and how they responded and contributed to the translation process of the Bible, in general, and in African theology in particular.

7. 2. Women and the Bible

7. 2. 1. Why a Women's Bible?

The Bible has been regarded as a Holy Book, the Word of God, which never errs (ELCIN 2001:11), but it is accused of excluding part of humanity, the women. This is why feminist theologians have raised the issue of a Women's Bible. The project of a Women's Bible is a protest against patriarchal domination in the biblical text on the one hand, and criticizes the Christian tradition on the other hand (Ziegler 2002:22). Mukonyora, Cox and Verstraelen, confirm this situation as follows:

Some women theologians came to the conclusion that the male supremacist way of thinking is influential not only in the interpretations but also in the biblical text itself; the Bible in their view is beyond redemption for becoming relevant to women and therefore should be dismissed (1993:277).

For this reason and many others, women theologians support the idea of the Women's Bible. The radical feminist theologians, as represented by Catholic theologian Mary Daly, took the stance of Women's Bible because they show that the Bible is irredeemable from the patriarchy system (Ziebler 2002:23). If the Bible excludes or misrepresents women, the process of translation is questionable; moreover, the position of women in the society in which the Bible originated is also questionable (Kanyoro 2002:87). One cannot deny the fact that the Bible originated from the patriarchal society of the Hebrews, and it is thus a patriarchal book (Oddie 1984:43). The Bible is patriarchal because it contains patriarchal elements. The Bible must be a matriarchal book too, because women were also part of the culture in which the biblical message emerged, and women are part of the societies and cultures in which the biblical message continues to be received. The Bible must be matriarchal to reflect women's experience in itself.

What is "The Women's Bible"? According to Santon, The Women's Bible, is a collection of scriptural passages pertaining to women's dignity and women's humanity, and is a protest

against the teaching that women are made after men, of man and for men, inferior beings, subject to men, and the teaching that women brought sin and death into the world (1988:7). Besides texts in the Bible, which speak negatively about women, there are passages or texts, which constrained women and these are the ones constituting a Women's Bible. Not all women reject the Bible as a whole, but only texts, which degrade them. Stanton writes: "The Bible cannot be accepted or rejected as a whole, its teachings are varied and its lessons differ widely from each other" (1988:13). Women still love the Bible, because "their lives have been enriched, sustained, and empowered in communities that affirm that within the Bible one encounters not only the divine will for human life and behaviour, but the very presence of God (Ringe 1998: 3). Although at the outset The Women's Bible was not widely accepted, its creation and reception demonstrated that something needed to be done for the women with regard to Scriptures. Women need the Bible, which represents and guides them in their daily life and preserves their dignity (Stanton 1988:12).

The Women's Bible became a challenge to the meaning and the authority of biblical scriptures and an attempt to liberate women from the "religious superstitions" that blocked women's emancipation (Stanton 1988:7). Translators and interpreters of the Bible, men and women, need to change the way of translations and interpretations to correct the mistakes of the past, and make the existing Bible more inclusive and relevant to all. Therefore, new approaches toward these texts are needed in order to portray women in a positive way. The translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako will help to include women in the biblical message.

Translatability has to be aware of this kind of approach as rejected by Stanton. Translation has to be accurate and reasonable having relevance in and reflecting the contemporary context. Even the language must be the language presently used by people, making it inclusive. The Women's Bible challenged the existing Bible, because of the critique it posed to the Bible. The Women's Bible has opponents and supporters from among the feminist theologians. The opponents are called mainstream feminist theologians who are liberal Christians. Liberal Christians on the one hand "appreciate and want to continue the Christian tradition, while on the other hand see contemporary religious consciousness as a critical norm for Christian tradition" (Ziegler 2002:23). The supporters are radical feminist theologians that are sick and tired of the patriarchy system in the Bible and church tradition. They reject Christianity as an

irredeemable religion. They want a new religion to emerge from the experience of the divine in women today (Ziegler 2002:23).

What Stanton initiated in disguised form is now the topic of public debate. The Women's Bible is needed to restore the balance between men and women. There is no need to replace the existing Bible, but further interpretation, which is inclusive of both men and women in their cultural settings, is required. Feminist theology is a part of liberation theology, so the next part will deal with women's liberation theology.

7. 2. 2 Women's liberation theology

Ziegler describes womanist/feminist theology as a liberation theology. Liberation theology is theology from below, from the suffering perspective. Womanist/feminist theology forms a part of contextual theology, because it deals specifically with the condition and experience of women (Ziegler 2002:21). It is a liberation theology because it tries to liberate women from men; it tries to liberate theology from male domination; it tries to liberate the Word of God from the words of people; and it tries to show the significance of women in the process of developing a meaningful and inclusive biblical message in Africa and in the world at large. The features of liberation theology which are found in feminist theology are contextual, which rejects the idea of an eternal, non-contextual method of doing theology. It is practical because it aims at the action, at a change of the situation of the oppressed, it is liberative because it sees God as the liberator and the Gospel as the message of liberation from all forms of oppression and alienation, and its goal is the socio-political salvation for all and the creation of a new and just society, and a comprehensive well-being for all on earth (Ziegler 2002:21-22). To compare the two theologies, liberation and feminist theologies, Ziegler put it right when he writes:

As liberation theology fights a denigrating and exploitative capitalist and hierarchical system, so feminist theology fights patriarchy, the system of male intellectual, religious, and social domination over women to restore true personhood to women and men (2002:22)

In Namibia and elsewhere in the world, liberation theology was created in the midst of years of suffering and humiliation and in the face of the exclusivity of the theology of the nineteenth-century missionaries (Mujoro 1989:96). In South Africa the black women's struggle has taken the form of a gender, national, and class struggle. Therefore, Mosala writes

A hermeneutics of liberation which is envisaged for an African women's struggle will be at once a human, African and feminist hermeneutics of liberation; it will be polemical in the sense of being

critical of the history, the devices, the culture, the ideologies and agendas of both the text and itself; it will be appropriative of the resources and victories inscribed in the biblical text as well as its own contemporary text; it will be projective in that its task is performed in the service of a transformed and liberated social order (1995:173).

According to Russell, “the message of the Bible can become the liberating word for those who hear and act in faith but that this same message also needs to be liberated from sexist interpretations which continue to dominate our thoughts and actions” (Russell 1985:11). This exclusiveness also has been manifested in the church, which carries the biblical message, and which is supposed to be inclusive (Dube 2000:12). Therefore the Bible needs to be liberated from the snare of exclusiveness to inclusiveness. Rakoczy argues, “since the Scriptures were written in a patriarchal historical setting we should not be surprised that they are permeated by that ideology. The rule of fathers over all females of every age is the primary worldview of the Scriptures which it maintains is mandated by God” (2004:154). Therefore this kind of understanding of the Scriptures is challenged and transformed by women theologians.

Feminist theologians maintain that the Bible is at the center of all liberation theologies, which put Jesus Christ at the center of liberation, because Christ is also at the center of the biblical message. Thus Mujoro writes:

Christ is at the center of liberation theology, for he is at the beginning and the end of all life; Jesus reveals God, the creator, sustainer and liberator of all life. It is through, in and for him that everything was created. He is the incarnated Word of God; the deliverer of the afflicted and the oppressed; the one who loves and accepts the rejected, outcast and poor (1989:98-99).

Claiming that Jesus Christ is the source and at the center of liberation theology highlights that it’s teaching and preaching must clearly and unambiguously articulate the affirmation and acceptance of women by Christ. The researcher agrees with Mujoro who argues that God, through Jesus Christ, makes a woman a person, who is created; a person, who is equal; a person, who is liberated from all sources of slavery, domination and oppression (Mujoro 1989:106). That means that in Christ the humanity of women is valued. Therefore, because the Bible is translatable and interpretable it remains a powerful tool for women’s liberation in the hands of women theologians.

Women theologians in many areas have challenged the translation and interpretation of the Bible. However, the researcher will concentrate on the following areas: biblical authority, biblical interpretation and biblical language from the feminist perspective.

7. 2. 3 Women and biblical authority

Christians believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, because of the teaching on inspiration. This teaching implies that God inspired people who wrote the Bible. Some even go so far as to believe that there is no difference between the Bible and God. It is hard to challenge this assertion from women's point of view. It was believed that what the Bible says, God says. The Bible has been put at the same level of authority as God (Masenya 1999:229). The authority of the Bible does not work if it does not respond to the present need especially if it does not consider women in this context. Many people expect the Bible to provide all the answers like a dictionary, but this is not the case. The Bible does not have all the answers, but it provides a source of meaning and hope for our lives (Russell 1985:139). Women theologians challenge biblical authority today, because some texts are too exclusive of and more oppressive toward women. If those texts, which portray women as inferior to men, are from God and are regarded as the Word of God, this makes God an oppressor and exclusive, a view that is unacceptable to Christians. Christians believe in God, for all people, men and women.

The Bible played and continues to play an important role in the spirituality of Christians today. The Translatability theory, aims among other things, to make the Bible relevant to both men and women. It aims to make the Bible relevant and meaningful in any given context, in this case, in the context and the experience of women. So the authority of the Bible must include both men and women.

Masenya compares the authority of the Bible with the experiences of women, to see if they are identical. This is a real challenge, because in the past there was no questioning of the Bible at all, which is regarded as the authoritative Word of God with regard to human experience. Those who questioned the authority of the Bible were burned at the stake (Mukonyora, Cox and Verstraelen 1993:137). This situation creates tension between the authority of the Bible and the realities which women experience. This tension leads to the perception that one has to choose between the Bible and being womanist. The Bible says that you cannot serve two masters; you either follow the one or abandon the other (Mat 6:24). However, the Bible does have room for other experiences, including those of women as biblical witness, because there

is no need to separate the two (Russell 1985:146). The notion of the Bible as absolute, inerrant, infallible and authoritative has long been accepted, but the emergence of the modern women's movement presented a serious challenge to the notion of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. It is believed that human experience is the driving force behind any interpretation of the Bible; therefore the experience of women determines their reading of the Bible. It is not necessary to develop a women's Bible as such, but rather to interpret the existing Bible in the context of women's experiences. Therefore women's experiences (and any other experiences) may not be ignored, because an experience inevitably affects every person's interpretation of Scripture (Masenya 1999:230).

From a different angle it was established that the Bible is a resource book. As Masenya writes:

For those women who regard the Bible as a resource, not only for their theological and biblical endeavours, but as a resource to shape their lives, the matter of experience becomes more pronounced and problematised. It becomes pronounced because, as Christians, they acknowledge the capacity and authority of the Bible to shape their lives. It is ... problematised because the Bible does not always nurture their experiences; the Bible sometimes hurts them (1999:230).

The nature of the Bible is that it contains a variety of meanings. It does not have only one meaning, and remain static. That is why the Bible sometimes shapes lives and sometimes hurts them. The Bible shapes the lives of women liberation theologians and at the same times it hurts them. Women need to be liberated from the patriarchal domination from which the Bible text originated. As Fiorenza (in Masenya) points out, women's experiences must come first, and not the Bible, because the patriarchal system of the Bible will suppress these experiences. She was specific to say: "not simply the experience of women but the experience of women struggling for liberation from patriarchal oppression" (1999:231) must come first. Masenya insists that there is no need to develop another Bible or a Women's Bible as Stanton tried to create, "but rather to afford us (women) an opportunity to imagine and reconstruct what it would look like if women's voices were allowed to be heard clearly in the biblical text" (Masenya 1999:231). This will be a struggle because men's voices have long dominated the biblical text and studies, and men have been almost entirely dominant in the field of theology (Abbey 2001:141). History has taught us that the struggle of liberation will never end without achieving its set goal. Therefore, the struggle of women to have their voices heard in the biblical text will reach its goal. Weems, as cited by Masenya, insists that women will use

whatever means necessary to recover the voices of the oppressed within the biblical texts (Masenya 1999:232).

The Bible speaks of the God of the oppressed whose concern is the comprehensive well-being of all humanity. The biblical God is the God of the oppressed, poor, and marginalized, whose intention is to restore freedom, dignity, justice and vindication (Masenya 1999:232). Therefore the researcher is convinced that the authority of women's experiences will be accommodated in the translation and interpretation of the Bible in the same way as the experiences of men. The womanist scholar, Weems, writes:

the authoritative passages are therefore those that appeal to the lives of ... women in a liberative way. These are the passages that identify with the experiences of the oppressed. It is the task of oppressed women to read the Bible in such a way that they will discover their own voices in the text ... the voice of the oppressed. Such passages become authoritative for the faith of ... women readers (1993:50).

