

THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN AFRICA

Essay contribution to the Professor Jesse Mugambi
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A. Introduction

1. *“I am going to read the whole Bible”*

In March and April 2015, I was at my home and birthplace in Kenya. One morning, a young man, Ngumbau Kanini, came to me and said that he wanted to ask me some questions about the Bible, which he held in his hand. He said that he had found it readable, and liked it very much. He added that he had now embarked on reading the whole Bible. I felt a bit perplexed, but happily I accepted to answer his questions. Ngumbau had attended school up to secondary level.

This incident echoed the story of the Apostle Philip and the African (Ethiopian) minister of finance who was riding on a carriage as he returned from his pilgrimage in Jerusalem. The two engaged in a conversational dialogue about the reading of the Bible (Isaiah 53:7,8), which the minister held in his hand. At the end of the conversation, Philip baptised him, and they parted ways. Philip returned to

Caesarea to continue his evangelising work. The (first?) African Christian travelled back to his country “rejoicing,” and continued reading the Bible in a new light (Acts 8:26-40). After our conversation Ngumbau went back home happily, and continued reading his new Bible.

The Bible that Ngumbau Kanini held in his hand was actually my Kiikamba translation of the Greek New Testament, which the Kenya Literature Bureau published in December 2014. There were also prior Bible versions in Kiikamba, from 1956, 2002, and 2011, one of which Ngumbau and other Akamba people might have owned, or read, or heard being read.

That was the first time I heard an African saying that he or she was engaged in reading the whole Bible. I did not ask Ngumbau Kanini why he wanted now to read the whole Bible. The Bible is a large book, it is a complicated book, it is an ancient book, it is a sacred book, and the Bible is in parts a difficult book for younger and older persons to

understand. However, the Bible is also a fascinating book, an interesting book, a nourishing book, a challenging book, and a unique book. Ngumbau Kanini had now found something different from, and more appealing than, other versions of the Kiikamba Bible. I sensed that the main difference was the fact that, what he was now reading was a new and direct translation from the original Bible language(s) into his Kiikamba language.

That being the case, Ngumbau Kanini probably felt that his new Bible had more authority and authenticity, since it “spoke” Kiikamba *directly*, and not through a foreigner or a foreign translation. This factor placed that Bible at a more accessible level than other versions. In addition, there was the fact that he was a relative of mine, and I was the person who had translated this Kiikamba New Testament. That also made him feel personally attracted and attached to this particular Kiikamba Bible (as it is being called). Three days earlier, he had asked me for a copy.

2. *A South African President Appeals for African Bible Translation*

In its issue posted on January 4, 2015, a news article appeared on the front page of *The Inquisitr*, with a big headline: **“South African President Zuma To Sponsor Bible Translation.”** Below the headline there was a photograph of President Jacob Zuma, with a caption that read: “South African President Jacob Zuma has agreed to financially sponsor a Bible translation through his J. G. Zuma Foundation.”¹

The Inquisitr is a secular online news source, established in 2008, and based in Brooklyn, New York. It covers “Entertainment, News and Politics, Sports, Lifestyle, Health, Science and Technology...” Millions of people all over the world read it.

It was astonishing to see a religious report in such

¹<http://www.inquisitr.com/1727971/south-african-president-zuma-to-sponsor-bible-translation/#mOpE1BBHiD2v3fUK.99>; image:<http://cdn.inquisitr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/President-Jacob-Zuma-665x385.jpg>; <imgwidth="665"height="385"src="http://cdn.inquisitr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/President-Jacob-Zuma-665x385.jpg" data-attID="1728026" class="single-leaderwp-post-image" alt="Joint Venture With Roman Catholic Church"/>

a secular online source of news. President Zuma is not a pope or an archbishop of the Church, but a politician. He is head not of a religious institution, but of a secular state. Nevertheless, he was now reported to be sponsoring the translation not of a political manifesto, but the Bible, the religious book of Jews and Christians.

According to that article President Zuma, who speaks isiZulu, wanted a more accurate and complete translation of the Bible than the one currently in use. The Foundation reported that the latest [isiZulu translation](#) had been written in 1959, and relied on languages other than isiZulu. “As a speaker of isiZulu, President Zuma had long felt that the existing isiZulu translation of the Scriptures was inadequate, and a new version will now be directly translated from biblical languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic straight into isiZulu,” the Foundation said in a statement.

