

The Basel Mission Presence in Bakundu 1897-1961; The Untold Story on the Destruction of Indigenous Religion

Dr. Timothy MUSIMA OKIA^a and Dr. ACHU Frida NJEI^b

^{a-b} National Center for Education, Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation – Cameroon

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Abstract

The activities of the Basel mission activities in Cameroon have been portrayed in missionary and colonial historiography as a civilizing and developmental force. However, in Bakundu, the mission's engagement between 1889-1961 produced profound transformations that undermined the indigenous religious systems. This article critically examines the role of the Basel Mission in dismantling Bakundu traditional religion, arguing that missionary efforts through education, evangelization, cultural suppression, and collaboration with colonial authorities systematically eroded indigenous belief systems. While acknowledging certain contributions such as literacy and social change, the study contends that these came at the cost of cultural dislocation and religious alienation. Drawing on oral traditions, missionary records, and secondary literature, the paper reconstructs an "untold story" of religious transformation and cultural loss in Bakundu.

Introduction

The encounter between Christianity and African traditional religions during the colonial period represents one of the most significant cultural transformations in African history. In Cameroon, the Basel Mission emerged as one of the most influential missionary societies, particularly in the coastal and south western regions. Its expansion into Bakundu coincided with the German colonial rule and continued under British administration, shaping religious and social life for decades.

Missionary accounts often emphasise the success of evangelization, education and social reform. However, these narratives frequently obscure the destructive impact of missionary activities on indigenous religious systems. In Bakundu, traditional religion was not merely a belief system but a comprehensive framework encompassing governance, morality, social relations, and identity. This article therefore interrogates the impact of the Basel Mission activities in Bakundu between 1897 and 1961, asking to what extent Basel missionary activities contribute to the destruction of indigenous traditional religion.

The Bakundu clan is situated in the South West Region of Cameroon and with thirty-six villages occupying settlements in the Mbonge, Konye and Kumba I subdivisions. They are descendants of Ngoe who is the same ancestor of neighbouring clans like the Bakossi, Bafaw, Mbo, Mbonge amongst others. Bakundu is a coastal Bantu speaking stock. Their environment is characterized by luxuriant forests and rivers. The main hydrographic networks in the Meme Division which are the Rivers Mungo and Meme run through many Bakundu villages. Besides the two main rivers in the region, there are other small rivers all over the land. This makes their religion to be connected with forest and marine activities.

Indigenous traditional religion in pre-colonial Bakundu

Before the coming of the Europeans to Bakundu, Traditional religion was expressed in cosmology and belief systems, social and political functions, as well as moral and ethical systems. This is because traditional religion in pre-colonial Bakundu involves the totality of the life of the people, it determines the spontaneous and their subconscious reactions as well as their interpretation of reality. It also refers to a specifically Bakundu way of responding to, and manifesting belief in the absolute. Its major beliefs and tenets are expressed more in recognizable, often unwritten rituals.

Cosmology and belief systems

Worship prayer and sacrifice are the three different forms of manifesting belief as well as expressing religious convictions or feelings. They are all ways to commune with the Divine; a covenant relationship between the supreme being (God) and humanity. The Bakundu had the conviction that there is a supreme being whom has to be respected, venerated, adored and revered. This supreme being was called tata obase who is also the God of their ancestors. This God was conceived both as transcendent and familiar, he is therefore visualized as awe-inspiring yet attractive. The god of our ancestors is venerated and worshipped in Bakundu like other peoples of Africa. He is given different names most of which are descriptions of his attributes. African peoples approach God according to the ideas they have about him. They think of him as God of the ancestors, God the moulder, God the provider to all, the one who governs and sustains the universe, a real father and friend to everyone; omnipotent, omniscient, merciful and benevolent - a God who is an embodiment of every good thing. (Mbiti, 1991: 53). This almighty God is in the earth, the skies, and everywhere. Nothing can escape his notice. He gives power to the ancestors who live with him and inform him about individual family problems. So, he is more often worshipped through the veneration of the ancestors and by performing concrete external acts shown through anatural religious cult which is both absolute and relative.