The authority of the Bible does not operate in a vacuum: it touches the lives of the people. It also touches the situation of women in homes, churches, communities and societies. In the homes women are told to submit to their husbands, in churches they are told to be quiet, in communities and society they are given inferior positions. In most cases if not all, the dominant group uses the Bible or quotes from the Bible to maintain its position of power. Women theologians deny such authority, which in many cases is not logical. That is why Masenya argues: "The authority of the Bible is valid only if it can shape Christians lives" (Masenya 1999:235). She concludes that the Bible has authority in one's life as long as its authority is liberative and life giving (Masenya 1999:237). A language is one of the aspects, which heals or hurts as far as gender sensitivity is concerned, and biblical languages are no exception. The Biblical authority must be inclusive and not exclusive. Both men and women must fall under the authority of the Bible. As we have dealt with women and biblical authority, the next subsection will deal with women and biblical languages.

7. 2. 4 Women and biblical languages

There are differences in each language seen in how it deals with gender issues. The biblical source languages, Hebrew and Greek, are exclusive by nature. Their exclusiveness was extended to the target languages in Europe and in Africa. Many Western languages are also exclusive. When addressing a person one can easily identify the gender of a particular person. Biblical languages hurt women, because the usage of the words like man, he, him points only

to men, a male, they are not inclusive. Women feel that they are excluded even with regard to the salvation plan of God. So gender-neutral words must be used which accommodate all humanity.

African languages, particularly the Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali languages, into which the Bible is translated in Northern Namibia, are inclusive, but they become exclusive because they depend on the source languages. However, it must be emphasized that inclusive biblical language is immanent. If a theologian uses exclusive language he/she is considered outdated if not ignorant. Translators of the Bible have to bear in mind the use of inclusive language when translating the texts. For example, the translator has to be sure of where to use masculine and feminine terminologies in the text. When necessary he/she may use ambiguity in the translation.

Some translators have attempted to make substitutions for the key biblical words and concepts for example God the Father [and Mother], the Kingdom of God [Realm of God] etc. Numerous Christians have argued that changing the canon would weaken the authority of the Bible (Russell 1985:13). The researcher argues that if the fatherly characteristics of God in the Bible do not weaken the authority of the Bible, then neither will the motherly characteristics of God. The use of inclusive language in the Bible seeks to affirm women so that they are acknowledged as fully human partners with men, sharing in the same image of God (Russell 1985:13).

In traditional English language the word “man” represents a male person or a human being whereas the word “woman” means a female partner to man, but does not refer to a human being. These are words commonly used by the English Bible. In America, the Division of Education and Ministry, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in U.S.A appoints The Inclusive-Language Lectionary Committee. This was established to look into exclusive language in the Bible. The Committee was mandated to seek language, which expresses inclusiveness with regard to human beings and attempts to expand the range of images beyond the masculine to assist the church in understanding the full nature of God. These inclusive terms are commonly found in the Revised Standard Version, which is the one most used by biblical scholars. In conclusion, gender-specific language, however, is not unique to English translations of the Bible; it is characteristic of the languages in which the Bible was written. The Old Testament and New Testament were written in gender specific languages (Hebrew

and Greek), and cultures that were basically patriarchal in character and both slipped easily into English versions of the Bible (An Inclusive-Language Lectionary 1988: 10-11). The exclusive use of language often does not apply to vernacular languages into which the Bible was translated in ELCIN, but the patriarchal cultures, which form the context of these vernacular languages, needs to be changed as far as the translation is concerned, to put women on an equal level with men. Biblical languages may be changed to accommodate both genders, but this will only make sense if the Bible is interpreted in the context of women.

7. 2. 5 Women and biblical interpretation

Interpretation and contextualization are important aspects that make the biblical message relevant and acceptable. Feminist hermeneutics, or womanist theology shapes women's interpretation of the Bible. Feminist hermeneutics is the hermeneutics from a feminist perspective, whereas a womanist interpretation is an interpretation from womanist theology perspective. Both are the best option for doing biblical interpretation, which suits women. For Christians in Africa and elsewhere in the world the Bible is an influential book from the West. With translation the Bible becomes an African book as well. Western imperialists used the Bible to colonize Africa, or as they called it to "civilize" Africa, because it carries stories most influential in shaping and producing ideology (Dube 2000:23).

It was because of the Bible that colonialism in Africa took place. Its translatability and interpretability makes it easy to be manipulated. Dube pointed out that the Bible facilitated imperialism in Africa and elsewhere in the world. She explained how the whites got the land with the Bible (Dube 2000: 3, 4, 12), as were explained earlier. So the authority of the Bible was used to colonize Africa. In the same breath, the authority of the Bible is used to suppress women. These are what women in Namibia and South Africa refer to when speaking of being "triple oppressed", by man, by whites, and even by the Bible or church traditions. Mujoro holds that European Christianity inherited confused theologies of African churches, and distorted Western culture as well as African culture has caused the suffering of women in Africa (1989:105). "Women have suffered exploitation on the grounds of their sex, as do most other women in the history of humankind. Moreover, under Western capitalism and culture, they are subject to discrimination by race and class" (Mujoro 1989:105). Therefore women's emancipation is a serious concern of liberation theology. Translatability reveals that the Bible may have what Russell calls "the multiple authorities to enrich one another rather than to outrank one another" (1985:143).

As the colonizers used the Bible to take African land, so Africans also use the Bible to get their land back. In the same vein, men used the Bible to oppress women, and so women are using the Bible to liberate themselves and to prevent men from oppressing them, and to liberate the biblical message from male domination. Russell writes about the contribution of feminist interpretation:

As the contributions to feminist interpretation have continued to grow in volume and maturity, it has become abundantly clear that the scriptures need liberation, not only from existing interpretations but also from patriarchal bias of the texts themselves (1985:11).

Russell also maintains that the Bible remains a source for Christian feminists. So, there is a shift in paradigm as far as biblical interpretation is concerned, from male dominated interpretation to inclusive interpretation, which considers women and allows their voices to be heard in the Bible, as well as in the history of Christianity. There were mixed feelings about such interpretation by some women and men who felt that feminist interpretation has distorted the biblical message, while others hailed the move as a way to challenge the impact of patriarchal tradition on the lives of women (Russell 1985:13). That is why contemporary feminist biblical scholarship attempts to extract the content of the message of the Bible from its patriarchal form (Rakoczy 2004:154). Feminist hermeneutics has challenged the male dominated interpretation of the Bible and offers a way forward in an inclusive interpretation of the Bible. The researcher agrees with the ideas that (African) women must read and interpret the Scriptures with new eyes (Rakoczy 2004:155) supported by women's experiences and by the culture and the context in which they find themselves. This is what is called "corrective lenses" which overcome culturally conditioned misinterpretation and the maintenance of the status quo in interpretation. Corrective lenses include race, sex, economics and culture that give a new way of understanding the Bible (Mukonyora, Cox, and Verstraelen 1993:275).

Feminist biblical interpretation has embarked on research into the use of inclusive biblical language and inclusive interpretation. The aim is to bring about change in the thoughts, values, and actions of religious groups (Russell 1985:13). This means that translators and interpreters of the Bible must use inclusive language and inclusive interpretation in their work of doing translations and interpretation. When rendering a text they must consider gender-neutral words when necessary and when interpreting the text they must use inclusive words. Theologians are at the center of developing these changes in their sermons and teachings. For the development

of feminist theology in Africa, the establishment of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians contributes immensely to the plight of women in Africa.

7. 2. 6 Challenges to translation by the Circle of Concerned African

Women Theologians

This section will focus on the challenges that The Circle of Concerned Africa Women Theologians, (hereafter the Circle) have posed to the translation and interpretation of the Bible and to Christianity in general and in Africa in particular. The concern here is not the challenges that African women encounter in the Bible, but the challenges to the Bible from African women theologians. The Circle has contributed significantly to Christianity in Africa. Their challenges to the Bible and theology as a whole aims to making the biblical message relevant, contextual and inclusive. This is also the aim of the translatability and interpretation theory.

The Circle was founded in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. It is a community of African women theologians who come together to discuss theologies from the experiences of African women in religion and culture (Phiri 2003:5; Rakoczy 2004:2). The Circle also symbolizes the rising ability of African women to speak for themselves on issues that concern religion and culture as experienced by them (Phiri 2003:5). The aim of the Circle is to promote African women theologians to produce literature about themselves and their life experience. Women are being encouraged to research and to produce literature because “issues that pertaining to African women in religion and culture have either been misplaced or ignored” (Phiri 1997:67). African women are being marginalized in many aspects of life: academic, religious, cultural, in homes and in the public domain, to mention just a few. Therefore women are taking up this challenge to produce literature about their life experiences, which will help to transform society as well as the translation of the Bible, because the Bible is the main source of theology, and also has a significant social impact.

Phiri argues that even though African theology emphasizes the contextualization of the Christian gospel within African culture, which is positive, it has neglected the issues of African women (Phiri 1997:67). It seems that men were in the forefront of producing African theology, but women’s voices and experiences also need to be included. Women’s experiences of God are not the same as men’s, therefore it is no longer acceptable to claim that when African men are writing African theology, they are speaking on behalf of all Africans, men and women

(Phiri 1997:69). Kapewangolo argues that parishioners are sick and tired of listening to sermons delivered by male theologians; they need soft voices from women theologians (2006).

Besides promoting the production of literature by African women theologians, the Circle also embarked on a project of compiling a database of all books, articles, and unpublished research written by African women theologians. It has also undertaken a project that advocates for the inclusion of studies on women's religion and culture in departments of African studies, religious studies, theology and sociology at universities, theological institutions and the colleges for higher learning in Africa (Phiri 1997:69). This is essential if African women are to be uplifted academically and socially. Rakoczy also stresses the point that the work of the Circle focuses on four areas: cultural and biblical hermeneutics, women in culture and religion, the history of women, and ministry and theological education and formation (2004:23). Members of the Circle are from different backgrounds and different education levels and socio-economic classes, cultures, and religions on the African continent, but they share a common experience of oppression from patriarchal practices in the African church and in society at large (Phiri 1997:70; 2003:5).

The challenge faced by African women theologians is the patriarchal system in the Bible, in the church and in society. Patriarchy makes it difficult for women to serve others and to worship God, because God is also presented as a male. The problem of patriarchy needs to be tackled from many angles of which the translation of the Bible is one. Because the Bible is the source of theology, it must be freed from patriarchal ideology and exclusive messages, and become inclusive and contextual. African Women theologians maintain: "whatever things uphold women's and men's humanity in the Bible, in African traditional religion, and in African culture are sources of this theology" (Phiri 1997:70-71).

Among many other issues African women have raised, the researcher is interested in one particular aim of the Circle: to develop the reading of the Bible through the eyes of African women (Phiri 1997:71), in other words, to translate and to interpret the Bible through the eyes of African women. "What is important is that African women theologians are united in voicing out their views against patriarchy" (Phiri 2003:5).

According to Phiri, the Circle recognizes that inspired men within a patriarchal culture wrote the Bible, and it has been interpreted by male theologians who have tended to make women

invisible or presented them negatively. Even although the situation is like that, African women theologians find consolation and meaning in life through Christ Jesus, who is the central message in the Bible. As for other theologians in the world, the Bible is the Word of God, and it must be read from the women's perspective, because its liberation message is for both women and men in the church (Phiri 1997:75).

African women see that Christianity cannot live or survive outside culture. It has to operate within culture in order to be effective and meaningful. In African indigenous thought, moreover, there is no separation between religion and culture. Kanyoro puts it rightly when she writes:

... culture and religion in Africa embrace all areas of one's total life. There is no sphere of existence that is excluded from the double grip of culture and religion. The presence or absence of rain, the well-being of the community, sexuality, marriage, birthing, naming children, success or failure, the place and form of one's burial, all these and others come within the scope of religion and culture. It is, therefore, a great threats to communal security to be critical of culture, for there are elements in these cultures that are the very roots through which the solidarity of communities are nurtured (2001:159).

If religion in Africa embraces all spheres of life, translators and interpreters of the Bible in Africa should consider the complexity of African religion and culture. This is a consideration they can adopt from the approach of African women theologians. The translatability theory implies that language and culture must be included in the translation of the Bible.

How can women bring about change in a society, which already has a set culture? Women theologians, [as well as men] are entrusted to bring about changes in theology, in homes and in society. Women pastors are in a position to establish relationships of trust and mutuality with other women and through sermons they can share their experiences (Kanyoro 2001:160-161). There are obstacles in the way, preventing the cries of women in general and in Africa being heard in the public scene. Kanyoro points out some of these obstacles: colonialism and imperialism, western culture, national liberation, famine, disease, war and poverty. These issues have pushed women's issues to the periphery (2001:161). At present some of these issues have been dealt with, but even if they continue to exist, they are not considered as stumbling blocks in the way of accepting the contributions of women theologians to theology as a whole and to African theology in particular. Changes are inevitable as far as women are concerned.

The gender issue has to be addressed in society and this must be extended to the Scriptures and the teachings and practices of the church through culture. African women's theology places prior emphasis on women's humanity and also on women as being created in the image of God (Kanyoro 2001:162), which seems to have been neglected by their male counterparts. The driving force behind the fight for justice and equality by African women theologians is their biblical faith.