Accordingly, “The Foundation of President Jacob Zuma will partner with [the Roman Catholic Church](#)

to improve the existing translation of the Bible into isiZulu... This work will culminate in a more relevant Zulu Bible, which is considered a critical evangelisation tool for both worshippers and scholars,” the Foundation said.

“Zuma handed over a \$50,000 cheque towards the translation project, during a prayer service held at the St. Joseph Cathedral in Marianhill in Durban on Sunday, January 4, 2015.”²

3. African Scholars on “the colonial translations of the Bible”

African scholars have begun to scrutinise and address translations of the Bible into African languages. This has appeared specifically in a book, *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, edited by Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango, and published by the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, U.S.A. in 2012. The book devotes four

². Read more at <http://www.inquisitr.com/1727971/south-african-president-zuma-to-sponsor-bible-translation/#kV5EXL62sld2z61.99:admin@jacobzumafoundation.org.za>

chapters in its Part 3 to the theme of what it calls: “Colonized Bibles: Re-reading the Colonial Translated Bibles.” The four contributors offer critical analysis with concrete references to translations respectively into, the Igbo, Shona, and Tshivenda languages. Their findings readily apply to other translations of the Bible in Africa.

In his book, Gosnell L. Yorke of Afro-Caribbean descent who had spent ten years as a translation consultant with the United Bible Societies in South Africa, explores Bible translations in Africa. He outlines three historical phases and areas of translations: (i) The early translations that included the Septuagint in Alexandria, the Egyptian Coptic, and the Ethiopian Ge’ez translations. For about one thousand years, these (and later Arabic) were the only Bible translations in Africa.

(ii) Translations done in the missionary, colonial, and pre-independent era. The British and Foreign Bible Society was founded in 1804 and the American Bible Society in 1816. In the course of

subsequent centuries these, among others, later became the chief promoters of Bible translations and distributions.

(iii) The contemporary (modern) translations that began to involve African peoples as Bible scholars, translators, and consultants. Yorke mentions that this is the phase in which Eugene Nida (1914-2011), an American linguist, promoted his translation methodology which he named “functional or equivalence.” This became the dominant approach to Bible translations throughout the world. On the African scene, this was also the period that saw colonised countries gain independence, and mission churches acquire autonomy. Various countries established national and (later) ecumenical Bible Societies, linked to the global United Bible Societies. They “trained” Africans to do Bible translations, according to the set source languages or versions and principles of the Bible Societies. Yorke called for “an Afro-centric interrogation of the Bible translation process... in which both biblical

scholar/linguist and competent mother-tongue speaker, are one and the same person.”³

In his contribution, Ernest M. Ezeogu from Nigeria addressed “The politics of Bible translation in Africa: the Case of the Igbo Catholic Bible.” He explored the actual experience of setting out an African translation of the Bible from original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. However, problems punctured the grand idea. He concluded that “a new translation from the original languages had been ruled out from the onset, as this would make the project too time-consuming and too expensive.” There were unresolved issues about “the source text and explanatory notes.” However, he pointed out that, “most of the issues of the politics of translating gender ... do not arise in Igbo and many other African languages.” That applied also to what he called “the Gender of God,” and “‘Man’ as masculine, versus ‘Man’ as human.”⁴

³ . Gosnell L. Yorke, “Bible Translation in Africa: An Afrocentric Interrogation of the Task”, in Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2012, pp. 157-169.

⁴ . Ernest M. Ezeogu, “The politics of Bible Translation in Africa: the Case of the Igbo Catholic Bible”, in Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 171 ff.

Ezeogu pointed out a fundamental feature that “many African languages are in various ways closer to the Hebrew and Koine Greek than most European languages. This created a problem in the translation of the Bible, when it was done with Bible translation in European languages as the source text.” That is a fitting depiction of the Bible translations into African languages since the nineteenth century. He summed up examples of European languages impacting Bible translations into African languages, thus: “Bible translations made in Africa from European language Bibles end up importing their embedded cultural assumptions and biases into African translations...”⁵

Ezeogu considered the translation question of indigenising some biblical terms and names, to fit the receptor Igbo (African) language. He took the example of names from English and Latin sources, corresponding to Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in Igboland, Nigeria. He also mentioned

⁵. Ezeogu, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

the harmonisation problem arising from Bible translations by the many teams of translators. In some cases, there arose debates about the European language Bible versions as the basis of translation into a receptor language.