Veneration of ancestors

The ancestors (melimo) are those who are believed to have gone to the world beyond and are now spirits who communicate directly with the supreme being. The ancestors are seen, understood and venerated only in respect with their unique relationship with God the creator of the universe. In Bakundu villages, special masks are kept in the etana representing and reminding the people about their ancestors. When people pass near the etana they show signs of reverence. Contacts with the ancestors are maintained through offerings, sacrifices and other rituals. When these ritual duties are neglected, it is purported the divinity will call them to attention by causing illness or misfortune. These ancestors are the ones who act as intermediaries between the people and God. They are termed as the living-dead (Mbuy, 2012:105) because though dead, they still intervene in the activities of the living. The ancestors were consulted because they were considered to be the custodians of the tradition that they handed to their progeny and continue to supervise. This is because human life in Africans in general and Bakundu in particular was a natural intercourse between the physical and the spiritual; a symbiotic existence between the living and the living-dead who are the ancestors. As Mbiti puts it, the faith of our ancestors dominates the thinking of African peoples that it shapes culture, socio-political and economic organisations-the whole way of life. (Mbiti, 1975:9).

Spiritual intermediaries

Contact with the divinities was not always direct so there was the need for intermediaries between the human and divine realms. These mediators range from simple servant at a family altar to head of lineages, family heads, diviners and village head (mowele mboka) among them, the Mowele mboka was the highest because he acted on behalf of the whole village. He maintained ancestor cults, acted as priest for the community

responsible for sacrifices offered to the spirits of sacred sites or ancestors. The mowele mboka in precolonial acting as a chief priest is seen when a new baby was born into any family of the village, to save the child from any harm. As Vincent B. Khapoya puts it, “the birth of a baby affirms the continuity of the community and provides hope for the future”. (Khapoya, 1998:45). The mowele mboka in this case would place the njongolo (a special stick that is believed to possess mystical powers and was held only by the mowele mboka or the person he was to initiate in a secret society) at the front of the house where the baby was born and pronounced the following words; “this new baby is not only a member of this house and family. The child belongs to the entire village. Any person touching or trying to harm this child must have touched the whole village and will carry the whole village on his back.” (Lenya, 2019). The njongolo would remain in front of the house in question for three days. On the day of taking it away, the whole village would assemble and the baby would be brought out. A small “grave” would be dug and the baby put into it which will later be covered with thatch. The mowele mboka would then invoke the spirit of the ancestors through a traditional speech called ikando to assist the family in bringing up the child, in making sure the child survived and in detecting any person or group of persons who would try to harm the baby through witchcraft. After the pronouncements, the mowele mboka personally removed the child from the “grave” and hands him or her to the family head to look after. (Lenya, 2019).

Sacred rituals and festivals

Religiosity in traditional Bakundu was also manifested through sacred rituals and festivals. Festivals like dinwangi when a new baby was born into a family was common in Bakundu to show their appreciation to Obase for the gift of a child into the family. The dinwangi It was a feast of plantains, beef and palm oil with enough pepper prepared for all present. (Carr, 1922:65). The preparation of the dinwangi started as soon as the woman was aware of her pregnancy. The husband kept aside one or two tins of palm oil, four to six legs of beef, a bag of salt, a fathom of cloth, a handkerchief and reserved about ten bunches of plantains in the farm. The pregnant woman on her part prepared cam wood powder and a store of firewood. She also kept aside dried fish. The mother of the woman collected pepper and as much beef as she could to add to the feast. That day the nursing mother was decorated with cam-wood powder (yowah) and white clay called pembe together with some other traditional regalia known as besseba or so’o all around her to present her more beautiful. In front of the house of the new born, the men beat the drums while the women danced. The centre of attraction was on the nursing mother who was accompanied by her friends, two or three identically decorated for that purpose. (Balemba,2020). There were other sacred rituals and festivals like at the death of a mowele mboka, initiation into secret societies through which the people showed their attachment to God.