The Biblical conviction that men and women are created in God's image in itself demands that women too must live in dignity. Any pattern of discrimination, domination or oppression is contrary to God's justice (Kanyoro 2001:163).

Liberation for African women will come from within African culture, because outside culture, there is nothing. The best way to bring about change is from within. Cultural hermeneutics is an important aspect of working toward African Women's liberation theology. Cultural hermeneutics is the interpretation of the Bible from a cultural perspective. Therefore, everything concerning women is described in the framework of culture (Kanyoro 2001:164). Culture determines what women should or should not do. Outside that framework there is nothing, no value or even no person. How can women achieve a meaningful life outside the framework, which is oppressing or limiting them? The church is also moulded by the society in which it is operating. Therefore "the status of women within their church is a microcosm of their status within the society of which the church is a part" (Kanyoro 2001: 164).

The Circle developed its own theology. According to Kanyoro, in their theology women express both the experience they have had of discrimination and the struggle they have endured for their right to life and respect for their dignity (2001:196). African women theologians want their life experiences to be included in the translation and interpretation of the Bible, as are the experiences of their male counterparts. African women theologians want to live a dignified life and feel that they have a right to life. Therefore, their concerns are for the whole life of women, regardless of education or social status. These concerns are thus contextual. Through theology women want to assert their belonging to the Church, which is a challenge to the translation of the Bible.

African women theologians need self-esteem. They must accept themselves as human beings, as loved and wanted; women can no longer consider themselves as the dregs of humanity, but

as full human beings; women should reject whatever tends to minimize their femininity. The identity of women is found in the Bible, in the church and in culture. If the Bible, the church and the culture, distort the identity of women, it is the Bible that can restore this identity. The Bible is a means of transformation; therefore it can transform the church and culture to bring about a new creation whereby men and women equally enjoy the right to life. African women theologians are taking a lead in this matter, because “the liberation of women is in the hands of women themselves and they must go forth to do this” (Kanyoro 2001:201).

There are many challenges, which African women theologians, under the umbrella of the Circle, have posed to the Bible and to theology as a whole. It suffices to mention those above. Now is the time to consider the translation and interpretation of the Bible in the theoretical framework of the translatability theory, which helps the Christian message to be inclusive of and to be relevant in every sphere of life. The responsibility of the translators and interpreters, men and women, is to liberate the Word of God from patriarchy in the church and in the community at large. The Circle, besides challenges from within and without, as being too radical toward the Bible and theology as a whole, is working hard to ensure that the biblical message is inclusive. In doing so the Circle is supporting the theory of translatability and interpretation of the Bible. The researcher fully supports the work of the Circle, because its intention is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Word of God.

Some ELCIN women theologians and laywomen are members of the Circle, the researcher is happy about that, but the number is low in comparison with the number of women theologians in the church. As far as their contribution to feminist theology is concerned, according to the researcher’s observation, it is minimal. They have not arrived yet, academically, at the stage whereby their contributions will be fully accepted. They are still at the initial stage. However, they are fully recognized by the church and their activities are appreciated. Because of women theologians in ELCIN, the women’s league is very strong in the church, and women in general are aware of gender equality and the right of the women in the church and society. As the challenges posed to the translation of the Bible were dealt with in this section, the following subsection will deal with the challenge posed to the translation by HIV and AIDS.

7. 3 The HIV and AIDS challenge to the translation

HIV and AIDS is a worldwide phenomenon, which has struck the entire human race, men and women, poor and rich etc. It is a pandemic. The researcher agrees with Akoto that HIV and

AIDS has become a universal cancer and needs to be given attention (2004:97), because to date there is no cure for HIV and AIDS. The whole world is still crying due to its scourge. Africa is the hardest hit continent with 63% of all persons infected with HIV living in sub-Saharan Africa, of which an estimated 230 000 are Namibian out of the population of 1.8 million in 2005 (2006 AIDS Epidemic updated). Statistically the HIV and AIDS situation in Namibia is as follows: The effect of HIV and AIDS in Namibia is shown by the following figures. The population of Namibia is 1.8 million, of which 95 per cent are Christians, the majority of whom are Lutherans, followed by Catholics and Anglicans. The largest population group is Ovawambo comprising about one third of the country's total population which stands at 700 000 and Kavango people 140 000⁶⁷, these people form the backbone of ELCIN membership of 673 939 (2007 statistics).

HIV and AIDS statistics in Namibia shows the followings:

- People living with HIV and AIDS in Namibia 227 000.
- Men living with HIV and AIDS 80 000
- Women living with HIV and AIDS 130 000
- Children living with HIV and AIDS 17 000

The remaining 1, 573 000 (including those who are not yet tested) are assumed to be HIV and AIDS negative, according to the UNAIDS 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic⁶⁸. (See UNICEF-Namibia Statistic appendix). These figures reveal that HIV and AIDS is a pandemic that needs to be addressed urgently, especially by the church, before it is too late. Namibian HIV and AIDS Statistic for 2001-2002 states that:

AIDS is becoming the single most serious threat to Education, social, and economic progress in Namibia today. HIV and AIDS epidemic is the most serious challenge facing Namibia today. AIDS is the number one killer in Africa especially in Namibia. Namibia has high incident of HIV and AIDS infected people in Africa. Namibia is one of the fifth countries with high rate of HIV and AIDS in Africa⁶⁹.

Meredith describes the scourge of HIV and AIDS as follows:

Generations of children were deprived of childhood, forced to abandon school undertake work or care for dying or simply to fend for themselves. With ever-widening consequences, the epidemic overwhelmed health services, impoverished families, disrupted farm

⁶⁷ <http://namibian.org/travel/namibian/population/kavango.htm>

⁶⁸ <http://www.globalhealthfacts.org>.

⁶⁹ <http://www.schoolnet.na/projectguide/understanding/statistic/htm>

work, undermined business, reduced productivity and eroded the capacity of governments to provide public services (2005:366).

Akoto also describes the effect of HIV and AIDS as follows:

The effects of this disease are not only economic but also social and spiritual. They are not national but also international. They are not continental but global. The whole fabric of society is affected by it to such an extent that Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14) becomes a befitting description of the global village in which we live (Akoto 2004:98).

This is a very serious situation, which needs to be addressed. Therefore because of this situation, governments, NGOs and Church-Based Organizations are taking part in the fight against HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS has occupied theological debates and in a sense have always been, as Nadar calls it "extremely polarized" (2004:60). Nadar further explains what she means by polarized: "In the most simplistic terms there are those who believe that HIV and AIDS is the punishment from God and those who do not" (2004:60). HIV and AIDS could be interpreted as a punishment from God, it depends on the context and the faith conviction of the interpreter. In the following pages this issue will be dealt with.

In Namibia the government and churches are at the forefront of the fight against HIV and AIDS, including ELCIN. The following section examines HIV and AIDS in relation to the Scriptures and how ELCIN is dealing with this disease.

7. 3. 1 What does the Bible says about HIV and AIDS?

There is no explicit verse in the Bible about HIV and AIDS (Akoto 2004:97), because during the time of the writing of the Scripture there was nothing like HIV and AIDS. However, there were other diseases, which caused people to suffer, but "the issue of HIV and AIDS can be said to be implied by the message of the Bible" (Akoto: 2004:97), because the biblical message is translatable. There are many explanations and interpretations about HIV and AIDS referred to in the Bible. According to Akoto, whether HIV and AIDS is a punishment from God or not, the issue is that there is a call to make "dry bones alive". The dry bones are those who are infected and affected. So, she writes:

Both those infected and affected by the disease can be likened to the "very man" and "very dry bones" on the "face of the valley". The call to become messengers to be used by God to bring the dead back to life, to instill hope into the hopeless situation into which HIV and AIDS has plunged us, pertinent (2004:97)

In fact this is the task of the church of Christ on earth in the context of HIV and AIDS.

In the Old Testament there were diseases, which caused people to suffer and be stigmatized. In the New Testament, a disease that offers some parallels with HIV and AIDS, which is widespread and contagious, is *tsara'at*, a skin disease that is translated as leprosy. The carriers of this kind of disease were isolated from the community because they were regarded as unclean and dangerous to the health of others (Stiebert 2001:183). According to the Bible, the sick and vulnerable in the community are to be treated with kindness and compassion (Lev 19:14). As far as lepers were concerned there was a need to separate them from the community, because leprosy could spread through close contact with the sick. Therefore, the Bible makes it clear that the spread of the disease must be contained. It is different with HIV and AIDS, which is transmitted by bodily fluids. Therefore the isolation of a person who is HIV and AIDS positive is not necessary (Stiebert 2001:184), what is important is to teach people how to prevent themselves from contracting the disease. It is also equally important that those infected with HIV and AIDS should seriously try to prevent the spread of the virus.

HIV and AIDS is a disease like any other disease, but it has certain complexities. The spread of HIV and AIDS is bound up with issues of gender, culture and economic status etc. So far there is no cure for HIV and AIDS. Other diseases like leprosy and TB, which cause suffering among many people, are now curable, and the time will come when HIV and AIDS will also be curable.

During the period of the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in ELCIN, HIV and AIDS did not exist, but people were suffering from other diseases for example, leprosy. For example there was a lepers' camp in the Okavango region where the sufferers were kept isolated from the community. In Namibia, people came to know of the existence of HIV and AIDS in 1986 for the first time. ELCIN AIDS ACTION (EASA) was established in 1999 in response to the disease. The Bible was translated into vernaculars in 1954 (Oshindonga), 1974 (Oshikwanyama) and 1986 (Kwangali). The translators naturally did not accommodate HIV and AIDS in their translations. But because of the translatability principle HIV and AIDS can now be accommodated in the Scripture, because the translatability theory is focused on language, culture and context. HIV and AIDS has created a context of sickness, and in response to this context, it is part of the Bible translation. What the Bible says about HIV and AIDS is the same as what it says about other diseases, especially contagious diseases, in the

Old Testament and New Testament. The difference is that AIDS is a stigmatized disease because of its connection with sexual immorality.

The Old Testament has something to say about diseases in general. In her article “Does the Hebrew Bible Have Anything to Tell about HIV/AIDS?” Johanna Stiebert, an Old Testament Scholar in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Botswana, examines how the Hebrew Bible deals with diseases. Her examination enables an understanding of HIV and AIDS in the Old Testament. Stiebert holds that:

The Hebrew Bible [Old Testament], being the canon of Judaism and a significant part of the canon of Christianity, too, is believed by many, [also in ELCIN], to have authority. The Bible continues to be read for guidance and for inspiration, for comfort and for obtaining wisdom. It is believed to have special significance to be a store of knowledge and teachings that reach down to us through the ages (2001:175-176).

Because of its nature the Bible continues to be relevant. In order for it to be relevant even today, the Bible must provide answers about HIV and AIDS for believers. Another point noted by Stiebert is that an ancient canonical text can speak about a modern pandemic (2001:176). The researcher agrees, because the Bible accommodates everything and it contains old and new answers for many different contexts. This is what makes translatability a successful theory. Furthermore translatability also allows believers to listen to the Scripture with new ears and places the text into the context of the needs of the people in their time. Theology must address the issues of each particular time and context in order to be relevant. In this case we must understand the biblical text in the context of HIV and AIDS and build theology around that. Gennrich writes:

Theology is not just a theorizing about God’s word, nor is it taking Bible verses and imposing them on reality. Rather, it involves reflecting on Scripture in the context of our lives as we experience them today, in order to begin to understand what God may be doing in our lives and in the world in which we are living (2004: 40).

The Old Testament has many terms describing sickness or illness, for example *helah*, means to be weak or sick; *dawah*, means to be ill, unwell; and *dawway* means to faint. The word *deber* is usually translated as plague and it refers to an epidemic disease. A contagious disease mentioned is *tsara’at*, a skin disease or leprosy. The Old Testament does not simply present the diseases, but it also provides a way out, a way of healing. The word for healing is *hajah* meaning to live or to revive, while *shub* meaning to return, to restore, and *rafa* means to heal or

healer (Gen 50:2) (Stiebert 2001:177). Therefore wherever there is a problem God is ready to help and take control. Believers are convinced that God “is in control of every aspect of the universe ...” (Stiebert 2001: 177).