Lovemore Togarasei from Zimbabwe has reflected on, “The Shona Bible and the Politics of Bible Translation.” He began and proceeded to demonstrate that, “although the translation of the Bible into African languages aimed to avail the Bible in Africans’ mother languages, it was not a completely objective process.” He specifically made this comment with reference to the Shona Bible in which he “discusses the political and cultural factors that influenced the way the Bible was translated.” Togarasei made the common assertion that “Christianity ... in most African countries is closely associated with colonialism.” He recalled how different mission societies and individuals translated different parts of the Bible into different Shona dialects and countries, with differing orthographies.

Discussions (and disputes) arose with regard to the Shona name for God for use in the translation. The same applied to translation of feasts (“banguetings”). The long translation process produced the Shona Bible Union Version 2011, but not everyone was satisfied with it.⁶ Thus, while Togarasei did not directly call for Bible translation from original languages to African languages, he cited a particular case where this was the aim in principle. Instead, various obstacles led to a team using an English language Bible to produce the Shona Bible Union Version.

Elelwani B. Farisani from South Africa wrote on: “Ideology, History, and Translation Theories: A Critical Analysis of the Tshivenda Bible Translation of I Kings 21:1-16.” He first explored “the ideology behind biblical translations” in which he detected two basics. One was “that there are different languages in which the Bible could be written.

⁶ . Lovemore Togarasei, “The Shona Bible and the Politics of Bible Translation”, in Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 185 ff.

Secondly, there is a need for the locals to read the Bible in their own mother tongue.”

After quoting “the 1936 Tshivenda Bible Translation of I Kings 21:1-16,” Farisani offered his own translation of the passage from the Hebrew. He proceeded to make an intriguing comparative analysis between the two translations. He found only one similarity, and a large number of differences. The differences related to both language and the cultural settings. He pointed out “current challenges to Bible translation in Africa.” Among these, was the understanding of “both the language usage and the cultural thought patterns of the language into which you intend to translate.”⁷

4. The Case for Africans translating the Bible from original Biblical Languages

In 2005 I finished my draft translation of the Greek New Testament into Kiikamba, my mother tongue in Kenya. It had involved eight months of

⁷ . Elelwani B. Farisani, in Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, eds., op. cit., pp. 199 ff.

actual translation work within a period of two years after my retirement, amidst my family, travels, and other obligations. During the following several years I thoroughly revised the translation seven times and made it ready for publication. Subsequently, I contacted religious and secular publishers in Africa, America, and Europe, to enquire if they would be interested in considering the manuscript for publication. Some did not respond. Most of the ones that responded were not interested, and several said that it would not be economically viable to publish it. One publisher told me that it would not publish the Bible because in the translation, I had not used the word “Jehovah” for God.

In 2012, before giving up I contacted my friend, Professor Jesse Mugambi, the founder and director of Acton Publishers in Nairobi, Kenya. He could not publish it, but he recommended and negotiated publication with the Kenya Literature Bureau (KLB). This is an indigenous publisher established in 1947 by the British colonial rulers. It is today the

largest publishing house in Eastern Africa, producing school texts, academic works, and general books in English and African languages. The current Managing Director, Mrs. Eve A. Obara, welcomed the idea of publishing this Kiikamba translation of the Bible. Earlier the KLB had published three of my books (the first in 1954). It was also to be the first time for the Kenya Literature Bureau to publish the Bible, also making it (probably) the first indigenous publisher of the Bible in Africa in modern times. The Bureau was prepared to print and distribute my Kiikamba Bible, provided sufficient funds to cover the costs would be available, for which I would be responsible.

