

MICHAEL TIMNENG AND JEREMIAH CHI KANGSEN:
CHRISTIANITY BEYOND THE MISSIONARY
PRESENCE IN CAMEROON



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in Cameroon

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This issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* explores the life and work of two men—Michael Timneng and Jeremiah Chi Kangsen. In their youth, they were both captivated by the Christian missionary message in Cameroon. As earnest and diligent converts, both of them carried the gospel beyond the reach of Western missionaries and they played a key role in establishing Christianity in Cameroon. Timneng was a Roman Catholic who courageously nurtured a young community of believers in the face of opposition from an unfriendly ruler. He worked as a pioneer in the absence of white missionaries, and he challenged positions of power from below. Kangsen, on the other hand, transformed power structures from the inside. First, as a member of the House of Assembly and then as a chief of the Kesu people, he worked to govern according to his Christian convictions. He went beyond the reach of foreign Christian missionaries, leading the well-established Basel Mission to independence as the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Their stories demonstrate the role that indigenous Africans played in rooting Christianity in the African soil.

Missionary Background in Cameroon

In 1472, the Portuguese reached Douala and sailed up the Wouri River. They found it teeming with shrimp, and aptly named it the Rio dos Camarões—or Shrimp River. Since that time, the surrounding country has been known as Cameroon. Originally, Europeans were only interested in the economic capacities of the area. They exploited the rich volcanic soil by establishing plantations, which inevitably increased the slave trade that spanned the Atlantic world. Missionary activity in the region was slow to start. It was only in the 1830s and 40s that Jamaican and Creole Baptists in cooperation with the Baptist Missionary Society of London began work. Their efforts, however, were limited to the coast and outlying islands. Malaria and other tropical diseases left

the interior cut off from the growing population and trading centers on the coast. [1]

The real Christian impact was felt after the arrival of Alfred Saker in 1844. He built schools and churches in Douala. While he is remembered as the “father of Christianity in Cameroon,” he only lived there four years before his death, and his influence remained limited to the coast. Missionaries began to imagine ways of expanding into the interior. Saker’s successor, T. H. Johnson, envisioned reaching the interior through a chain of mission stations. But even before he could embark on this scheme, African Christians themselves began to spread the gospel to the interior. Recaptive slaves who were brought to Douala converted to Christianity and then returned to the interior with the Christian message. [2] This was a model that would be repeated throughout the history of Christianity in Cameroon and Africa more broadly. Africans themselves came in contact with the Christian gospel, and then they began the work of mission and evangelism in the absence of foreign missionaries. It was not uncommon for western missionaries to arrive and already find small communities of Christians.

The Heyday of Imperialism

European leaders at the Berlin Conference in 1884 divided the African continent among themselves. Their objective was to spread commerce and civilization to the “dark continent,” an end that seemed to justify any number of brutal means. Cameroon was granted German Protection (Schutzgebiet) in 1884, which had the benefit of military protection against the whims of other European trading powers, but it also gave Germany far reaching authority. With the consolidation of the German presence on the coast, the hinterlands were gradually explored not only in search of ivory, rubber, palm oil, and cocoa, but also to spread the Word.

The advent of German rule also meant a change in missionaries. The British Baptist Missionary Society stations were turned over to German and Swiss missionaries. In protest, some African church leaders hived off to form the Native Baptist Church. The Basel Mission was established in Cameroon in 1886 under the name German Missionary Society—and later the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society. Besides preaching the gospel, one of its major concerns was the improvement of the quality of life of the people in the areas where their mission stations were located. To attain this

objective, they provided practical skills in a number of areas. They built a number of smaller mission stations over a widely diffused area. Likewise, they were noted for further reaching white missionary control. By contrast, American Presbyterians in Cameroon built fewer mission stations that were larger and emphasized local leadership. [3]

Germans placed missionary activity under strict control. They were not eager to allow non-German missionaries to operate in the territory. French Catholic Missionaries were refused permission to establish stations in Cameroon. When the Pallottine Fathers from Germany and Switzerland asked for permission to work in Cameroon, the colonial government instructed them not to compete directly with the Basel Mission and to receive no orders from non-German authorities. When they arrived in 1890, they were required to establish their mission stations far removed from areas already occupied by earlier arrivals. The Pallottine Fathers set up their stations in Marienburg near Edea and moved later to other areas as they began to open schools and mission stations. The priests of the Sacred Heart, arrived in Cameroon in November 1912 and were assigned to part of the Western Grassfields. Working under the same policy of avoiding missionary competition, they were posted to the Grassfields especially to Nso and Kom countries, far away from the well-established Protestant societies. They set up mission stations at Shisong in 1912 and in Fujua in the Kom country in 1913, the place of origin of Michael Timneng.