There was a belief in the Old Testament that diseases were a form of punishment from God. Sickness and disease are listed among the curses for disobedience (Deut 28: 27-29, 35, 61). In some cases the disease appears to be a consequence of transgression and therefore part of the punishment (Num 12). Plague, sickness, war and famine are proclaimed as a punishment for the wickedness of an individual or nation (Stiebert 2001:178). Enkono (appendix XI)⁷⁰ agrees with Stiebert that plague, sickness and other misfortunes are a punishment from God. He confirms his argument with the case of Job, when Job’s friends were emphasizing that he (Job) might have sinned sometimes (Enkono 2006). The interpretation that diseases and illness are a punishment from God is problematic. This understanding can be traced back to Ancient Near Eastern tradition, which held that the obedient and God-fearing persons prosper, while the godless and those who do not obey God are punished, but there are also other voices in this regard (Nadar 2004:61-62). Nadar argues further that:

If the Bible, and not just the Bible, but common theological thought over the centuries espouses the view that God curses those who are ‘wicked’ and blesses those who are ‘good’, then it would seem that Christians who believe that HIV and AIDS is a punishment from God are justified in their belief. [But] African biblical scholars and theologians cannot and should not be satisfied with this theology, since if this is the theological voice that speaks in the midst of immense suffering in the HIV and AIDS era, then the future looks bleak. If, however, we listen carefully enough we can discern an alternative voice within the Bible, one that critiques the dominant ideology of retribution and reward (2004: 62)

In some cases diseases, illness and plagues are not necessarily the punishment of God, but they illustrate the power of God and his control (Stiebert 2001:179). Gennrich argues that the terminology of punishment needs to be discarded in favour of an understanding of God as omnipresent in a constant and loving relationship (2002:40). Even though God is in control he gives a person a free choice, therefore sometimes a person’s choice leads to his/her destruction. A person can create or do something, which later will destroy lives. If something is punishable it is sin. If we regard HIV and AIDS as a sin, then it deserves punishment. However the Bible

⁷⁰ Rev Alpo Enkono is the co-ordinator of ELCIN AIDS ACTION (EASA), in the Eastern Diocese of ELCIN, based at Oniipa.

tells us that sin can be forgiven. HIV and AIDS is not a sin, but it is a virus. The problem is not that a person with HIV and AIDS cannot be forgiven, but rather that there is as yet no cure for the virus. It is not biblical to claim that diseases are synonymous with sin. Those verses, which show that there are connections between diseases and sin, can be dealt with within their context. The Book of Job has demonstrated this clearly (Job 1:1, 6-12). Job did not commit any sin, but he suffered. Sickness is not necessarily caused by sin, but by a virus.

Lutheran theology states that God is good and God's love endures forever. God can inflict diseases to bring stray children back to Godself and at the same time God can heal them. God does not ultimately desire the destruction of lives, but the construction of lives and their restoration to normality (1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 5). The Book of Psalms has demonstrated that God can cure and heal and forgive (Ps 103:1-3). It is also true that disease does not come to the disobedient only. What about spouses who remain faithful to their partners but still get infected through their partners? What about children who are born with the disease? What about those who get infected through other means than sexual contact? This means that HIV and AIDS can infect also a faithful spouses from their unfaithful partners and infants from their infected mothers. Therefore people are called to take refuge in God (Ps 91:9-10). It is also true that God can punish evildoers, but in contrast God who can destroy all sinfulness by punishing humanity once and for all, chose to respond in love and came into the world, in the form of a servant, to identify fully with human weakness, human vulnerability and human sickness, to bring a new perspective and a new hope in Christ (Gennrich 2004:41).

The Old Testament also provides ways to deal with sickness and the sick. The sick person has to undergo examination, after which it will be determined what the treatment should be, and how he/she ought to behave in relation to other people. This means that he/she might be isolated or remain in the community, depending on the outcome of the examination. In the case of a contagious disease, those who carry such a disease must alert others to their condition, to prevent the spread of the disease as prescribed in Leviticus 13:45:

The leper who has the disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, "Unclean! Unclean!"(RSV).

Similarly people living with HIV and AIDS must come clear and reveal their status in the community, allowing themselves to be known, prayed for, cared for and catered for and preventing any further spread of the disease. Stiebert writes:

... persons carrying a disease that is catching must do all in their power not to pass it on. ... they must live in isolation, and prevent others from entering their contagious sphere. It seems, therefore, that a carrier of a contagious disease is not reprehensible or responsible for having it in the first place but is responsible for keeping it to himself or herself (2001:183).

Luther also condemned such persons who deliberately pass on diseases to others. According to Scriba, Luther harshly condemned those infected with diseases (or Plague) who went and infected others who were healthy, in order to heal themselves. For Luther these people were no better than murderers themselves and should be executed as common criminals (Scriba 2006:73). People need to condemn those people who are infected with HIV and AIDS and deliberately spread it. Some people rape babies and young girls in the belief that they will be cured. This is a horrible situation or another “sickness” among our nation. Munyika advises: “kaukwatange na itandi u yandje”, meaning ‘it will not contract me and I will not spread it’. Munyika, referring to HIV and AIDS states, that if a person discovers that he/she is HIV negative, he/she should not allow himself/herself to become HIV positive and if a person finds out that he/she is positive, he/she must not infect anyone else (Omukwetu 2005). The problem here is not with the HIV and AIDS positive persons, but it also lies with the people who stigmatize them. The more a person is stigmatized and discriminated against, the more he/she will look for ways to get rid of the disease. Sometimes he/she ends up doing nasty things. The church needs to assist People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) to live positively and create hope in them.

The New Testament, especially the Gospels, contains many accounts of sickness and sick people. In many instances Jesus healed the sick and restored their life to normality. According to the New Testament no one is to be blamed for any disease. It is the work of the evil one. It is not a punishment from God. Isaac also reiterates this point that as far as HIV and AIDS are concerned, many people have stressed that “AIDS must be a punishment of God against a promiscuous life style” (Isaac 2005: 56). However this kind of understanding is misleading. It is not biblical. In the New Testament the picture is different from that of Old Testament. Diseases, illness and plague are not a punishment from God. Jesus has a different message as he says: “I have come that they might have life abundantly” (John 10:10). The New Testament approach to HIV and AIDS is the message of compassionate, love and hope.

Those who take part in the fight against HIV and AIDS from a Christian perspective do take the stance of the New Testament. In the struggle against HIV and AIDS Christians must take responsibility to ensure that HIV and AIDS stops spreading and that those infected and affected by the disease are not ostracized, and that 'no seed will be endangered by the thorns and rocks that are within us (Luke 8). This means that Christians must avoid being part of the problem. To many Christians this verse refers to the standpoint of Jesus and to the church's view of diseases and the sick. Diseases and other ailments are the work of the evil one who came to destroy lives. According to Enkono, the evil one is HIV and AIDS, which comes to destroy the lives of people on earth. The person is not sick because of his/her sin, but so that the wonderful work of God will be revealed. Enkono reiterates that according to the New Testament, diseases are diseases, and therefore HIV and AIDS is just a disease like any other, and not a punishment from God (2006).

Nonetheless, many people believed and continue to believe that HIV and AIDS is a punishment from God, even among the theologians in ELCIN. Therefore their sermons and interpretations of the biblical message are too judgmental as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned. Their sermons focus more on the wrath of God than on the grace of God. We need to understand that HIV and AIDS came to rob us of the enjoyment of life, which was brought to us by God through Jesus Christ (Enkono 2006). According to Shitundeni (appendix XII), the Bible speaks about sickness and disease and warns people to behave well and be obedient to God to avoid sickness and danger. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the grace of God in Jesus Christ to all people (2006).

As people in the current context are at high-risk of HIV and AIDS, Isaak argues that the Gospel message should be delivered in a fashion that it is culturally relevant or culturally responsive (2005:45). Only if the Gospel were operating within an African cultural setting would the scourge of HIV and AIDS be stopped in church communities. The translatability of Christianity and the interpretation of its Scripture will help to appropriate the message effectively. The researcher supports the idea that the church must take African culture seriously when addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS. The church and the theologians need to examine how African people react when talking about sexuality and why children are excluded from sexual topics, as well as why they need to be exposed to sexuality. If children are educated about sexuality will this help in preventing them from contracting HIV and AIDS? How will

the statement of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) affect the Namibian people? This reads thus;

We must educate ourselves and others to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS. In doing so, we recognize that our future rests with young people, who are in special need of education, our guidance, and our understanding concerning issues of human sexuality, morality Christian values, and the challenge of HIV and AIDS (Isaak 2005:46).

The church must have a standpoint, and its message must be clear and unwavering. The message will be clear if it considers the language, culture and context of the people. God does not operate in a vacuum; God operates within a given reality. Culture itself needs to be critiqued as argued by African women theologians as it, too, has contributed to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The Bible as a whole cannot claim that it has all the answers to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. One has to be cautious not to make the Bible a stumbling block in the way of dealing with HIV and AIDS. It must allow others to have a say. That is why Isaak recognizes other partners in the war against HIV and AIDS when he writes: “In such realities, the Bible, culture and biomedical perspectives should all work together and not against each other...” (Isaak 2005:46).

All voices speaking about HIV and AIDS must be heard as having the same goal, although not from the same perspective. The church, as the community of caring, must play a vital role in caring for the infected, and this response of the church is important (Richardson 2006:38), because this is how Jesus responded to the sick in the New Testament. Richardson holds that “caring in response to HIV and AIDS and its terrible effects is essential to the nature and function of the Christian church” (2006:40). However, if the church fails to care for the HIV and AIDS infected as well as affected, it fails to be a church of Christ in this world.

7. 3. 2 Is the Bible a useful tool to fight the HIV and AIDS pandemic?

This section will deal with the practical use of the Bible in the fight against HIV and AIDS with a special reference to ELCIN HIV and AIDS workers. Before dealing with this question, let us look at the definition of the word ‘tool’ as against the word ‘weapon’ with regard to the Bible. To make the question more complicated, let it be like this: Is the Bible a tool or a weapon? The tool is an instrument one uses to do something good, whereas a weapon is an

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instrument to fight with. The same instrument can be both tool and weapon. For example one can use a knife to cut meat for cooking, and the same knife can be used for defense or killing. As far as the Bible is concerned, according to Ukpong, it has been used in various ways to oppress, domesticate and enslave Africans, and the same Bible has been used as a source of liberation and freedom. He further asserts that the Bible is a most dangerous book, among other books, because it endows power to kill and also endows power to liberate (2004:36). As far as HIV and AIDS are concerned, the Bible has the power both to heal and to kill. It can be used to punish people living with HIV and AIDS, and can be used to heal them, to comfort them, to encourage them, and more so, to create hope. In this case the Bible is a useful tool to fight the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

For Christians, the Bible, the Holy Scripture, the Word of God contains everything people need in their daily lives. Therefore, for Christians in general and African Christians in particular, it is also a useful weapon to fight HIV and AIDS. The churches' programmes aimed at preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS and caring for those infected and affected by the disease are based on biblical teaching. The HIV and AIDS program of ELCIN is also based on the Bible and on Christian ethical norms and behavior. Therefore translation and interpretation of the Bible must be compatible with the HIV and AIDS situation on the ground. The question of how the Bible can be effective in the fight against HIV and AIDS was posed to interviewees who are working with the HIV and AIDS programme in ELCIN. Here follows answers as to how those who are entrusted by ELCIN view the Bible in the face of HIV and AIDS. They are Alpo Enkono, Villi Heiki Shivute, Eva-Liisa Shitundeni and Nehemia Sheefeni, and all are theologians.

Enkono: The Bible is a great book of God. It carries the great ideas of God, for the salvation of people. The Bible encourages the sinner to return to God. It is the light on our path and food for our spirituality, the comforter in sorrows and the guide in our ways, the compass to show us right directions, the weapon to fight enemies of any kind and the book of ethical norms to show us Christian character. The whole Bible is filled with counseling and comfort. Therefore Christian counseling and care depends on biblical ideas. The Bible teaches us to have courage and hope for the future in the face of HIV and AIDS, while other worldly books teach us to be positive and courageous. The Bible teaches about the life in this world and in the world to come; no other book ensures us this. The Bible differs with other books because other books try to answer

according to the will of the people in this life whereas the Bible goes beyond this life. There is always tension between the Bible and other books. The Bible is about the will of God. When HIV and AIDS entered human life, the government took its approach, and the Church took its approach. They differ in approach although they all are aiming at defusing the disease. They are using different tools. So the church took its own action against HIV and AIDS. That is why we are here today. To those who are using the Bible in counseling the message is that our biblical God is a loving God. God challenged us to show love to those who are infected and affected, but not judgement. Jesus identified himself with those who are sick, jailed, and sinners, so we have to take that road. The Bible encourages us to take seriously those who are sinners and rejected, to bring about love to them (Enkono 2006).