Social and political functions

Religion in precolonial Bakundu was also evident in social and political functions. traditional religion was at the center in precolonial Bakundu governance. Traditional governance in pre-colonial Bakundu was in the hands of three main institutions; the mowele mboka (village head), the traditional council (janea ra mboka), and the secret societies (bekali). The mowele mboka was the custodian of the culture, peace and tradition of the people. This oath was taken on the day of enthroning before the whole village in the presence of other village heads, leaders of the different secret societies as well. Before the enthroning ceremony, the mowele mboka had passed through many rituals to fortify him so as to better govern his village. They mowele mboka was usually a member in all secret societies in the land, head of the village traditional council (janea ra mboka) as well. At the time he took over office as village head, he also took the office of high priest of the village as he was the one to act as the link between the living and the living dead. He was the highest in the rungs of the traditional authority, having numerous political functions and royal prerogatives which included among

others guaranteeing the socio-cultural wellbeing of the community, the settlement and the imposition of traditional injunction orders. (Nakomo,2020). He propitiated the spirits of the land by offering sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. The sacrifices he offered and the rituals he performed were believed to nourish the people's relations with the gods and assured continuity. (Sakwe,2019).

Since the Bakundu traditional authority system was decentralized, there was also the traditional council that took part in governance. This council was made up of the various family heads of the polity. They acted as the legislative arm of governance of the village. Their meeting house was the etana (a traditional and mystical house built at the centre of the village). This house was the centre of peace and a protecting force for the village. It was in this house that the gongs of the various juju societies were kept. This house also acted as the highest shrine of the village as most of the sacrifices and rituals took place there.

The secret societies were the other arm of pre-colonial Bakundu governance. They acted as the judicial arm because "in the days before European occupation, the judicial system was controlled by the Juju clubs, or in certain cases by decisions of the whole village." (Carr,1922:31). The colonial administrator goes further by stating that "the settling of civil disputes of a trivial nature was probably done in the village by the village elders but anything of serious nature was done by the juju societies". (Garson, 1932:28). The secret societies that were very active in Bakundu included the Nganya, the Malle, Mudimi, Nyakpe, Bolemba, Basongo, Dior, Ngoa Maloba amongst others. Secret societies were purportedly linked to various spirits which gave them a double nature. Members of these clubs were both humans but also had other souls in animals in the forests or in the rivers, depending on the type of secret society to which one belonged. For example, members of the male society were said to have "bush souls" in elephants, the Ngoa Maloba having theirs in red river hog also known as bush pigs.

It is for the afore reason that in their apparel and dance they would always want to present things in resemblance to the animals in which they were attributed with. This credited them with the name Neyo o Mariba, Neyo o Mokondo literally meaning "I live in water as well as on land". They were instruments of peace and order in the polity. They meted out punishment for violation of social rules while at the same time deflecting any resentment that might come from the people to the supernatural as represented by the masks that they wore. (Khapoya, 1998:44). These societies were out to maintain morality and decency especially in the manner in which they treated cases of theft and adultery. The severe manner through which these secret societies dealt with stealing, made Carr in his report to conclude by saying "with such drastic measures, it is not surprising that it was often said stealing was practically unknown among the Bakundu." (Carr,1922:31).

Arrival of the Basel mission in Bakundu

When Cameroon became a German protectorate in 1884, the English Baptist missionaries finding it difficult to work with the German colonial authorities, decided to leave the territory in 1886 in favour of the Basel mission. From the coast of Cameroon, the Basel mission decided to move into the hinterland and by 1897 the Basel mission was in Bakundu area coming from Douala passing through the Mungo River and established a station at Bombe under the leadership of Rev. P. Scheibler. (Garson,1932:84). Carr supports this when he says "during German occupation Bombe (Bakundu) was a big centre of the Basle Mission...from this centre were sent out native teachers, and preachers who opened small schools, and missions in numerous villages of Mbonge, Bakundu and other tribes". (Carr,1922:49). The Basel mission was a Christian mission with headquarters in Basel, Switzerland and a branch were established at Stuttgart in order to give it a German character. This made the Basel Mission to have a German connection. (Eyongetah et al, 1987:51).