Roman Catholics

Historian of Christian mission Stephen Neill observed, "Perhaps the most successful of all the Roman Catholic missions in West Africa was that of the Cameroons." He noted that missionary efforts were slow to pick up until the turn of the 20th century, at which point "progress was rapid." Neill continued, "With a missionary force outnumbering that of all the Protestants put together by four to one, Roman Catholics were able to establish themselves throughout the territory, in which certain areas gave the impression of being an entirely Christian country." [4]

Neill's use of the term "missionary force" is unfortunately vague. It carries the connotations of white foreign missionaries, when in fact it was local young men and women who did most of the

grunt work in establishing Catholicism in Cameroon. Beginning in 1896, German colonial administrators sent the sons of chiefs to the Catholic school at Kribi, where they learned Catholic doctrine in addition to the “three ‘Rs.’” When they returned to their home villages, they were eager to share their faith with their friends and families. In Cameroon, the young Christians had the urgent zeal of youthful converts. They were often uncompromising with the “pagan” past, seeking to make a break with practices of polygamy, secret societies, and witchcraft.

Michael Timneng was one such convert. With little assistance from foreign missionaries, Timneng stood bravely by his convictions in the face of a hostile ruler and nurtured the young Catholic Church among the Kom. But the direct challenge to Foyon Ngam did not come from foreign missionaries, but rather one of his own difficult subjects. Timneng’s story sheds light on the relationship between foreign missionaries and indigenous initiatives in African Christianity. It also provides an example of the tensions that can develop between traditional religion and Christianity in Africa. Ultimately, however, Timneng’s story is one of the key players in what made Catholicism such a vital force in Cameroon today.

Independence and Christianity Today

When the Allied forces defeated the Germans in Cameroon in 1916, the German missionaries (Pallottine, Sacred Heart, etc.) fled south to Equatorial Guinea with the German forces. At the end of First World War, Cameroon was divided between British and French administration. Not surprisingly, new missionaries, usually from France and Britain, replaced the missionaries from Germany. Apart from yet another change in missionary nationalities, the war also led to an increased awareness of African national consciousness. In the early part of the 20th century, African nationalism was not directly antagonistic to colonial rule. Many early nationalists demanded more say in the colonial government and access to land. They were perfectly willing to accept a qualified franchise. But as the century wore on, it became increasingly clear that African nationalism was turning in the direction of full independence. The former colonial powers were badly battered during the Second World War and their

colonial subjects, who had now fought in two major world wars, were eager to determine their own destinies. Independence was the watchword of the day, and it extended into the churches.

As the sun set on European empire in Africa in the middle of the 20th century, Christian missionaries were also ceding control over their missionary outfits. Formerly white dominated missions began to turn more control over to local church leaders. The Basel Mission turned control of the church over to the hands of Kangsen. He made the ideal leader. He was highly educated, an experienced teacher and preacher, and he had the political experience necessary to govern a large church body. He was also humble, meaning that he would not be corrupted by a position of power in the church hierarchy.

Today, the population of Cameroon is estimated at over 23 million. For over 100 years, Christianity has succeeded in transforming not only the lives and souls of the different ethnic groups, but it has also delivered a better quality of life by establishing schools, hospitals, clinics and other social services that have made meaning in people's lives. Today, there are three major religions in Cameroon, namely Christianity, Islam and indigenous African religions. At least 70% of the Cameroonians are Christians while 30% are either Muslims or those who still hold the religious beliefs and practices of their ancestors. The two dominant Christian groups are Catholics (32.4%) and Protestants (30.3%). Kangsen's Presbyterian Church in Cameroon is the largest English-speaking Protestant Church in Cameroon. It has between 1 and 1.5 million members who worship in 1,475 congregations, divided into 29 presbyteries. There are roughly 1,400 pastors. Behind these facts and figures are the lives of those people who worked tirelessly to champion the cause of the gospel.

Contrary to the popular image of mission work in Christianity, the conversion of Cameroon and the African continent was not a "foreign affair." Africans like Timneng and Kangsen were directly responsible for making Christianity in Africa the vital force it is today.