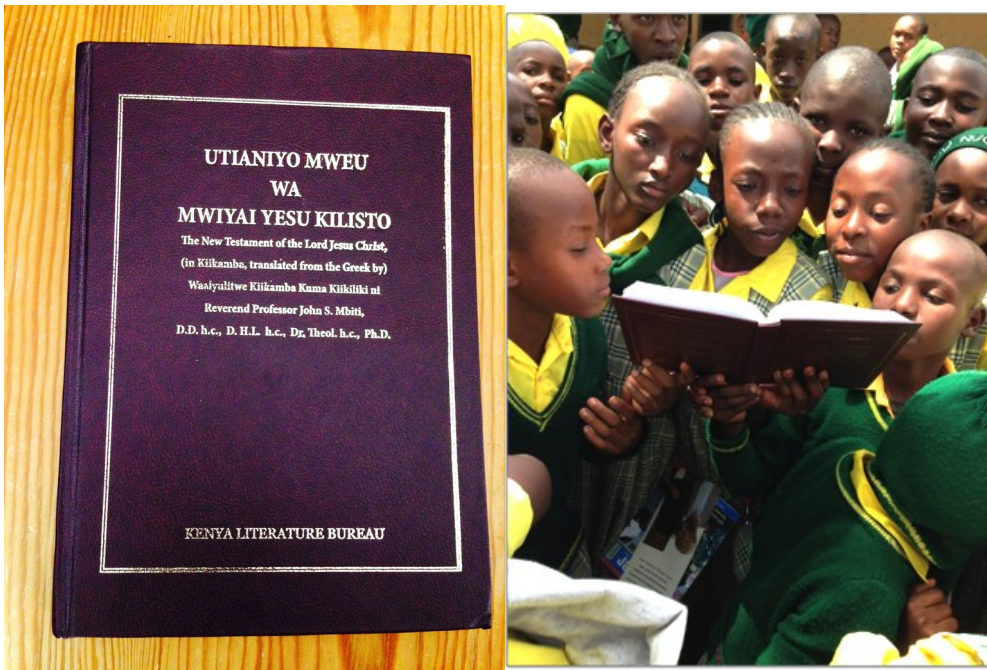
Meanwhile, another friend suggested the idea of a project to publish the Bible and distribute it to primary schools in Ukambani, the region where Kiikamba is spoken. Funds to cover the costs for the free distribution of the Bible to the 3,000 schools would of course be required. And this turned out to be a mighty difficult task!

So, with this challenging Bible project facing us, the willingness of the Kenya Literature Bureau to publish the translation, the enthusiastic support of Professor Jesse Mugambi, the prayers and encouragement of friends in three continents, I embarked in 2013 on raising the funds for the project. With a printed brochure containing coloured photographs of churches, schools, and the use of the Bible in Ukambani, I appealed to hundreds of would-be sponsors (donors) – churches, Christian organisations, Bible Societies, individuals, and secular donors, in Africa, America, Australia, Canada, and Europe. But nothing resulted from this exercise, other than being told that it was a good project, and that some persons would be praying for it.

However, in early 2014, a friend and fellow pastor, Markus Wyss, in Switzerland suggested that the two of us should make a personal appeal to Swiss friends, pastors, and select organisations. To our joy and surprise, within a few months, the project

received sufficient donations to enable the Kenya Literature Bureau to proceed with the first print run of 3,000 copies of the Kiikamba New Testament, *Utianiyo Mweu wa Mwiyai Yesu Kilisto (The New Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ)*. It was a beautiful production. The publisher launched the publication on December 19, 2014. To see this Bible in print was something of a miracle. It made history on the landscape of African Christianity.

On March 30, 2015, the publisher launched the first free distribution of the Bible to Mulango Primary School in Kitui. The school and the public received this gesture with great jubilation. As there are 3,000 primary schools in Kenya's Kiikamba-speaking communities, it would require many more thousands of free copies. Each school received approximately 30 copies with several churches also receiving copies for purposes of orientation . The Bible is not for sale to the public.



John Mbiti Kikamba Bible (NT) and its first distribution to Mulango Primary School, Kitui, Kenya, on March 30, 2015. The children are eager to see the Bible, touch, and read it.

© Photos John Mbiti

Throughout the lengthy process of publication and distribution, Professor Jesse Mugambi voluntarily provided support and guidance. He lent his full commitment to the process, with tireless encouragement, rich experience in publishing, caring for essential details, offering supervisory involvement, and creative wisdom. In many universities in Kenya he has organised lectures

regarding this publication and he had the publisher display and present copies. He highlighted it as the first Bible translated by an African scholar, directly from biblical languages. He gave lectures in this regard at several universities in Kenya, captivating audiences that appeared to be fascinated, responding strongly in support of this new approach to Bible translation.

I happily contribute this essay to the Professor Jesse Mugambi Festschrift, as an expression of my deep appreciation and gratitude for the support and encouragement that he lavished on me, for the printing, publication, and distribution of the “Mbiti Kiiikamba Bible,” as it is being referred to. My essay is also in support of promoting the idea of direct African translation of the Bible from the original languages into African languages. In his diverse academic work, Professor Jesse Mugambi has been a keen advocate of this idea. He has been very instrumental in this first publication of the Bible which followed the new and widening perception of

Bible translation in Africa. We hear “the cry” and “echo” from both lay persons and academic scholars, regarding the urgent need to change the method of and approach to Bible translation in Africa.

So, I want to share my experience as to how I went about translating the Greek New Testament into Kiikamba. My translation serves as the first practical step of moving beyond the ‘colonial’ translations, which have in manifold ways planted the Bible firmly on African soil. These translations have rendered the Bible as the bread of African Christianity.