Shivute ⁷¹: Among many things and tools used in workshops the Bible and other

Christian writings are the sources we use the most. But the Bible is the main source. The Bible has a broad understanding as far as sicknesses are concerned. The Bible was written in different surroundings from ours. In Hebrew understanding sickness is a sign of punishment from God. However, according to New Testament understanding, sickness does not occur because of disobedience to God, but due to the lack of health. There are different viruses and bacteria in the world, which cause sickness. But we cannot deny the fact that some sicknesses occur as punishment. Our knowledge is partial; we do not know how God punishes people and we cannot prescribe any punishment to God. The Bible is helpful in the fight against HIV and AIDS. HIV and AIDS is mainly spread through sexual contact. The Bible urges people to keep God's Ten Commandments, which are the summary of God's intention toward people (Ex 20). The Bible has a message for those who are married to be faithful to each other. The Bible does not allow unfaithfulness. The younger ones must abstain from sex until they marry. Those who are infected must keep their faith until death. Many who are infected must be helpful to assist and tell others about the danger of the disease. Many infected people say openly that they got it through sexual contact. They made a mistake, therefore they do not want to spread the disease, let alone have it. To spread disease to others is to kill. The Bible says: Do not kill (Ex 20:13).

⁷¹ Rev. Villi Heikki Shivute trains the trainers of the ELCIN AIDS ACTION group in the ELCIN Eastern Diocese. He operates from the Eastern Diocese Office at Oniipa, Namibia.

Shivute mentioned that during the time of Jesus there were diseases. Jesus healed the sick. His disciples also healed the sick. Jesus is still among us to heal us. God is helping us today through faith. The Bible is the source of encouragement. Shivute tells how he met three infected people who confessed that the Bible is more helpful than their parents. When they face displeasure and disappointment in life they turn to the Bible for encouragement and comfort. According to Shivute, in their programme they have Bible studies, and everyday they have morning and evening devotions, with the reading of the text from the Bible. Reading the Bible is part of healing. In the training workshops, they invite those who publicly came out and revealed that they are infected. The aim is to give witness to those who are training.

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People tend to use their own wisdom if they are in trouble. At this time people are using their own wisdom to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS and set aside the Bible. We believe that God is the only one to help in the time of trouble. The Bible is clear as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned. Nowadays people are talking about one partner; but the Bible is talking about partners in marriage. Therefore, other sources of information are in tension, but the Bible is clear. There are two ways of contracting this disease. Some innocently got it; some “go around” and get it. For those who innocently got it, it is not a punishment, but for those who “go around” and get it, one could say it is punishment. But we have to bear in mind that the ways of God differ from ours. The judgment is upon him (Shivute 2006, appendix XIII).

Shitundeni⁷²: The Bible helps because there are commandments, which God gave to people from the beginning as a guide in life. If I prepare a speech about HIV and AIDS I ground it in the Bible. I tell people about the anger of God as it is stated in the Bible and sometimes I point out that if a person returns to God he/she will be healed. The Bible has a message of comfort. We are using the Bible to comfort both the sick and the relatives of the dead during bereavement. The Bible has a clear message to all people sick or healthy, therefore the Bible is a useful tool to combat HIV and AIDS.

There was a time in ELCIN people living with AID and AIDS would refrain from attending church services because sermons were too judgmental; instead they were

⁷² Mirs Eva-Liisa Shitundeni is an ELCIN woman theologian. She is a trainer in ELCIN AIDS ACTION in the ELCIN Western Diocese. She is operating from Ongwediva, Namibia.

reading the Bible on their own. But after the introduction of the HIV and AIDS programme in ELCIN, pastors and lay preachers changed their tone of preaching. Now their message is that of comforting, encouraging and building hope for the future in Christ.

There are many books prepared by the government and other organizations containing information about HIV and AIDS. They have no message from the Bible. We differ because what the churches and faith-based organizations prepare has a biblical message. We are fighting HIV and AIDS with the commandments of God. For example, we are not speaking straightforwardly about the use of condoms. It is not in our vocabulary, but others can speak about it openly because it is in their vocabulary. This does not mean that we reject it. It is one of the preventive methods. There is tension between the Bible and other informative books about HIV and AIDS. The Bible is a good tool for the infected, affected and uninfected, because all benefit from reading it contextually. The Bible has a clear message to all, all the time. We need to interpret the biblical message to mean what it means not what we want it to mean. We need to listen to the message of the Bible (Shitundeni 2006).

Sheefeni: When we deal with the HIV and AIDS Youth Prevention Project, we use the Bible as our main source of information. For prevention we select texts from the Bible, which deal with the same issue. One text we use is the story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar. Joseph bravely refused to lie with the wife of his master (Gen 39). The youth must learn to say no to sexual contact, because this will maintain their health and their dignity. So the Bible is a good tool or weapon in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Especially when we speak about prevention, the Bible is number one. The message of the Bible is for people to behave well. The “No” in the Bible means a lot to our lives. In the Old Testament, especially in the five books of Moses, there is a lot about diseases. God warned his people [Israel] to be obedient and live, if not they will suffer from diseases. In the New Testament Jesus healed sicknesses of different kinds. The Bible has a clear message about sicknesses. However it does not end in sicknesses, but it shows also that there is a cure for sicknesses. The New Testament message on the sick and sufferers is more focused on love, compassion and hope.

Although the Bible does not speak directly about HIV and AIDS, it speaks of diseases, which were threatening the lives of people at that time. We can compare those sicknesses in the Bible, which have similarities with HIV and AIDS and take a message out of it. The Bible in vernacular languages in ELCIN carries that message. Some members of ELCIN use the Bible less, and opt to listen to other information from outside the Bible, which is sometimes misleading. Therefore we need to find a good strategy for how to use the Bible. In the Bible there is a message of the love of God to people in difficulty, in pain and in suffering caused by HIV and AIDS. This message is only found in the Bible. Sheefeni urged Christians in ELCIN of the need to be encouraged to primarily use the Bible in church activities; other sources may be secondary. The biblical message about Jesus Christ, the Saviour, must be at the center of the church programme about HIV and AIDS. The Bible has something for our lives now and beyond (Sheefeni 2006, appendix XIV).

Although the Bible does not address HIV and AIDS directly, it does relate to HIV and AIDS in a number of aspects. For instance the story of the bleeding woman (Mark 5:23-43) and the story of leprosy (Luke 17:11-19) discuss the incurable diseases of the biblical times. These people mentioned were not only sick, they were also stigmatized and discriminated against on the grounds of their sickness (West and Zengele 2006: 60). Jesus transformed the situation of the bleeding woman and that of the lepers to normal. He made them well. He removed the cause of their suffering and they became accepted in the community. The healing of Jesus restores lives to normality. Through the process of healing, life was restored and stigmatization and discrimination were removed. The Bible describes this, but the message remains as relevant today as it was at the time it was written.

The interviews the researcher conducted among people who are working in the ELCIN AIDS ACTION programme, expressed that the Bible is a useful and powerful tool for Christians to fight HIV and AIDS. West and Zengele confirm the power of the Bible through the statement by the Siyaphila Support Group that the Bible “is a powerful tool”. They further expressed that “the Bible provides frameworks or perspectives from which to see the world with new eyes” (2006:61). Anderson insists, “the Bible must be interpreted in new ways in these changed circumstances” (2003:23). That means that the power of the Bible does not function independently; it depends on how it is accepted in the community and how it is translated and

Comment [UKZN4]: You need an introduction to the interviews as to the methodology used. This should be part of your introduction. Where you are quoting from the interviews, needs to be clearly stated.

interpreted. Therefore the Bible is a powerful tool only if used properly and interpreted from a particular context, in this case from the HIV and AIDS perspective.

The researcher supports West and Zengele and Shitundeni and Sheefeni (of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia) in their views that the Bible is a powerful tool for theologians and ordinary Christians in combating HIV and AIDS. The Bible has played a central role in the construction of African Christianity and it continues to do so. The Bible will become a key tool for the struggle Africa Christians are now engaged in to make theological sense of HIV and AIDS (West and Zengele 2006:63). The translatability and interpretation of the biblical text made the Bible a powerful tool, because it allows the biblical message to penetrate and affect all spheres of life in human communities.

7. 3. 3 ELCIN and HIV and AIDS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) has been engaged in addressing the problem of HIV and AIDS since 1986, through the programme called ELCIN AIDS ACTION (EASA), based on her statement on HIV and AIDS (Appendix XV). The programme operates in her two dioceses namely: The Eastern Diocese and The Western Diocese. Each diocese has its co-coordinator, the trainer and other workers on parish level. Among the youth there is a programme called the ELCIN Youth HIV Prevention Project (EYHPP). The main aim of ELCIN AIDS ACTION is to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, and to care for those who are infected and affected among its members and in the community at large. ELCIN AIDS ACTION and its wing, the ELCIN Youth Prevention Project (EYHPP), are using the Bible as a tool to combat the scourge of HIV and AIDS. The target group in the youth project is aged 14-25. The syllabus of the EYHPP focuses on the lifestyle of the youth. In order to be effective parents are also included in training workshops. Prevention is basically the aim among the youth, because they are the future nation. There is a strong belief that if all embark on prevention, then the spread of HIV and AIDS will slow down (Sheefeni 2006). Sheefeni points out the lack of information about HIV and AIDS among parish members, a situation that creates loopholes that allow the spread of the deadly disease. There is an urgent need for dissemination of the information to reach each and every church member in both urban and rural areas.

Alcoholism is one of the vehicles that facilitate the spread of HIV and AIDS, because if a person is drunk he/she loses control. There are some youth who are using excessive alcohol.

According to Sheefeni's observation, in hospitals there are many young girls who are pregnant or giving birth. People who are older than them make some of them pregnant. The question is why so many young girls? Pregnancy among the youth indicates the current failure of the HIV and AIDS prevention programme, because such a person is at high risk of contracting HIV and AIDS (Sheefeni 2006). That means that the message of the church to abstain is falling onto deaf ears. The church needs to look into other preventive measures.

Because of this problem facing church members and the entire community at large, there is a need to translate the biblical message to be appropriate to the context of the people. The message of the Bible has something worthy to contribute to our lives. Its effectiveness depends on how it is translated and interpreted into people's language, culture and context. This is supposedly the task of the church's programmes against HIV and AIDS, run by ELCIN AIDS ACTION and ELCIN Youth HIV Prevention Project. The question stands: Is it really working?

From the beginning of the appearance of HIV and AIDS, ELCIN pastors and theologians were judgmental as far as HIV and AIDS and related diseases were concerned. They were emphasizing the punishment of God rather than focusing on God's grace toward the infected. Infected people thus withdrew from attending worship services. Because of the work of ELCIN AIDS ACTION, the approach of the ministers, pastors and lay-preachers are now to provide a more positive message to the infected and affected people. Therefore people living with HIV and AIDS now opt to attend church services because there is a message for them too (Shitundeni 2006). The next section is the analyses of ELCIN AIDS ACTION programme in relation to what happen in other contexts.

7. 3. 4 Analysing the ELCIN HIV and AIDS programme

According to the interviewees ELCIN has indeed embarked on a programme for the preventing of the spread of HIV and AIDS, for counseling those who are infected and affected and for providing care for the sick. The main resource of the church is the Bible. Although the church does not have all the answers to all the questions related to HIV and AIDS, it brings a clear message of hope to everyone. This section analyses what ELCIN HIV and AIDS programme does in relation to others.

All interviewees stress the point that the Bible is at the center of the ELCIN AIDS ACTION programme. Shitundeni (2006) pointed out that some people living with HIV and AIDS

(PLWHA) were not comfortable with some judgmental sermons and with the message they passed on. Some preachers stimulated the spread of stigma among church members by advocating that HIV and AIDS is a punishment from God against those who disobey his commandments. Church members take this message very seriously, and it is particularly women who suffer stigmatization rather than men.

Stigma is one of the major problems in tackling HIV and AIDS. According to Ackerman stigma “is essentially its most explosive aspect”. This is because stigma is associated with dynamic forces in the structure of the society: culture, politics, religion, sexism, gender and language (2006:228). Unless these forces are translated into being effective and constructive as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned, they remain destructive. Stigma has entangled itself in these forces. There is an urgent need to combat stigma. The effects of stigma have a great impact on the lives of PLWHA; it discredits a person in the eyes of society, and it reduces the dignity of a person. To explain stigma in relation to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, Ackermann writes:

Stigma is not just some kind of “thing” that confers a “spoiled identity” on an individual. Neither is it a static concept. Stigma in the HIV and AIDS context can ultimately be understood only in relation to power and domination, gender and social inequality, and deeply embedded cultural and religious concepts of what it means to be a sexual human being (2006:228).

According to Kgalemang HIV and AIDS did not come alone; it brought with it a package labeled “stigma”. Stigma hinders both prevention and care of HIV and AIDS. The term stigma was used by Greeks to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier and such person was avoided in public places. Some people, who are perceived to have sinned against society and God, are identified with marks to expose infamy or disgrace. Therefore those who are stigmatized according to this definition are people who supposedly have sinned or not met the expectations of societal norms and values and therefore they “deserve” exclusion from the society (Kgalemang 2004:142-145). Kgalemang agrees with Ackermann that stigma also connotes a power relationship, making some individuals feel superior and others inferior, because it indicates that those who possess power, the dominant group, can determine which human differences are desired and undesired (Ackermann 2006:228; Kgalemang 2004:146). If someone is HIV and AIDS positive people begin to see such a person as being different from them (Kgalemang 2004:147), which is very wrong. Whether a person is HIV and AIDS positive or negative he/ she is a person in the sight

of God. He/she deserves human dignity. HIV and AIDS and its package of stigma have to be fought against and done away with all together.