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Michael Timneng
1898 to 1968
Roman Catholic
Cameroon

His Birth

Michael Timneng was born in 1898 at Wombong in what used to be Western Grassfields of Cameroon. At age ten, the Kom Royal Palace conscripted him to serve in the royal court at Laikom as a retainer (*chindo*). Retainers were members of the ruling elite known as *Kwifoin*—the legislative arm of the traditional Kom administration—and they managed the royal household and acted as administrators and diplomats.

Timneng found the job to be a difficult fit. He was accused of hurling a stone and wounding another retainer, after which he fled to his birthplace in fear of reprisal. This incident occurred at the outbreak of the First World War. Since Cameroon was under German protection, the German government asked Foyng Ngam to conscript young men for colonial military service in Cameroon. Foyng Ngam recommended Timneng for conscription. Timneng was an insubordinate retainer and sending him off to join the German army was one way of getting rid of a thorn in flesh of courtly life.

As he was being taken from his mother's hut, Timneng thought he was going to be returned to the palace to complete his service. When he was informed that the *foyn* was sending him to the army, he said, "It is better to serve the white man than to be a slave under Foyng Ngam." Foyng Ngam is described in Kom history as a brutal leader who even had his own brothers and cross cousins killed by the Germans. It is also noted that his wives exercised undue influence on him. Together with six other stubborn retainers, Timneng became a soldier. With the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon by the Allied forces in 1916, Timneng and the six were interned at Fernando Po in Equatorial Guinea.

While in prison, they met the German Pallottine Fathers, who taught them Catholic doctrine. For three years, Father Baumeistter, who was one of the missionaries that started the mission station at Fujua in 1913, drilled the young men in the catechism, eventually baptizing them. At baptism, Timneng took the name Michael. He was also equipped to be a catechist. He was designated as the converts' leader, and given the catechism of the

Roman Catholic Church in German. While Father Baumeistter trained the young men in the Catholic faith, it was up to them to return to their own people with the new religion.

In July 1919, Timneng and his fellow converts arrived back in Kom dressed in German military uniforms. As custom demanded, they visited the palace and met Foyn Ngam. There, the *foyn* asked the returned soldiers to present the spoils of war. Timneng replied, "It was good you sent me to be killed by the white man. Instead of killing me, he has given me this small book to bring back and preach the Christian doctrine and restart the church you authorize them to build." The *foyn* showed no interest in his reply as he insisted on the presentation of war booty. If they had nothing to offer, they would be stripped of their uniforms and kept in the palace. To the astonishment of both the *foyn* and his advisers, Timneng replied bluntly, "This can never happen." Their military uniforms emboldened them and protected them from being arrested by the local palace retainers. His hands tied, the *foyn* simply allowed them to return to their village, hoping they would live normal lives. But the *foyn* was mistaken. Once back in their village and without delay, Michael Timneng started a prayer group in his uncle's compound at Wombong. This group soon attracted the interest of many, some of whom would become Catholics. As the membership of the prayer group grew, they moved from the compound of Timneng's uncle into a church building. Interest grew and two communities were formed at Wombong and Njinikom respectively.

First arrest: Bi Wa'ah, the runaway royal wife

The Christian faith had already emboldened Timneng in his stand against the *foyn's* authority. Perhaps the *foyn* would have continued to tolerate this marginal insolence, but soon Timneng's faith posed a challenge to the *foyn's* own household. As Timneng preached against polygamy and witchcraft, many royal wives began to flee the palace and take refuge in this new community of Christians. The first royal wife to join the Christian prayer group was a young woman named Bi Wa'ah. She first encountered Timneng's community while on a visit to her mother. She found freedom amidst the gathered believers and she refused to return to the palace. Timneng was soon accused of "taking the *foyn's* wife." He was asked to return Bi Wa'ah to the palace. He refused because she had joined of her own volition. His response to the *foyn's* request was further interpreted as contempt.

Timneng made it abundantly clear that he could not send her away. Palace retainers were sent to arrest Timneng for failing to obey royal orders and he was locked up in the palace. Bi Wa'ah was also forcefully taken back to the palace. They were both subjected to severe beatings. Timneng was released after several weeks and Bi Wa'ah rejoined the royal household. As tempers calmed, Bi Wa'ah escaped again to rejoin the Christian community, and this time she was followed by other royal wives. By 1923, twenty-five royal wives had fled the palace, taking refuge in the new Christian villages at Wombong and Njinikom. This situation was shocking and completely unacceptable to the traditional authorities. The emerging Christian group consistently disobeyed the royal orders of a ruthless *foyn*. Wanting to regain his traditional position of authority and his wives, the *foyn* hatched a plan to re-arrest Timneng.