The Basel Mission Station at Bombe



Rev. P. Scheibler



The missionary society engaged in evangelisation thus spreading the “good news” and the Christian doctrine in the area and contributed in other social services. This period saw the westernisation of social customs which came through the introduction of formal education, Christianisation and modernisation of cultural values such as birth, marriage, death celebrations and the transformation of architectural patterns. The Basel mission extended her activities to all Bakundu land from their station in Bombe and Reverend Nathaniel Lauffer was its first resident missionary. It was from the Basel mission station in Bombe that the missionary society spread its activities to the rest of Bakunduland and neighbouring clans like Balong, Bafaw, Ekombe and Mbonge. (Garson, 1932:84).

The friendly nature of the Bakundu was manifested in the warm welcome they gave the Basel missionaries. Their relations started deteriorating when the missionaries started preaching and having disdain for everything traditional. This arose anti-Christian sentiments especially from the traditionalists. Moreover, the missions in most cases built their Churches near the etana of each village which is a secret house of the Bakundu of which they hold a sacred esteem. The missionaries went as far as destroying them in some villages like Kake, Bombe among others. This action was seen as a serious threat to their ancestral worship which made pro traditionalists to see them leave their land. (Ndome,2019).

The *etana* of Itoki Bakundu



Though these efforts were abortive, it nevertheless affected the Christian missionaries’ effort to convert the people. The destruction of the etana which was the epitome of the people’s tradition too had a negative effect on the Bakundu traditional authority system as it proved the victory of Christianity over tradition.

After colonial rule was well established, the missionaries and the colonial authorities forged a very close working relationship. (Khapoya, 1998:114). This was because the missionaries used the Bible and the gospel to pacify the indigenes while laying the groundwork for the colonial authorities to easily consolidate their administration. They thus worked hand in gloves to prohibit traditional practices. Everything traditional were termed evil, demonic uncivilised and primitive like idol worship, polygamy, traditional post mortem among others. (Ndome, 2019). This is because missionary activities were well-meaning, but they had little understanding of the cultures they were entering. Their intent was to bring Christianity to a continent and a people they believed to have no true religion. They meant to stamp out African religious practices they saw as superstition and ignorance. Most of the Bakundu villages notably Mbu, Itoki, Ibemi, Kake had open confrontations with the missionaries during modimi and malle traditional dance celebrations. They tried to send the missionaries out of their villages but their efforts proved futile because the missionaries were supported by the administration. In 1898 just one year after the establishment of the missionary station in Bombe, the village head of and most of his subjects assembled all their juju objects and called on the Basel missionary Lauffer who was the resident missionary to burn them and they promised to be Christians. Other juju objects were sold out whenever the natives had the opportunity to do so. It is said that at that moment, twenty-four men registered as catechumens. (Itoe,2019). This action by the village head of Bombe was a blow to the traditional authority system as he made an out show of the victory of Christianity over the Bakundu traditional beliefs, institutions and religion. By the end of that year, the Bombe station and its outstations had 130 Christians and 174 catechumens following the table below.

Number of Converts in Bakundu in 1898

Village	Number of Christians	Number of catechumens
Bombe	20	24
Kake	17	21
Bole	13	20
Boa	09	16
Banga	16	23
Ndifo	06	17
Konye	14	14
Mbakwa	17	13
Ibemi	05	11
Itoki	07	10
Mbu	06	05

From the table, one realises the evangelization strides made by the mission in recruiting many converts in some Bakundu villages. These converts joined forces with the missionaries in discrediting everything that had to do with the Bakundu tradition and religion especially the juju societies which were the backbone of the traditional authority system.

The Basel mission’s activities during the British colonial era

After the First World War that ended in 1918, the British took over control of part of German Cameroon where Bakundu is located. With the arrival of the British, the Basel mission which had a German connection did not find it difficult to work with the colonial administration. There was therefore a symbiotic relationship between them. This British colonial administration encouraged missionary activities in her Cameroonian territory as she stated that “no formalities of any kind are required in order to open a church, chapel or school.” (Epah, 2007:126). This relationship is analysed by Rodney when he states that “The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers... missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light.” (Rodney, 1982:121).