The researcher agrees with Ackermann that from the emergence of the HIV and AIDS pandemic a series of powerful metaphors have been mobilized around the disease. In ELCIN as in other communities, HIV and AIDS has been associated with death, horror, punishment, crime, war, shamefulness and other social evils in the world. Those who were infected have been neglected and separated from the community as well as from their families, either by family members or by themselves. HIV and AIDS is understood as life threatening but in addition to this, it is linked to behaviours already stigmatized and is often seen as being caused by moral fault rather than a virus (Ackermann 2006:229). Many in ELCIN and among Ovambo have over emphasized this notion, which fuels the stigma.

According to Munyika, HIV and AIDS is spreading rapidly like bush fire and attempts to reduce its spread have been minimal. For Munyika HIV and AIDS is quietly making divisive inroads into human society, splitting communities into two, those who judge and stigmatize others and those who have been shamed and discriminated against or stigmatized (Munyika 2005:74). Munyika shares the same sentiment with Ackermann that HIV and AIDS stigma is characterized by denial, silence, fear, condemnation to insignificance, exclusion, shame, loss of self-esteem, guilt and death (Munyika 2005:74; Ackermann 2006:229). Munyika states “the stigma of HIV and AIDS is one of the worst obstacles to effective HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for those that are HIV positive” (2005:74).

According to Munyika, stigma can be defined from different perspectives: medical, anthropological, social and religious. Judgementalism, blame, spoiled identity; fear, exclusion and discrimination are common characteristics of the stigmatization of people living with HIV and AIDS. “People who are stigmatized are those who, due to their HIV status, are rendered impure, unclean, polluted, dangerous, and unworthy of full inclusion in the community” (Munyika 2005:76). Ovambo people are very antipathetic toward such people mentioned above, because they [Ovambo] feel that people with such behaviour are not needed in the society. The Bible also states that people who are not pure are not worthy to enter the kingdom of God (Rev 21:8). That kind of Bible translation and interpretation has contributed to the stigma. The Bible translation and interpretation, which destroys the lives of God’s people, has to be challenged. Contextualization and translation, which accommodates the whole of

humanity irrespective of race, culture, language and state of health, will create a more inclusive and less judgmental attitude. The translatability theory paves a way for a contextualization of the biblical message.

Munyika points out two kinds of stigma within the HIV and AIDS context: internal stigma and external stigma. “Internal stigma, is a stereotypical discrediting judgment of oneself in a particular context. It is the discrediting of the self; it is a self-rejection” (2005:76-77). This kind of stigma causes persons to decide not to be tested to know their HIV status, and to reject themselves as worthy human beings should they be tested and find that they are HIV positive. “External stigma is the stigmatization of others. It is any negative thought or action against an individual or group on the basis of their actual or presumed HIV status” (Munyika 2005:77). All these kinds of stigma mentioned earlier or others that may emerge are negative, never positive, because it makes everything worse. Stigma leads a person to a state of guilt feeling, shame and loss of self-esteem. A person in that situation is facing isolation and death, and the stigmatization of that individual by the community is unbiblical. The God of the Bible is the God of love and the God of hope. He wants all people to live a good life in abundance, as Enkono emphasized. In addition, “stigmazing someone with HIV and AIDS is a violation of human right” (Munyika 2005:77).

In dealing with HIV and AIDS there are different stages a person undergoes. Balcomb describes the different states of denial and refusals as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned when he writes:

...denying that it (HIV) is the cause of a sickness in the first instance, to the denial that it was the cause of death in the final instance with all the stages of denial in between – from the refusal to receive testing, to the refusal to disclose one’s status, to the refusal to acknowledge the link between HIV and AIDS, to the refusal to acknowledge that it is a sexually transmitted disease, to the refusal to acknowledge the efficacy of ARV treatment, to the refusal to acknowledge that it is a pandemic of apocalyptic proportions (2006:105).

Thus people do not admit that they are sick because of HIV, they mention other common diseases. Many people do not freely go for testing. Most people do not want to reveal their HIV status. Some people do not want to link HIV with sexual contact. Even certain leaders do not believe in ARV treatment. All these denials are caused by the stigma, which is attached to HIV positive people, because “the greater the stigma the greater the reason for denial” (Balcomb

2006:113). According to Balcomb, what led HIV and AIDS to be associated with such denials is that the disease manifests itself in a number of other diseases, which can be blamed for the condition, such as TB, pneumonia and others (Balcomb 2006:105). Balcomb may be right in his analysis of denials and refusal elicited by the disease, but there are now aspects of this denial that people have begun to overcome.

In many cases the stage of denial is a thing of the past. For example, people are now revealing their status, and testing centers are being set up across the country in the case of Namibia, and many people are flocking to be tested. According to UNAIDS 2006 Report, 227 000 are people living with HIV and AIDS in Namibia. People living with HIV and AIDS in Namibia in general, and in ELCIN in particular, have formed support groups in parishes and in communities. ARVs are now available as an option to survive. Munyika refers to ARVs as a miracle, because without them many more infected people would have died by now. It is possible that one day a cure for AIDS will be found in time to heal them. Dealing with the HIV and AIDS pandemic is a struggle of life and death.

Historically, the churches in Southern Africa (South Africa and Namibia in particular) have been engaged in the struggle against the evil apartheid system, which caused racial division in society. After 1990 in Namibia and 1994 in South Africa the system, which caused the suffering of many black people, came to an end. Today the churches are faced with the new challenge of HIV and AIDS and its stigma. This problem, too, is dividing people between those who are HIV positive and those who are not (Haddad 2006:80). The challenge of HIV and AIDS and related stigma has to be tackled by the church in order to find a solution to the whole problem of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. As the church in South Africa took a stand in the face of apartheid with the *Kairos Document* (1980), it must now take a stand against HIV and AIDS. This is the call from theologians in South Africa (Maluleke 2000) and in Namibia (Munyika 2005). If the church remains silent who will speak on behalf of the voiceless and the suffering people under the scourge of HIV and AIDS? The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) calls on all people, Christians in particular, to take part in the fight against HIV and AIDS (ELCIN statement on HIV and AIDS 1991)⁷³. HIV and AIDS is a complex disease. It does not discriminate like apartheid. It infects and affects all members of the church.

⁷³Ewi LyOngeleki ya ELCIN Kombinga yo AIDS (ELCIN statement on HIV and AIDS) was formulated and endorsed by the ELCIN Church Council at Okahao on September 13th, 1991. This document stipulates the ELCIN position on HIV and AIDS. ELCIN based her HIV and AIDS programme on this document.

Therefore the churches require all to participate in the struggle against the disease. The church has to realize as Haddad asserts, that:

Now is the time for theologians to be establishing the theological significance of this moment in the history of humanity in general and the history of Africa in particular. For our current context provides us with both a moment of truth in critical and dangerous times as well as a moment of grace and opportunity. ...we live in critical and dangerous times and our HIV positive world challenges our theology, our traditions and our cultures. It forces us to seek new understandings of God and of God's work in the world and to find ways of living as "church" that are redemptive to both men and women (2006:81).

ELCIN in her programme to combat HIV and AIDS emphasizes prevention, cure and care. So those who are spearheading the programme are engaged in teaching people who are infected and affected to stand together and not be separated by the disease. They encourage people to be tested in order to know their HIV and AIDS status, and encourage family members to take care of their loved ones who fall prey to the deadly disease. A major challenge is how to deal with people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) in society. The ELCIN statement states that HIV and AIDS patients must be treated with love, and not be condemned and stigmatized (ELCIN Statement on HIV and AIDS 1991). The Bible, which has been used to condemn PLWHA, is the same Bible, which is used to create life and hope in individuals and communities (Munyika 2005:115). The biblical message brings about the love of God to the people living with HIV and AIDS and to their families. Some infected young people have indicated that the Bible is more helpful than their parents. It has more influence over them than their parents and even their pastors. The church is accused of fueling stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS with its doctrine of retribution. Parents are also accused of fueling stigma because they discriminate against their children along the same lines. So, people living with HIV and AIDS opt for reading the Bible alone. Some people have indicated that it is better to attend Bible study rather than to go to the church (Shitundeni 2006). This is true because the Bible speaks in every language, enters any culture, tradition and context of people. The translated Bible makes it possible for ordinary people to read the Bible in their own tongue and idioms. So the Bible is closer to the people than the church. If people value the Bible rather than the church, then there is something wrong in her teaching. This means that the biblical message within the church context must be made relevant to all people in their context as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned.

The struggle against HIV and AIDS forms a part of liberation theology. Liberation theology tackles situations, which cause the suffering of the people of God. Liberation is not only political, but also emotional and physical. People infected and affected by HIV and AIDS and its related stigmatization, need to be liberated from such a situation. Munyika writes: “We must now develop a liberation theology which takes the experience of people living with HIV and AIDS seriously” (2005:88), because “Alongside other liberation theologies that have shaped our African continent, HIV and AIDS liberation theology must take its place” (Haddad 2006:88). According to West the key to the methodology of this liberation theology, as with other liberation theologies, “is the epistemological privileging of those who experience this particular marginalization. Those who know the lived reality of HIV and AIDS must become the primary interlocutors of theology” (Haddad 2006:88). This is the theology from the perspectives of the infected and affected.

The researcher agrees with Haddad that, “theologians (men and women), need to do theology with those who are HIV positive, walk alongside them, and use their training to interpret the current theological crisis. In so doing, we must begin to interpret the HIV and AIDS crisis not just at a personal level, but also structurally” (Haddad 2006:88). There is also a need to read the Bible from the infected and affected perspective or from the stigmatized perspective. People infected and affected by HIV and AIDS are comfortable with the texts in which a theology of love and compassion is upheld. This is because they need to hear the message of love and compassion, rather than being stigmatized. Ackermann contributes to this understanding by stating that feminist theology takes all women’s experiences of oppression and discrimination very seriously, and it extends its concern to include all people who find themselves on the margins of society and who know the violating effects of discrimination of any kind, including those suffering in this context HIV and AIDS (Ackermann 2006:226). Women and HIV and AIDS sufferers are marginalized, so they need a theology, which liberates them from marginalization on the grounds of gender and disease.

It was indicated earlier that HIV and AIDS stigma spoiled the dignity of a human person (Ackermann 2006; Munyika 2005). The point here is that HIV and AIDS infected individuals are people with dignity and must be treated as such. Failing to do so is a violation of their rights. It is clear that people living with HIV and AIDS have the same rights as all other citizens of the country they live in (Munyika 2005:94). Human dignity and the right to life are

protected in the Namibian Constitution (1990)⁷⁴ and in the South African Constitution. “The basic rights to life and dignity are often appealed to as motives for care of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS” (Richardson 2006:40). From the Christian point of view we speak of “inherent human dignity” whereas others speak of “human rights”. They both mean the same thing.

From the Christian perspective every human being bears the image of God (Munyika 2005:94), and no one is able to rob it or to spoil the image of God in a human being, whether a person is sick or healthy. Munyika writes: “Thus, violating inherent human dignity is the same as violating the image of God in which every human being is made. Care must be taken that every human being fully enjoys his/her inherent dignity” (2005:95). Theologians have to watch out in their teaching to avoid any violation of inherent human dignity, for example stigmatization. This will be their outstanding contribution to the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The researcher agrees with Munyika as he concludes: “To make a significant and meaningful contribution to the struggle against HIV and AIDS, theologians (men and women) must develop a theology capable of limiting any religious language, which justifies stigma and discrimination” (Munyika 2005:95). Theology must be inclusive, contextual and liberative. The translatability principle allows the Bible to be translated and its message to be interpreted in such a way that it can form the basis of this theology liberated from human behaviour toward other people. Theology must treat all people in a dignified manner as the image of God.