Second arrest: The horror of torture

Two palace retainers were sent to start a fight on the church premises in order to justify Timneng's re-arrest. They arrived and forcefully seized corn from a young boy who had come to sell it and attend catechetical instructions at Timneng's church. When the boy yelled and requested payment for the corn, they told him to go and ask Timneng to come and pay. When Timneng overheard the row outside the church, he rushed out and found the retainers and ordered them to pay. As he insisted, the retainers yelled back at him saying: "Go tell your God to come pay!" Furious at their insolence, Timneng gave them a good beating. Unable to contain Timneng, they ran back to the palace. A few days later, the *foyn* sent a contingent of forty retainers to arrest Timneng for attacking palace retainers.

After his arrest, Timneng was detained for two months. In his absence, his followers continued to gather and pray for his release. During his detention Timneng was beaten, tortured and forced to carry feces every day. He continued to preach his faith, saying that if his listeners did not convert to Christianity, they would go to hell—a message he brazenly delivered to the *foyn*. Foyngam was so furious that he ordered Timneng to be beaten. Timneng challenged Foyngam's authority to such an extent that the *foyn* asked if he wanted to take the throne. Timneng retorted "I am not a member of the royal lineage and therefore have no ambition

to be a ruler. I am a commoner preaching God's gospel and nothing more." [5]

After undergoing this inhumane treatment, Timneng was taken to the magistrate court in Bamenda on two charges; viz., taking the *foyn's* wives and beating palace retainers. On the first count, he was accused of encouraging the *foyn's* wives to become Christians. In response to this accusation, Timneng said *everyone was free to attend his church*, and he could not force anybody to attend his church services. On the second count, he denied having beaten palace retainers, and no one provided evidence to the contrary. Since the court did not have enough evidence for either charge, Timneng was acquitted. Jubilant crowds welcomed him back to Njinikom, and even more people became Christians. Timneng also embarked on the monumental task of translating the German catechism and prayers into itangiKom, the mother tongue of the Kom people.

Third arrest: The closure of the church

Angered by the outcome of the trial in Bamenda, the *foyn* decided to close down the church. He dispatched a contingent of retainers under the leadership of a senior palace retainer, Ngong Fundoh to close the church. When they arrived, Timneng was away in Shisong to meet the resident parish priest whose jurisdiction included the whole of Kom. The royal party met only seventeen Christians. With his band of retainers, Ngong Fundoh arrested the seventeen Christians, sealed the church, and ferried prisoners to the palace where they were detained.

When Timneng returned from Shisong and found his church sealed, he went to the palace. Arriving there, guards stopped him to ascertain his identity. He told him that he was the person the palace retainers came looking for in Njinikom. He had come to have his people released from the palace prison. The guards immediately arrested him and put him with the seventeen others. They were jailed for several weeks and the church remained closed.

This continuous molestation of Christians was reported to the British administrators of the colony. The growing tension and animosity between Christians and traditional authority could not be ignored. Mgr. Plissoneau of the Apostolic Prefecture of the Adamawa travelled to Njinikom in 1921 to visit the persecuted Christian community and he said a mass attended by over 300 Christians. After Timneng's third arrest, British administrators D.

O. Duncan of Bamenda and S. D. O. Roxton of Buea travelled to Njinikom to assess the situation for themselves. On their arrival they found the church sealed. Duncan and Roxton sent soldiers with a message asking the *foyn* to report to Njinikom. Terrified, the *foyn* arrived Njinikom and refused to go near the church. He instead sent his trusted servant, Ngong Fundoh, who had sealed the church in the first place, to go and unseal it. Furious that he had been humiliated by the British administrator, the *foyn* returned to Laikom vowing never to set foot in Njinikom. He declared that he had abandoned that part of his kingdom to Timneng and the white man.

When Foyon Ngam died in 1926, Njinikom and its Christians gained more breathing room. The new ruler, Foyon Ndi, adopted a conciliatory approach, reconciling his Christian subjects with the rest of his people.

The Christian faith continued to flourish as the Christians received protection from the British administration and the new ruler. It is interesting to note that between 1919 and 1926, Timneng kept the faith alive by resisting all kinds of persecutions. It was not until March 1927 that a resident priest, Father Leonard Jacobs, was appointed to take over the good work of Michael Timneng who was appointed as the catechist. In 1931, Michael Timneng was made head catechist.