The fight against the religion of the Bakundu was strengthened with the good relationship that the missionaries created with the administration. The missionaries backed by the administration condemned the traditional beliefs of the people while encouraging conversion to Christianity. There was a coordinated effort by most of the early Europeans (economists, politicians and missionaries) to destroy, or at least minimize, the impact of African Traditional religion on the people. (Mbuy,2012:13). The Bakundu people who were so inclined to juju societies saw the preaching of the missionaries as a deviation from their traditional beliefs which led to some resistances. These missionaries who operated in Bakundu did not understand the manner in which the people expressed their religiosity, inaccurately referred to the faith of our ancestors as paganism which had to be fought, conquered and suppressed. Since the missionaries were backed by the colonial administration, they did terrible things like the burning of the etana, destroyed their art like the carved wooden figure associated with the kori and basongo societies among others. As Garson puts it, “the Bakundu like the surrounding tribes probably had little organisation that was not closely interwoven with the juju societies.” (Garson, 1932:85). Thus, the destruction of traditional edifices was like taking away their identity which was not welcomed by some traditional adherents but they could not resist the missionaries who were backed by the colonial administration.

Basel mission involvement in education

Before the coming of the Europeans to Bakundu, the education that was practiced is what is termed “informal” while the Europeans on their part came with “formal education” with the creation of learning institutions. Education was left in the hands of voluntary agencies like missionary societies (Esseiben,1976:22) and in Bakundu, education was in a greater part in the hands of the Basel mission. This mission was the main agency that established educational institutions at varying capacities in Bakunduland. This was because they were the first missionary body to have established in the area and they were backed by the colonial administration. This mission opened their first school at their station in Bombe of which the architects were Reverends Lauffer and Scheibler. (Carr, 1922:49).

Keller writing on the history of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon states that the Basel mission began with vernacular schools and before the First World War, seventeen of these vernacular schools already existed in Bakundu. (Keller,1969:43). The popularity that these schools got at its inception gained it the name volkschulen (schools for everybody). The curriculum of these schools was health knowledge, religious knowledge, history, geography and German language. Each of the vernacular schools was placed under a missionary assisted by a catechist. In Bakundu, the Duala language was used as a medium of instruction while Mungaka was used in the grassfield region. Lokundu which is the Bakundu language was not used because when the Germans wanted to develop the language, sese Nambiri of Banga told them that lokundu was the same as Duala. Though these languages have a lot of similarities, Nambiri fears were that if the Germans understood lokundu, they might uncover all the secrets of the Bakundu people. The villages of Itoki, Mbu, Ibemi, Supe, Bombe, Banga, Kake were among those hosting the vernacular schools. These schools had nothing in their curricular on Bakundu tradition. This led to a way in degrading the Bakundu tradition and religion. The fact that these schools were in most cases under the Basel mission goes a long way to show how the motives of the schools were to discredit the Bakundu traditional culture and beliefs.

Rev. Lauffer in 1902 started a boy’s boarding school in Bombe and he was assisted by Scheibler and Gruele as teachers. The training at this school lasted for two years and the curriculum was the same as in the vernacular schools and only sport was the additional subject. The administration in order to make the students self-sufficient in food established a garden around the school for the students to cultivate. It should be noted that the school sold some of her products from this garden to the African fruit company an activity that fetched additional revenue for the school. The Bakundu children who were among the first enrolment included; from Bombe Itie Mukwelle and Itoe Nanyinga, while Masue Nдох came from Marumba, Maloba Nangia from Banga, Ngoe Nobiko from Kake while others came from neighbouring clans. (Nyassako,1986:34). These young

men came to regard themselves as more upgraded Bakundu people who had no respect for traditional institutions because they have become semi-Germans (Europeans) due to the education they received.