Nevertheless, more and more laypersons and theologians are yearning for this new perception to Bible translations to become the norm. However, this has to be understood in the following perspective: this effort is intended as extension, support, and improvement of the existing and ever increasing numbers of translations. With their respective qualities and shortcomings, even if some

may differ from others, all aim to make the Christian Scriptures available in African languages. In addition, there are various Bible versions in colonial languages, which more and more Africans speak and use in our independent countries.

African Christianity is changing the religious landscape in Africa. On the scale of world history, this can be designated as **the century of African Christianity**. This blossoming Christianity is yearning for and deserves the scriptures in its own languages, translated by its scholars directly from biblical languages. In this essay, we first examine briefly the main features of this expanding religious phenomenon, followed by my experience of translating according to the new perception.

B. The Century of African Christianity

Main Features of African Christianity in the Twenty First Century

This emerging Christianity deserves (and quietly demands) Bible translations based on the original

biblical languages rendered directly into African languages. The features discussed below constitute the setting and context of African Christianity in which the Bible is the spearhead. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the Christian faith expanded to reach almost everywhere in the southern two thirds of Africa. There are several factors that have contributed to this “explosion” that rendered Africa (with Madagascar and neighbouring islands) a largely Christian continent. As a result, the religious scenery has changed and continues to change rapidly. The following factors characterise African Christianity in which the Scriptures have played and are playing a prominent role.

1. Modern African Christianity is the Fruit of Missionary Labour

Missionaries from many Mission Societies and private Church supporters in Europe, America, Canada, Australia, and later Asia, have flooded Africa with the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have done great work. Africans have largely

embraced it with open hearts and continue to pass it on smoothly to following generations and to places where it has not yet reached, except in Muslim regions, which forbid or resist it.

2. African Christianity is active in evangelism, with Christians everywhere spreading the Christian message. Informally and spontaneously, they do so among their families, communities and schoolmates, and as living witnesses of the Gospel in their daily lives and activities. Formally, they promoted it as catechists, lay preachers, pastors, priests, teachers, youth workers, Church workers, Christian business persons, and through the establishment of independent and indigenous churches.

All this goes on in the daily lives of people (if and where they are not hindered by political and religious opponents), through speaking about the Christian faith, through singing (hymns and songs), through sermons and prayers, conferences, campaigns, tracts, computers, modern media radio broadcasts, television, scriptures, videos, films,

newspapers, schools, universities, on the streets of towns and cities, in buses, and public gatherings.

3. African Christianity is strongly scriptural and biblical, having possessed the Bible, and using translations of African languages since the time of the early Church. Coptic and Ethiopian Christianity from the first centuries has survived and continues into contemporary Christianity in Africa. The tradition of Bible translations from that early Christianity has progressed into a new phase of Bible translations, with a new momentum beginning in the nineteenth century. In turn, this made rapid progress in the twentieth century, when missionaries with African helpers initiated and carried out translation work in many African languages. Bible Societies in the west and later national Bible Societies supported and supervised translations and revisions. In 2015 there were nearly 800 African languages with translations of the Bible in full, the New Testament, or portions of the Bible, all together a highly commendable achievement.

We Africans love the Bible. We read the Bible keenly or listen attentively when it is read in Church services, in schools, in Christian homes, in market places, and on city streets. We quote verses and stories from it, some Christians memorise verses, some sing songs based on it, and others act plays based on stories and parables of the Bible. African Christians value the Bible immensely. For these reasons they are now calling upon African scholars to translate it directly from biblical languages into our own languages. That is of course, a gigantic challenge!

In response to the spirit of this emerging request, but without realizing its enormity, I became the first African to translate the Greek New Testament into an African language, namely, Kiikamba my mother tongue in Kenya. Thanks to the generous gifts of Swiss and American Christians, the Kenya Literature Bureau in Nairobi was able to print and publish it in December 2014 for free distribution to

primary schools where Kiikamba is spoken. The people in Kenya greeted this translation with great enthusiasm. In 2015 the publisher, Kenya Literature Bureau, distributed the first print run to 66 Primary Schools (out of 3,000). The ultimate goal is to make these Bibles available to all the schools as funds permit.