By 1931, Michael Timneng, without any formal education, finished translating the German Catechism into itangiKom. Apparently the little German he had learned while he was interned in Fernando Po was sufficient enough to perform this monumental translation work.

When Michael Timneng died in 1968 in his native village Wombong, the small Christian community he had established in 1919 had become a full parish with resident priests. Today, the territory that used to be controlled by that parish has become an archdiocese with over forty-one parishes.

The seed that was sown by the Pallottines and the Sacred Heart Fathers was nurtured and kept alive by Timneng and his companions. The area that once had only seventeen Christians in 1923 now has over two hundred thousand Christians. His legacy lies in his audacity and courage, his translation of the German Catholic catechism, the training of other catechists and the compositions of religious hymns that captured the spirit of joy in his Christian community. He championed monogamy and became a model himself

when he married Martha Chituh. The couple had twelve children, all brought up in the Catholic faith. When the Archdiocese of Bamenda celebrated 100 years of Christianity (1913-2013), they remembered the early years (1913-1927) as a difficult time, but one presided over by the strong and audacious person of Michael Timneng.

Paul Nchoji Nkwi / Julius Tohmentain

* * *

Jeremiah Chi Kangsen

1917 to 1988

Presbyterian

Cameroon

Early Life and Education

Kangsen was born in 1917 as a prince in the Aghem community in the Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. As a prince, he had countless siblings from his step-mothers from among whom a new chief could be chosen. Becoming a preacher as prince had deep implications. He was from a typical polygynous home, and one day he could be chosen chief, which eventually happened in the midst of his ministry. When he became a Christian he took the name of Jeremiah, a biblical prophet, and became known as Jeremiah Chi Kangsen.

Kangsen started school at the age of ten. It was expected at the time that within six years of formal school, a brilliant child would be ready for the job market. Kangsen's education did not start with regular primary school but with what was known as the vernacular school, which prepared pupils for primary school. After three years in his home village, he went to Bali Primary School and finally completed his primary education in Mbengwi. There, he met the future politician and his bosom friend Solomon Tandem Muna. Kangsen finished his primary school at the age of sixteen in 1934 and became at the time one of the few qualified people on the job market. Many employers wanted him, including the colonial government, but his dream was to become a missionary. His qualifications made him a suitable candidate to enter the Catechist

Training Institute in Nyasoso, which trained teachers and preachers. At the end of his studies, the brilliant candidates were engaged as teachers in existing mission schools while the less brilliant ones were sent to preach the gospel. Kangsen graduated among the top students, and his vocation of becoming a preacher was virtually put on hold while he was sent to teach in a primary school in Mbengwi.

This policy had a tremendous impact on the early ministry of local pastors. Pastors with low academic qualifications earned low salaries while those with better academic credentials were engaged as teachers and had better salaries. As the years went by, the need to adjust to the realities of the time led the church to change its policy. Preaching the gospel could not be left in the hands of the academically mediocre. The reversal of the policy would later lead some of the most brilliant minds like Dr. Bame Bame, Dr. Osih, and Dr. Toko to the pulpit. The church quickly transformed the ministry of the Word into a vocation in which vows had to be taken to lead an appropriate lifestyle.

From Teaching to Politics

Having been a brilliant student, Kangsen was offered a teaching position for a couple of years. His performance and academic standing impressed his superiors, and they sent him for further studies. In 1945, he was withdrawn from the classroom and sent to Kumasi in Ghana to pursue theological studies. When he finished his training in Kumasi, he was ordained as a full pastor in 1948. After briefly teaching and working as youth pastor at the Training Institute in Nyasoso, his superiors sent him for more advanced studies in theology in Edinburg, Scotland. His solid training convinced the Basel Mission to rely on him. In interviews, some members of his family spoke of him as a committed and dedicated servant of the church.

Muna was another teacher at the Basel Mission but he left teaching to join politics. Muna convinced Kangsen that, as a youth pastor, he had developed the necessary skills for politics. Kangsen developed interest in politics and when it was time to campaign for seats in the Eastern House of Assembly in Nigeria in 1951, Muna encouraged Kangsen to contest the seat in his constituency. The two of them stood in their respective constituencies and won. It was an event to celebrate, especially for Muna.