7. 3. 5. The way forward to combat HIV AND AIDS in the Church

The church must continue to address the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The translatability and interpretation theory makes this possible, because it makes the Bible to be understood in any language and in any context. The church has to put in place teaching and strategies grounded on the Bible in its programmes combating HIV and AIDS. It needs to ensure that its HIV and AIDS programme remains relevant, and effective all the time. The church, in order to makes its programme relevant, must be contextual and inclusive, and consider other aspects like medicine and culture. The church programme and strategy must be as inclusive and compassionate as is the Lord Jesus Christ. Here follow some recommendations with regard to the approaches that could be used to combat HIV and AIDS:

⁷⁴ The Constitution of Namibia 1990, Article 8, and 10

1. It has been confirmed by many theologians that the Bible is a useful tool and resource book for Christian theologies, because it can be contextualized so successfully. Thus contextual Bible studies need to be intensified especially with people living with HIV AIDS. This is one of the methods that can combat HIV and AIDS and its related stigma and discrimination. Contextual Bible study will allow people living with HIV and AIDS to participate in the struggle against the spread of the disease. Bible study, according to the Siyaphila Support Group of Ujamaa Center, is empowering because it provides access to unfamiliar texts and new ways of reading familiar texts (West and Zengele 2006:60). According to Richardson, among the valuable contributions made by PLWA in the church are their participation in the programmes of caring and their education of other members of the church or Christian family as to what it means to live with HIV and AIDS (2006:42).
2. Contextual Theology is another methods, which is effective in combating HIV and AIDS. Theology must be contextual. Universal theologies sometimes overlook context of the people concerned. Universal theology is the theology which generalizes things, whereas contextual theology is the theology which is dealing with a given context. An HIV and AIDS theology will be effective because it will concern itself with people infected and affected by the deadly disease.
3. Biblical theology is the theology of transformation. The Word of God has power to transform even culture which has elements of oppression and dehumanization. There are elements in culture and language, which are oppressive to part of humanity and the Word of God must transform them. If the Word of God in a given situation is maintaining an oppressive status quo, then it is not relevant, and a new interpretation is needed. Stigma, which always comes with HIV and AIDS, needs to be transformed into loving acceptance. A theology of transformation will contribute to this process.
4. In the face of HIV and AIDS, human dignity must be respected. HIV destroys human health, while stigma destroys human dignity, and the church must restore the spoiled dignity of people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. This will be achieved through nice and kind words, through caring, and through sharing responsibility, in other words, through being inclusive. The death of Christ on the cross-demonstrated that all people are subject to the love of God regardless of their social status or health. Jesus shows endless love and compassion for those in situations of pain and suffering.
5. It seem that people, including pastors and theologians are not well informed about HIV and AIDS. Engaging in something about which one is ill informed, with the aim to

Comment [UKZN5]: What is universal theology?

help, is dangerous, and will cause more damage than restoration. Therefore, the church needs to inform her workers about HIV and AIDS and its consequences in the individual and in society. If people are well informed, they will be effective in combating the scourge of HIV and AIDS. Any new developments that appear need to be explained in order to be of better service to those in need of help.

6. The Medical IRV treatment roll out and HIV and AIDS testing are essential tools in fighting HIV and AIDS. People must be encouraged to be tested to know their HIV and AIDS status. If HIV and AIDS is accepted like any other sickness, then people need to be tested as for all diseases. But because of its nature, HIV and AIDS testing is essential. Testing leads to the roll out of IRVs, which will prolong the life and improve the quality of life of the sick. This allows a person to perform his/her duties as normal. Therefore the church has to encourage people to go for testing and then to receive proper medical treatment. ELCIN has testing centers around Namibia, at Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital, Eenhana ELCIN Center and other places. There are many other testing centers covering the whole country. Therefore ELCIN, through its HIV and AIDS programme, is encouraging people to go to their nearest center and be tested.
7. Creating hope and a redemptive community assists towards the emotional well-being of those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. The Bible, which was used to condemn and judge people who are HIV and AIDS positive as promiscuous and adulterous and to stigmatize them, needs to be recovered from such interpretation. The Bible has an established community, the church. Therefore the church must be a place to nurture faith in God, to create hope for all people and not be the place of inclusivity. A theology of HIV and AIDS needs thus to be created in order to rediscover the standpoint of theology from an HIV and AIDS perspective. If the church and its theology fail to address the problem of HIV and AIDS, then the church fails to be a redemptive community and its resource book, the Bible, will be useless. People living with HIV and AIDS are equal members of the body of Christ and should be treated as such.
8. Fighting internal and external stigma. Stigma is the child of HIV and AIDS. The Bible must be an instrument of fighting the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS. The God of the Bible, in Jesus Christ, wants all people to live life in full (John 10:10). If there are other Bible translations or interpretations, which are not compatible with this, they need to be investigated. People living with HIV and AIDS and their relatives suffer all kinds of stigma. They need to be liberated from stigma. The church is the only community

which is in a position to liberate them through its teaching about sickness, healing and caring.

9. An effective way of fighting HIV and AIDS must be developed. All people who are engaged in the fight against the HIV and AIDS pandemic claim to be effective. One cannot deny this, because so far there is no cure for HIV and AIDS. In the African worldview, a triangular method to fight HIV and AIDS; –religious, cultural and medical, are recommended. In the traditional African context, healing is a combination of chemotherapy, logotherapy and theotherapy. Healing is not only confined to the individual who is sick but it is extended to the entire community⁷⁵. When reading the Bible one can also discover a tripartite process of healing. Jesus in his healing ministry used prayer, touching and words, and he even pronounced the forgiveness of sins to the sick and healed person. Above all, healing is only effective together with faith in God, because healing is the prerogative of God.
10. The church must have a standpoint. God is working through the church to address human calamity with the Word of God. The teaching of the church must be dynamic not static, therefore its translation of the Bible and its interpretation thereof must be flexible to accommodate the world of changes. The church with a standpoint cannot sway to and fro. New hermeneutics cannot change the standpoint of the church, rather it strengthens its standpoint. According to Nürnberger, Lutherans believe that God is in charge of all reality and nothing can exist and happen without God's creative activity. The cross of Christ in Christian faith is the symbol of a tenacious struggle with God to make good his promises, thus a powerful antidote against hopelessness and carelessness (2005:297). The function of the law, which exposes sins and the wrath of God, and the gospel, which proclaims unconditionally the love of God, the acceptance of the unacceptable, must remain at the center of the Christian church (Nürnberger 2005:298). The church must be an active church and an institutional church and a caring church. Thus the church must act against injustice, it must provide a practical framework of structure to do so, and it must provide an inclusive environment of love.

These points will assist ELCIN to be effective in combating HIV and AIDS. They must be considered when making translations and interpretations of the Bible in the face of HIV and AIDS, because they are inclusive. The translatability and interpretation theory need to be

⁷⁵ Choosing Hope. Discovering Hope in the Epidemic Through our Biblical Foundation. Published in 1996 by MAP INTERNATIONAL, Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa pp 1-15

applied in dealing with HIV and AIDS and the biblical message. These points above outline the challenge HIV and AIDS have posed to the translation process of the Bible. They are to be accommodated in the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages as required by the translatability theory. Dealing with HIV and AIDS should not end with a good theoretical approach, but it should be materialized as well. One has to beware of making the HIV and AIDS project one of economic gain; rather it is life saving. HIV and AIDS is a reality, which needs to be addressed fully for the well being of the whole world.

7. 4. Conclusion

This chapter examined the challenges that women and HIV and AIDS offer to the translation process of the Bible into vernacular languages. It shows how the women and HIV and AIDS have challenged the translation and the interpretation of the Bible. The problem with regard to women lies in the patriarchal system in which the Scripture originated and which has been carried over in its translation, a process dominated by male theologians throughout the history of the Church. The emergence of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has contributed a great deal to the transformation of the way the Bible is read and to the rediscovery of women in general and women in Africa in particular in the church, in society and in culture. They have demanded that women's experiences be included in the translation and interpretation of the Bible, to make the biblical message relevant and contextual. The chapter also shows how the HIV and AIDS pandemic has challenged the translation of the Bible and its interpretation. The Bible has been used to condemn and judge people who have contracted HIV and AIDS. However the Bible is not a tool of judgment, but a means to bring about hope in the midst of suffering. Both women's theology and HIV and AIDS theology are liberation theologies, and maintain that the Bible is their source of strength and that it is the Word of the living God to living people. The Bible can hurt and heal; therefore it is at the same time a tool and a weapon. Let the Christians, the people of the Book, use the Bible as a source of healing, a source of hope, a source of inclusiveness and a source of transformation. ELCIN, as the church, must seize the opportunity of translating the Bible to make it relevant and inclusive all the time. The translatability theory offers the inclusiveness of the Bible through the process of translation, because the Scripture, as well as Christianity are translatable into all contexts and all situations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter marks the end of this study. The research itself however is not yet completed. The door is open for other researchers to continue researching on this topic. Chapter two dealt with the translatability and interpretation theory of Sanneh and Bediako on which the whole study is based. The translatability and interpretation theories have allowed the biblical message to be relevant and acceptable in any time, any language, any context and any culture as described.

Chapter three dealt with the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people. According to the translatability theory, in order to produce a better version of the Bible, the translator is required to know the language, the religion, the culture and the social set-up of the people concerned. ELCIN operates among Ovawambo and Okavango people who live in the northern belt of Namibia. Although these people have much in common, there are differences in languages, and culture, which were the forces behind the decision to translate the Bible into their three main vernacular languages, Oshindonga, Oshikwanyama and Kwangali. Therefore the origin of Ovawambo and Okavango people, their culture and their traditional religion and practices were examined, as a background to the translation work of the Bible.

Chapter four provided an overview of the Bible translation process done by ELCIN. The translating process of the Bible in ELCIN took place during different periods and was conducted by different translators, starting with missionaries from Finland and Germany and ending with indigenous translators. Some translators received translation training while others did not. Some translators have studied the original biblical languages Hebrew and Greek others have not. What made the translation of the Bible in ELCIN possible were the will and the determination of the translators. The translators managed to complete Bible translations in Oshindonga (1954), Oshikwanyama (1974) and Kwangali (1987). The applicability of the translatability theory helped a lot to produce a better translation in ELCIN.

Chapter five explored the expression and belief that the Bible is the Word of God that never errs according to Lutheran understanding. ELCIN members, when receiving the Bible in vernacular languages, claimed that they had received the Word of God in their languages, as

dealt with in chapter four without question. Therefore the Bible in vernacular languages in Oshiwambo and Kwangali was thus hailed as the Word of God among the people. In fact, the Bible is the incarnated Word of God in the language of the people. What makes the Bible the Word of God? This is a difficult question, which was dealt with at length. Luther, a reformer, and his understanding of the Bible and translation have been dealt with. One cannot take for granted that the Bible is the Word of God, because theologians have interpreted that notion in various ways. Contemporary theologians like Klaus Nürnberger, Absalom Hasheela, Tinyiko Maluleke, John S Mbiti, Itumeleng Mosala, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musa M Dube and Musimbi Kanyolo, give different answers from different perspectives in the African contexts. From the perspective of liberation theology, the Bible is the Word of God when it addresses the plight of suffering, oppression and exploitation of the people. From a feminist/womanist point of view, they maintain that the Bible is the Word of God if its message is liberative and inclusive and stress the point that God is the liberator who rescues men and women from the bondage of oppression of any kind (Rakoczy 2004:87). From an HIV and AIDS perspective, the Bible is the Word of God if its message is one of caring, compassion and creating hope for the sick. People wrote the Bible, but its ultimate message comes from God and it requires interpretation to access this message as mentioned in chapter seven. The emphasis is on the fact that the Word of God is always contextual. Those who apply the translatability and interpretation theory to translation process succeed because the Word of God is only relevant if it is addressing the people in their language, culture and context.

Chapter six provided the dialogue between cultures and religion when translation takes place. The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages in northern Namibia led to the dialogue between religions: African Tradition Religion (Ovawambo and Kavango people) and Western religion (Christianity). Each religion's terms and concepts, which play an important role in the salvation of human beings, were discussed at length. In many cases they carry the same message; therefore African terms and concepts have fitted into Christianity. Dialogue is thus inevitable in the process of translating the Bible. The translatability theory makes dialogue possible. Therefore, translatability is also a dialogue.

Chapter seven dealt with how the Bible translation should deal with the challenge of women and HIV and AIDS. This means that translation cannot take place without the challenges of the day. The process of translating the Bible and its hermeneutics was challenged by the changing of times, and new situations, issues, and contexts emerged. The major challenges of today

include women's emancipation and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The Bible originated within a patriarchal system, and was written by men and dominated by male theologians (fathers), therefore women's experiences and women's voices were neglected or forgotten. This situation makes the Bible unacceptable for women. Dube calls on women from the African continent to examine the translations in their languages and to reread the colonial biblical translations of the Bible from a postcolonial feminist perspective (2001:7). Therefore, women theologians want their voices and their experiences to be accommodated in the Bible translations. The Bible needs to be liberated from patriarchal ideology and needs to become inclusive. Russell writes: "The Bible is accepted as the Word of God when communities of faith understand God to be speaking to them in and through its message" (1985:141).