The Basel mission school inspector Dinkelacker published many books that were adapted to the official programme drafted in 1910. In spite of the many financial problems faced by the Basel mission to run their schools, education in Bakundu was free during the German era. By 1914, nearly every Bakundu village hosted a Basel mission school and their impact on the people and the tradition cannot be overlooked. When the British took over their section of Cameroon from the Germans, their educational policy was not very different from that of the Germans which were geared at training clerks to work for the administration, business, plantations and security service. (Ngoh, 1996:174)

As far as the Bakundu was concerned, before the arrival of the British to the area, the Basel mission which operated under the German era had done a great deal in the domain of formal education.

This thus helped the British administration to easily continue with the implementation of western education though there was the language problem as very few people understood the English language. The British felt that the Western Christian missionaries, who had been experienced pioneers in educating Africans, would be valuable partners for the establishment of British colonial formal schools on the Cameroon landscape. The British colonial administration opened Native Authority Schools but as far as Bakundu is concerned, only two of these schools were opened in Kombone and Kurume. The other thirty-four Bakundu villages were served by the Basel Mission schools.

Practical lesson in the Boys school at Bombe Mission Station



Most of the schools in Bakundu as seen were in the hands of the Basel Missionaries which were staffed and run by them but subsidised in varying degrees by the colonial government whose interest in missionary education simply was to ensure that enough Bakundu children were educated to meet the limited need for semiskilled workers in colonial bureaucracies as opined by Elijah Okon when he states that “colonial policy made it that Africans received only limited education, which would enable them only to read the Bible, take orders efficiently from the white masters and missionaries, and function, at best, as interpreters, messengers and clerks in the colonial bureaucracy.”(Okon,2014:25)

Social reorganization and cultural suppression

The activities of the Basel mission in Bakundu contributed largely to social reorganization and the suppression of the traditional religion of the people by suppressing their cultural identity in all its forms. As Bakundu children attended the schools set up by the missionaries they were taught that European presence in Bakundu was to uplift them from a state of barbarism thereby making those who attended these schools

to look low on their traditional forms of life and practices which in turn had a negative bearing on the traditional religion. This has been corroborated by this writer when he states that; “The destruction of African culture and values through the imposition of alien religions and the relentless attack on African values mounted by mission schools contributed to a mentality of ennui and dependency and to the loss of confidence in themselves, their institutions and their heritage.” (Khapoya,1998:144) Their goal was to give the Bakundu people like other Africans a new identity as they went as far as requiring them to use new Christian names. As asserted by this writer when he says;

Instead of being the word of God, the Bible became a satanic tool that enhanced the plunderage and defecation of Africa. Through Christianity and later Islam, all African ways of life were condemned to purgatory. They were completely destroyed so as to end up producing the current seed of Africans who abuse and deny their own ways of life. African cultures and ways of life were demonised and deemed uncouth while European ones were glorified, spread and superimposed on unsuspecting Africans... the venom Christianity injected into many Africans is still working so as to make them believe that abandoning, demonising and negating their ways of life is civilization. (Mhango,2018:21-22)

Opoku corroborates this when he states that;

Armed with the conviction of possessing the only truth, missionaries condemned all that was 'pagan'. They preached against all kinds of traditional practices - the pouring of libation, holding state offices, drumming and dancing, traditional ceremonies of the rites of passage, such as outdooring, girls' puberty rites and customs associated with deaths and burials. They also denied the existence of gods and witches and other supernatural powers which Africans believed in. On the whole, becoming a Christian meant, to a large extent, ceasing to be an African and using European culture as a point of reference. Thus, Christianity had a disintegrating effect on African culture. (Opoku,1985:526).

As a result of this, many Bakundu children who attended these schools joined forces with the missionaries to destroy the Bakundu religion by becoming catechists and pastors as seen from table 2 below.