The church, however, had mixed feelings about Kangsen's

entry into politics. An extract of a letter from the congregation to wish both of them well read like this:

It gives us gladness and satisfaction to see two members of our church in the magistracy. However, we regret your resignation, yet we believe that God himself may be your gift to work and act within the new circle as Christian members of the evangelical church and that in Christian responsibility you may be effective help in this country. [6]

The church expressed mixed feelings concerning his resignation and in it reminded him that his resignation was not a departure from the church. On the contrary, they expected him to be of great assistance to the church and to the school system. They wished him God's wisdom and wanted his personal presence in church to continue to inspire many. The Synod Council added, "There are men in responsible positions who know about God's will and are familiar with His Commandments; it is our desire to see you further in our midst as members of our church and the Basel Mission."

Kangsen became a member of the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly and also served in several capacities, including minister of education, minister of health and social welfare, a member of the Board of Southern Cameroons Development Agency, and a member of the Inland Revenue Board of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He was a pioneer member of the New House of Assembly of Southern Cameroons when it became a region. He also served as a member of the executive council in Buea. Kangsen served a full term with the government: four years renewable once in both the governments of Nigeria and Southern Cameroons.

Minister and Moderator

The system was designed so that when a person had served two terms, he or she was free to retire to his or her previous occupation. When Kangsen knew that he had exhausted his two terms, he returned to his original job, teaching and preaching for the Basel Mission. According to Jonas N. Dah, the church was reluctant to accept him back, because they were deeply afraid that he could pollute the church with a new style of leadership. In order to reform the once eloquent pastor-politician, the church sent him back to Edinburgh with the aim of reeducating him and dismantling the

politics in his mind. The next stage was to have him teach as a lecturer at theological seminary, formerly the catechetical training institute, while he was being monitored. According to Dah, Kangsen was asked to write a short essay on the church and politics so that the church could assess his fidelity to the faith in an indirect way.

[7]

In his answer, Kangsen wrote that politics could be a clever way of telling lies and consequently the attitude of the church towards politics was obviously confrontational. At the same time, he believed that the church had to be present in political circles. Politicians are members of the church and politics should not divide them but build a sense of brotherhood in the congregations. On the whole he believed that we cannot avoid politics but that partisan politics were out of place in official church circles. For him, the pastor had to play the role of a village chief where all are under his counsel but are diverse in opinions. All the Christians have one pastor and the pastor should never be partisan towards any of them.

This answer satisfied any lingering questions church authorities held about Kangsen's fidelity. After briefly serving as vice-principal at the seminary, he took up the position of synod clerk of the church and began to introduce some remarkable changes. With his experience as a onetime lawmaker in the government, he limited the duration of service in church offices. Pastors elected into office could only serve for four years renewable only once. Furthermore he became the moderator of the church and had the task of implementing his proposed changes. The Basel Mission, which was not actually a church per se, was also thinking of granting independence to its outfit in Cameroon. The Basel Mission wanted to concentrate its missionary efforts on bringing the gospel to other parts of Africa. It selected Kangsen as a reliable and committed man of God to become the moderator of the new church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, on November 13, 1957.

Kangsen downplayed his position as moderator. He did not attach so much importance to the title nor to the personality. The moderator for him was, as the definition stands, to moderate what the rest are doing like a chairman or a supervisor. A clerk to him was just a subordinate who went about collecting data to present to the main body on how the church was running. He humbly referred to himself as a piece of meat. Mrs. Nku, one of his daughters quotes him as telling his children "My children, when I die, just throw the meat into the grave and cover it up." From the frown on the faces of the

children, he modified it, saying, “Just put on my pastoral gown on me and give my clothes to those who don’t have.” [8] As a modest person, he drew neither pride nor honor from his title of “Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon.” Being the highest person in the church hierarchy, he played his role as moderator of the activities of the church and he wanted his subordinates to regard him as such. He never called himself a moderator but others saw him as one. He referred to his previous office as that of a mere clerk and his collaborators as secretaries who should assist him with information gathered from the field.