HIV and AIDS is a complex deadly disease, which has impacted most of humanity in Africa and many people in the world at large, and Namibia in particular. If one is not infected, then one is affected. In some instances people infected and affected are condemned and judged by the Bible. However, the Bible, which is the source book of all theologies, is a good tool with which Christians can fight the HIV and AIDS pandemic and its impact of stigma. Through contextual translation and interpretation the Bible becomes a useful weapon in fighting the scourge of HIV and AIDS. The chapter explored how ELCIN has embarked on a war against HIV and AIDS using the Bible as a main resource. The success of ELCIN in the fight against HIV and AIDS depends on the application of the translatability and interpretation theory of the Bible, which allows all the situations to be accommodated in the biblical message. The Bible can hurt and at the same time it can heal. The right translation and interpretation of the Bible is the one that creates hope for all people, ill or healthy.

Chapter eight provides some final insights of the study, the future of the translation in ELCIN and recommendations and resolution.

8. 2 Translatability and the translation of the Bible in ELCIN

The Bible has been translated into Oshiwambo and Okavango languages. The process of translation has been completed. The question is whether these translations are compatible with the translatability theory of Sanneh and Bediako. According to the translatability theory, the Bible and Christian religion are translatable, and translators must thus consider not only the language but also the culture and the context of the people whose language the Bible is being translated into in order to be relevant. Sanneh confirms this when he argues, "translatability

became the characteristic mode of Christian expansion through history” (Sanneh 2004:17). Bediako adds to this argument that it is through translation that Christianity has become a worldwide religion. He holds that the translatability of the Christian religion signifies its fundamental relevance and accessibility to any person in any culture within which the Christian faith is translated and assimilated (Bediako1997:109). This is what took place in ELCIN. Through the process of translation, Christianity and its Scripture became part of African culture. Once Ovawambo and Okavango people received the Bible in their own tongue they began to theologize. They now understand God speaking to them in their own tongue, and as Sanneh points out, the importance of Bible translation and its priority in missionary work are an indication that God is not disdainful of Africans as to be incommunicable in their languages (Bediako 1997:120). Reading the Bible in vernacular languages has allowed Christianity to take root in ELCIN.

The Bible is translatable therefore its translation into many languages is the way of making the Bible relevant and accommodated by African Religion and Practice. Therefore African heritage can be found in Christianity as well as in the Bible in the vernacular languages of Africa. Translatability was and will remain the main mode characteristic of Christian mission, because it allows the Christian religion to accommodate and be accommodated in any language, culture and context. Today Christianity is part of Ovawambo and Okavango people’s culture through translation.

8.3 The authority of the Bible

The authority of the Bible in ELCIN is overemphasized. According to ELCIN, the Bible is the Word of God that never errs. This is a legacy from the Finnish missionaries who worked in the northern belt of Namibia, and brought Christianity to the Namibian people, which resulted in the establishment of ELCIN. The views of ELCIN agree with that of Obeng who writes:

... the Bible is the Word of God and hence all that it contains and affirms are without error. Knowledge of the biblical truth then is open to a person who has entered a covenant relationship with the living God through personal faith in Jesus Christ, utilizing the Bible and with the aid of the Holy Spirit (1997:14).

With this conviction, in her work, ELCIN thus emphasizes the unquestionable authority of the Word of God.

Church traditions play an important role in placing authority on the Bible, that is why in the Christian tradition the Bible is the ultimate source of authority upon which the Christian faith and teaching is to be based (Nthamburi and Waruta 1997:50). This means that the traditions of the church and denominations played an important role in placing authority in the Bible. Different traditions have various emphases with regard to the biblical message. Lutheranism highlights Justification by Faith; Reformers focus on the doctrine of Election and Predestination; Anglicans refer to the doctrine of the Episcopacy system; Baptists emphasize baptism; and Methodists concentrate on Sanctification etc. (Nthamburi and Waruta 1997:50).

The message of the Bible is ambiguous, and has many meanings. Masenya argues that the Bible hurts and at the same time it heals. Liberation theologians denied the authority of the Bible if it was not liberative. The imperialists used the Bible to nurture their ideology; men used the Bible to defend their patriarchal systems; and the church used the Bible to condemn and judge people living with HIV and AIDS. However, today the Bible is being used to liberate those who are in captivity, to uphold the position of women in the church, and to create hope for people living with HIV and AIDS. That means that the Bible in any language creates a conducive environment for the people to read themselves into and fit themselves in its message. Therefore, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the sick find themselves comforted and encouraged by the same Bible. The translatability and interpretation of the Bible makes its message inclusive and liberates its message from imperialist ideology and from male domination. The Bible only has true authority when it is liberative, contextual and inclusive.

8. 4 The significance of the Bible in vernacular languages in ELCIN

The Bible in vernacular languages in ELCIN has great significance. It has transformed the way of life among Ovambo and Okavango people. The dominant fear of sickness, witches, misfortunes and death, which caused chaos and death among these communities, was reduced. These hazardous things, no longer dictate their lives. Their lives are now dictated by the new life in Christ who is the central message of the Bible. One has to be cautious of overemphasizing the authority of the Bible among these communities. For many Christians in ELCIN, especially the first generation of Christians, the understanding is that what the Bible says God says. The biblical text can be used without interpretation. The time has now come for ELCIN theologians and trained pastors to appropriate the Word of God. The Bible keeps the vernacular languages alive; it has transformed life; it has given Ovambo and Okavango people a chance to hear God speak in their own tongue; and has provided the opportunity for people to read it and

reflect on it and see or find themselves in the Bible. So, the Bible is regarded in ELCIN as a Holy Book of God, written by human beings and thus requires translation and interpretation.

8. 5 Challenges in translation

8. 5. 1 Women

Feminist theology is not only a challenge to the translation of the Bible, but to the entire field of theology. Feminist/womanist theologians have contributed significantly to the development and shaping of theology. At this point in time many male and female theologians are transformed. The researcher also felt proud of being a man in the past, but now he is transformed. What is important now is not to be a man or a woman, but to be valued as a human being. This is what women are fighting for in the church, in society and in culture. It is reflected in the use of gender sensitive language, in those languages and terms that are gender related. For the change to be materialized and effective, The Circle in particular, developed a strategy of writing books, articles and other material related to women in the Bible, in church and in society in relation to the African elements of life such as culture, sexuality, rituals and rites of passage, which survived the Christian onslaught and continue to sprout (Kanyoro and Oduyoye 2006:1-2). Most of these elements are misinterpreted and mistranslated in the Bible, because of the lack of the translatability theory. The following books are the result of the aim of the Circle to shape theology in Africa in the new millennium, and they are compatible with the translatability and interpretation theory: *“The Will to Arise”* (1992), edited by Oduyoye and Kanyoro, is the first book of this kind; *Talitha cum! Theologies of African Women* (2001), edited by Njoroge and Dube, contains a series of articles collected and written by African women theologians concerning their life experience in the church and in society; *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (2006), edited by Phiri and Nadar, and many other articles found in Journals of theology. These writings are the voices of women themselves. The time has come for the women to speak for themselves (Phiri 1997:69).

8. 5. 2 HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS is a worldwide phenomenon, but its effects have been particularly severe in sub-Saharan Africa. When it was heard of in ELCIN for the first time in 1986 people were afraid. They panicked and were disorganized. They did not understand it or know how to approach and live with it. It was said that HIV and AIDS was a disease of homosexuals (*omukifi womashenge*). Therefore heterosexual people were not bothered with it. Later on it

became seen as a disease of prostitutes and promiscuity (*omukifi weembwada novaholi voipala*). At this stage there was a great deal of condemnation and judgment in the church and in society. Infected people were stigmatized as well as affected. Today HIV and AIDS is a disease affecting everybody (*omukifi waaveshe*). When ELCIN realized that HIV and AIDS was infecting and affecting her members, she introduced an HIV and AIDS awareness programme called, ELCIN AIDS ACTION, (EASA). The aim of the programme is to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS, to care and to counsel people infected and affected by THE disease. It is only through that programme that ELCIN members have become aware of the reality of the disease and have been shown the way forward. ELCIN does not fight alone, but is networking with other faith based organizations and government officials. ELCIN has arrived at the understanding that HIV and AIDS is a pandemic without any cure; therefore her emphasis is to fight it using the Bible as a main source together with other related materials.

ELCIN has taken a stand to cater for PLWA with compassion, showing that God has not rejected them, which is according to the biblical teaching. HIV and AIDS is not the end of life. ELCIN is creating hope in the midst of the pain and suffering caused by HIV and AIDS. The condemnation and judgment, which was fueled by the Bible has become compassion, hope and caring, which is the true central message of the Scriptures. Jesus comes so that they might have life abundantly (John 10:10).

The Bible shows that Christ treated the sick with love and compassion, so the Church has to follow this example of its head. The Circle has also contributed significantly to the struggle against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. They offer new ways of translating and interpreting the Bible, which include all people, sick and healthy, men and women, as God's people, with a share in the Kingdom of God, now and in the future. The following books written by African women theologians are useful in the struggle against HIV and AIDS and in introducing new ways of the reading of the Bible and of shaping theology as a whole: *African Women HIV and AIDS and Faith Communities* (2003), edited by Phiri, Haddad and Masenya, and *Grant Me Justice: HIV and AIDS & Gender Reading of the Bible* (2004), edited by Dube and Kanyoro. These books deal with HIV and AIDS and churches' response to the pandemic in the context of African culture. It is because of the translatability of the biblical message that the contexts of women and HIV and AIDS are able to become part of the whole spectrum of theological discourse.

8. 6 The future of translation and interpretation of the Bible in ELCIN

ELCIN has completed the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages. God is now speaking to Ovawambo and Okavango people in their languages. These languages are now among the worldwide languages in which the Word of God can be read and spoken. The translation of the Bible into vernacular languages paved the way for local theologizing and interpreting of the Bible. One has to bear in mind, however, that translation is an ongoing process. In future, ELCIN must engage in translation, which is more contextual and which has a stronger cultural orientation, rather than relying on foreign translations and interpretations. The dynamic translation approach, as introduced by Nida, which guided the translation process in ELCIN, is compatible with the translatability theory of Sanneh and Bediako.

More African heritage and dialogue between Christianity and African Religions needs to be realized in future Bible versions. African theologians argue that Christianity in Africa must be more appropriate to the African context and African realities Foreignness in Christianity, supported by the Scriptures, which takes root in the local faith, must be discharged starting with the translation process (Bediako 1997:115). The notion of the incarnation of the Word of God through Scripture must be made a reality in the translation of the Bible in Africa. As Sanneh, cited in Bediako, asserts;

Translation assumed that the abstract Word of God would find its true destiny when embodied in the concrete local idiom, lending credence to the theological insight that the Word of God had always carried the burden of the incarnation... (1997:121).

The future of the translation of the Bible, particularly in ELCIN, will be shaped by new waves of trends when they occur, and by new theologies, which are based on culture and context. ELCIN must understand both the local and global translation issues in order to be effective and relevant in its future translation work.

8. 7 Recommendations

The researcher would like to make the following recommendations and suggestions to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN):

1. ELCIN needs to prepare herself for new translation/versions of the Bible in all languages in which she is operating. Mixed language translation is not acceptable, because it degrades the languages. ELCIN must keep local languages as pure as possible.

2. ELCIN must re-examine the existing Bible versions to ensure that they are appropriate and up to date and if not, new versions/editions should be produced.
3. The translatability theory and the dynamic approach to translation must be a guide to the translators, because the former highlights the accommodation of culture, context and language, and the latter focuses on passing the biblical message across without losing the original meaning.
4. Translators must know the biblical languages (source languages) of Hebrew and Greek as well as the target language, culture and context. Only in this way will the biblical message become relevant and accepted by any given people.
5. ELCIN must train professional translators and Hebrew and Greek specialists from time to time to maintain continuity.
6. ELCIN theologians, both men and women, must use their own eyes in reading, interpreting and appropriating the Bible as the Word of God. Corrective lenses, like race, sex, economics and culture will help ensure that the biblical message is inclusive. Such corrective lenses are needed in order to overcome cultural and gender-based conditioning, which leads to exclusivity. ELCIN theologians must always keep in mind the African culture, language and context.
7. Biblical interpretation and translation must always be contextual and inclusive, in order to be accepted by all humanity.
8. ELCIN must have trained theologians or scholars from different fields: Systematic Theology, African Theology, Feminist Theology, Biblical Theology and specialists in HIV and AIDS and other issues, for the provision of better services in the church, and to assist in various aspects of Bible interpretation and translation.
9. ELCIN must be ready to meet new challenges and address them professionally, appropriately and contextually according to a biblical basis.
10. ELCIN must maintain her identity as a Lutheran church in each and every aspect of her work. Jesus Christ must be at the center of her teaching, preaching, caring, administering of sacraments and all other services.
11. In order for ELCIN to make the Bible known and understood and to help it take root among her members, Contextual Bible Studies must be emphasized at all levels of her operation.
12. ELCIN needs to encourage the learning of vernacular languages in higher academic institutions in order to maintain indigenous languages. This will also encourage new

generations to read books including the Bible, in indigenous languages and keep these languages alive.

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