Table 2: Bakundu youths who became Pastors from 1931-1950

Name	Village of origin	Mission
Pastor Dikonge	Banga	Basel
Pastor Dossah E. Sakwe	Banga	Basel
Pastor Ekweni Modika	Bombe	Basel
Pastor Lobe Ekwalle	Bombe	Basel
Pastor Mosina	Supe	Basel
Pastor Mukwelle Peter	Mbu	Basel
Pastor Ndoh	Marimba	Basel
Pastor Nganda Nakomo	Mbu	Basel
Pastor Njemo	Ibemi	Basel
Pastor Sakwe Emmanuel	Ibemi	Basel

With these youths joining forces with the missionaries, many key cultural practices like, initiation rites, ancestral ceremonies, and traditional festivals were discouraged or banned because they saw them as incompatible with Christianity. The Christian teachings presented the Bakundu culture, tradition and everything Bakundu as paganistic, uncivilized, satanic which led the Bakundu to lost confidence in their culture, adopted European values thereby creating an identity crisis. This worked negatively to the vulgarization of the Bakundu traditional religion. The juju societies who were the back bone of the traditional authority system saw their activities and powers destroyed thereby creating local administration problems and the

increase in civil and criminal cases. With the powers of the secret societies weakened, the people were encouraged to look down on them and when there were litigations, they were advised to take them to the European courts where it was the force of argument that prevailed to determine the culprit. This was in contrast with the era before the arrival of Christianity where secret societies were in charge of the judiciary where they depended more on their religion to dispense justice.

Also, the propagation of Christianity in Bakundu led to a situation of religious duality. Here many converts practiced Christianity in the open but in moments of crisis they instinctively turned to the religion of their ancestors. Hence many lived what can now be referred to as a “double-life existence.” (Mbuy, 2012:13).

Long term consequences for the Bakundu society

The activities of the Basel mission in Bakundu from 1897 has had far reaching consequences for the Bakundu traditional religion. By 1961 when the country had its independence from the colonial power, traditional religion in Bakundu had significantly declined. There was the loss of practitioners in all the Bakundu villages. The attractiveness of the schools during the colonial period led to many Bakundu youths enrolling in them which in another way was converting to Christianity because the schools were run by the Basel mission. This created a generational crisis as the old could not pass over the religion to the next generation who had embraced Christianity and looked with negativity the Bakundu traditional religion. This led to the disappearance of rituals as there were handed over to the next generation. With all these, there was the weakening of spiritual institutions who had lost all their powers due to the destruction of their artefacts by those who embraced the new religion.

Another long-term consequence of the activities of the Basel Mission’s activities on Bakundu religion was cultural dislocation. The erosion of traditional religion led to breakdown in social cohesion that characterized the pre-colonial Bakundu society. Before the coming of the Basel mission that coincided with European colonization, Bakundu practiced her traditional religion and there was social cohesion as the people knew were aware of certain issues and their consequences but the coming of Christianity that was spearheaded by the Basel mission leading to the erosion of traditional religion, confusion took over the society leading to dislocation in all spheres of Bakundu life. The traditional authority system was dislocated with its main fabric destroyed giving way to many calamities in the society. This to a great extent has led to the loss of cultural identity as their religion had been destroyed and decided to embrace foreign religion.

Conclusion

The Basel Mission in Bakundu between 1897 to 1961 played a central role in transforming religious and cultural life. While it introduced Christianity and western education, it also systematically undermined indigenous traditional religion. The destruction of traditional religion was not merely a byproduct of missionary activity but a deliberate objective rooted in ideological and theological convictions. This process resulted in profound cultural and psychological consequences for the Bakundu people. understanding this history is essential for appreciating contemporary debates on identity, culture and religion in Cameroon.

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- Lenya, Edward, 76 years old, traditional council head of Nake Bakoko and farmer, interviewed on the 10th of October 2019.
- Nakomo, Nekena, 82 years old, chief of Mbu Bakundu and retired public health technician, interviewed on the 15th of June 2020.
- Ndome, John, 85 years old, chief of Kake Bokoko and retired educationist, interviewed on the 5th of September 2019.
- Sakwe, Victor, 70 years old, chief of Kombone Bakundu and retired educationist, interviewed on the 12th of September 2019.

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Correspondence:
Dr. Timothy MUSIMA OKIA
musimatim@yahoo.com
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