A Christian Kesu Chief

On his retirement, Kangsen did not forget his roots; he was a village boy transformed. He believed his wide experience in the Lord’s vineyard and in government could be of use to his people. He was convinced that God had a plan for his people and they were only in need of someone to show them the path to follow. Kangsen submitted himself to destiny and occupied the empty throne of the Kesu people, a position he had never aspired to. It seemed that destiny had chosen him from among the princes. Having risen to the highest ranks in the Presbyterian Church, he was being called to the highest position among his people. Were the two incompatible? How could he navigate around longstanding customs and traditions of his people? With his great exposure and learning, he was the workable link between traditions and Christian culture. Having accepted being their traditional ruler, he cautioned and warned them that, as he began to re-educate himself with rules and norms of tradition, he would reject and discard whatever was contradictory to the Christian faith. Once he was at the center of the traditional hierarchy he began to define how the two could co-exist. Christianity became the center of the social and political life of the people, rituals that contradicted the faith were abandoned, kinship relations were maintained and polygyny associated with the ruler was also eliminated as a practice. The people could honor their ancestors but not adore them for Christ was the greatest.

Paul Jenkins’s intimate conversation with Kangsen seven years after he became traditional ruler while remaining a pastor revealed how skillfully he handled issues among his local people both as a pastor and as a traditional ruler. [9] As a traditional ruler he did not take the front seat as long as he had been the moderator of

the PCC. He only had accepted the role of traditional ruler after his people persuaded him three times pleading with him that he become their chief. He rejected the request twice but finally succumbed reluctantly to their plea in 1977, but on two conditions. First, he would not marry any of the widows of the late ruler. The women would be given the freedom to marry someone else. Second, he would not perform sacrifices to the ancestral spirits. For him, the ancestors were dead. He would concentrate his efforts on the living. In his leadership, his focus was on how to rejuvenate the living and encourage sharing among them without much attention to the dead. Any customs and traditions that were not progressive or compatible with Christianity were eliminated. To him, Africans do not need to deny their culture but instead they should modify aspects of it so as to improve their lives and create a more acceptable context. His Swiss partners and friends, Jacque Russell and Eberard Renze, seemed to agree with his approach to culture. His impact on culture as a missionary transformed the customs and traditions of his people as long he was their chief. His successor, it seems, would restore some of these customs and traditions such as polygyny, which is still part of the legacy of the Kesu royal lineage. [10]

Kangsen was the village boy who became a missionary. He presided over the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon during an important period of transition. His educational, religious, and political background qualified him to act as moderator of a fully independent church. In this capacity, his humility was only exceeded by his effectiveness. He modeled a new form of Christian Kesu leadership. Kangsen was a sincere Christian and his work led to an enduring political and ecclesial legacy for his people.

Conclusion

The lives of Timneng and Kangsen shed light on Christianity in Cameroon during two very important transitional phases. They certainly had their differences. At the most basic level, one was Catholic and the other Protestant. Timneng was bold and even impertinent. He challenged structures of power from below. Kangsen on the other hand was notably humble, moderating arguments, ensuring that all sides had a fair hearing. Kangsen challenged power structures from the inside, Christianizing forms of traditional leadership. While they were different, they both shared a

zeal for their faith. They worked hard to ensure that the gospel was heard, and that structures would be in place to ensure that the gospel went to future generations.

Paul Nchoji Nkwi / Mih Clement

Endnotes:

1. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of Christianity in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 59-62
2. *Ibid.*, 62
3. *Ibid.*, 62-63
4. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 367.
5. Timneng's personal notebook, 1950.
6. J. N. Dah, ed., *Kangsen as They Saw Him* (Buea: Unpublished, 1989) 18f.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 9.
9. Paul Jenkins, "Kangsen on Mission and Culture," in *Kangsen as They Saw Him*.
10. Jacque Russell and Eberard Renze, in *Kangsen as They Saw Him*, 97 and 89.

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Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Drønen, Tomas Sundnes. *Communication and Conversion in Northern Cameroon: The Dii People and Norwegian Missionaries, 1934–1960* (Studies in Christian Mission). Leiden; Boston : Brill, 2009. \$88.00 - \$95.00. ISBN-13: 978-9004177543

Was modern Christian mission to Africa primarily a colonial project and a civilizing mission or was it a spiritual revival spreading to new areas? This book tells the tale of the Dii people in northern Cameroon and describes their encounter with Norwegian missionaries. Through archival studies and through fieldwork among the Dii, an intriguing scenario is presented. Whereas the missionaries describe their mission as one of spiritual liberation, and the Dii highlight the social liberation they received through literacy and political independence, the author shows how both spiritual and social changes were results of captivation, miscommunication and constant negotiations between the two parties. ([Amazon](#))

Drønen, Tomas Sundnes. *Pentecostalism, globalisation, and Islam in northern Cameroon: megachurches in the making?* Leiden: Brill, 2013. \$149.00. ISBN-13: 978-9004244894

Pentecostalism is among the fastest growing social movements in the 21st century. This volume discusses global aspects of Pentecostal churches in northern Cameroon, by describing how the local congregations interact with civil society, traditional religion, and Islam. Extensive fieldwork and descriptions of the complex historical context within which the churches emerge, makes the author draw attention to Pentecostal leaders as social entrepreneurs inspired both by local traditions and by a global flow of images and ideas. This indicates that Pentecostalism can be interpreted both as a social and as a religious movement which manages to encounter mainline churches and Islam with flexibility and spiritual authority. ([Amazon](#))

Lado, Ludovic. *Catholic Pentecostalism and the Paradoxes of Africanization: Processes of Localization in a Catholic Charismatic Movement in Cameroon* (Studies of Religion in Africa). Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009. \$124.00. ISBN13: 9789004168985

The anthropological literature on religious innovation and

resistance in African Christianity tended to focus almost exclusively on what have come to be known as African Independent Churches. Very few anthropological studies have looked at similar processes within mission churches. Through an ethnographic study of localizing processes in a Charismatic movement in Cameroon and Paris, the book critically explores the dialectics between “Pentecostalization” and “Africanization” within contemporary African Catholicism. It appears that both processes pursue, although for different purposes, the missionary policy of dismantling local cultures and religions: practices and discourses of Africanization dissect them in search of “authentic” African values; Charismatic ritual on the other hand features the dramatization of the defeat of local deities and spirits by Christianity. ([Brill](#))

Nkwain, Augustine N. *Cultural Diversity and its Challenges to Evangelization in Cameroon: A Multidisciplinary Approach with Pastoral Focus of a Church in a Multicultural African Society (Pastoralpsychologie und Spiritualität)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, [2013]. \$64.95. ISBN-13: 978-3631643747

Living in a multicultural society offers many advantages but also poses many challenges not only in the political but also in the religious, social domains. With Cameroon as a point of departure, the author examines the advantages and challenges that accrue from living in a multicultural African society, both for the society and for the Catholic Church, and offers refreshing reflections, suggestions and methods for facilitating interaction and functioning in a multicultural society. Drawing inspiration from theological and human sciences the author delves into ways of working and evangelizing in a multicultural African context. ([Amazon](#))

Theses & Dissertations (Open Access)

Frouisou, Samuel. *Women in the Church in Africa, Continuity in Change: the Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon from Its Inception to Present Day, (1923-1999)*. PH.D. Thesis. University of Natal, 2002. <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/3271>

The thesis aims at bringing to light the immense, yet ignored, contribution of women to the establishment of Christianity in Northern Cameroon. Northern Cameroon has a quite different

historical development from the south of the country, with a significant difference being the presence of Islam in the north, which dates back to the beginning of the eleventh century. However, the situation of women in the church and society in Northern Cameroon today is no different from that experienced by women throughout centuries of male domination and, indeed, still experience in most of the traditions and cultures of the African continent ... this oral history study has made it possible to bring to light the role of not only the women missionaries, but also the African women in a major area of public life, the church, when their contribution to it has been denied for years. Therefore, the thesis is based mostly on oral interviews since nothing is written about the work of women in the church in Northern Cameroon, apart from the reports by missionaries for their mission societies. Hence, the aim of this study has been to explore both the past and the present of Christianity in Northern Cameroon in order to make known to a wider public the extent of women's contribution to social, cultural, and religious change. [Excerpts from the Abstract]

Fochang, Babila George. *An Exploration of the Conception of God Among the Bali Nyonga and Its Impact Upon Their Contemporary Christian Practice with Particular Reference to Hymnody and Prayer.* M.Th. Thesis. University of KwaZulu-Natal. 2004. <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/2002>

Through the invitation of the then traditional ruler of Bali Nyonga, the missionaries of the Basel Mission arrived there in 1903. They embarked on evangelisation especially through the opening of schools. They studied the mungaka language, translated the Bible into it and made several other publications. However in the process of translation they concluded in strong terms that the Bali had no notion of a Supreme Being who created heaven and earth. Professors Bolaji Idowu, Kwame Bediako, and others argue, contrary to such missionary assertion above, that continuity from the old religion is what gives meaning to the understanding of the new. It is in this light that in this work we seek to explore the Bali Nyonga conception of the Supreme Being. We will also investigate Christian understanding of the God of Israel; whether he is understood only in the light of previous understanding or they consider him to be somebody whom they had never known in their worldview. [Excerpt from the Abstract]