There is discussion re the possibility of posting the Bible online for access through the internet, but at this point (January 2016) there are no concrete plans to make this dream a reality

4. Modern African Christianity is historically and demographically very young, in that more than 70% of the Christians are under the age of forty years.⁸

5. At the cultural-religious level, African Religion serves as a firm backbone in the expansion

⁸. According to a lecture paper by Philip Jenkins, "Die Schwerpunktverlagerung des Christentums in den Süden", at the Basel Mission 1815-2015 "Internationales Symposium" 24-26 September 2015, Africa will have 1,031 Million Christians by 2050 (cf. Asia 601 Mil., North America 333 Mil., South America 655 Mil., Europe 530 Mil., and Oceania 38 Mil.) <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>.

and deepening of Christianity. This is a very ancient monotheistic religion that emerged among African peoples, in the absence of founders or sacred scriptures. It is centred on the belief in God, the Almighty, and Maker of all things. Missionaries did not introduce the concept of God to Africa. Before they came, people prayed to God, and referred to God as the ultimate explanation of the mysteries of life and the universe. The God described in the Bible is the same God that Africans acknowledge in their religious heritage. That is the basis on which they accept the Christian faith so readily, and take the Bible so seriously.

African Religion has quietly said YES to biblical religion, thus providing a fertile ground in which the Christian message has established new roots. Translating the Bible into African languages inevitably uses religious vocabulary from African Religion. It also opens the way for doing theology in

African languages, in addition to or apart from European languages.

Jesus Christ is the new and unique element on the African religious scene. Africans take him to be the Son of the God, whom they already knew since ancient times. Therefore, Africans accept Jesus readily and happily. They see and experience him as the new centre of their religious life and spirituality.

6. African Christianity is strongly Christological. Christians have fallen in love with Jesus Christ and some have suffered persecution or martyrdom in his Name. I have collected over 300 christological titles on African Christianity. They indicate African attachment to Jesus Christ. The believers feel at home with Jesus Christ; he is at home in their lives. I saw one such open declaration of faith on a placard at the back of a bus in Kenya in 2013, and photographed it as I travelled behind the bus. It proclaimed:

*“WHO GOD BLESSES NO MAN CURSES. IT’S
NO SECRET, I LOVE JESUS.”*



7. African Christianity is dynamic, as displayed in a wide variety of expressions and activities. These include: founding new Church groups, strong attachment to original mission churches, building countless places of worship, singing and proclaiming (shouting) the faith in the towns and villages and market places, caring for the needs of society (like famine, health, and community conflicts); its oral theology is very creative (e.g. in indigenous hymns, prayers, and sermons by clergy and laity), sending workers to other ethnic communities, groups and countries in Africa, as well as overseas to Europe, Middle East, Asia, North America and Oceania. It has established churches and congregations in Europe, in the Americas, in the Middle East, and now in the Far East.

Therefore, the 21st century can rightly be called *The Century of African Christianity*. To serve this Christianity the Bible deserves to-be-in-its-original-languages-translated-directly-into-African languages. This would place African insights into the world of the Bible. If need be, such Bibles in turn could be translated into some other languages of the world, especially in Europe. These would be *fresh* Bible translations, the reverse of current Bible translations that have derived largely from European languages. That way, European languages would have a taste of Bible translations originating from African languages, thus rendering the Bible more ecumenically oriented and more globally understandable. It would also provide another impulse to Christian Theology. Until now, this lives only as a biblical daydream!

8. African Christianity is ecumenical and dialogical. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hundreds of Church denominations and

groups were imported from Europe and America to Africa, and local Christians spawned thousands more. There are also the ancient Coptic and Orthodox Churches in Egypt, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Altogether, is African Christianity becoming an ecclesiastical jungle or wasteland? The contemporary religious scene in Africa has three main traditions of religious allegiance: African Religion, Christianity, and Islam. In addition there are religious minorities including Judaism (ancient and numerically small), Hindus, and modern religious movements from Asia and the west.

African Religion is not as visible (or audible) as the others. It originated gradually, without founders and sacred scriptures. It is monotheistic, centred on the belief in or affirmation of God, the Almighty, the Creator, and Upholder of all things. People pray and (formerly made) make sacrifices and offerings in times of need such as sickness, famine, drought, or unusual natural phenomena. By its very nature,

African Religion is integrated into the whole of African human life.

Many African countries recognise and grant the freedom of religious belief and practice. However, some, mainly Islamic countries, have restrictions on religious practice other than Islam. Some compel conversion to Islam, some punish converts to other religions, and forbid the existence of other religious organisations and communities and the Bible. In some cases they punish “offenders” by imprisonment, by forced recanting or renouncing of faith, or by killing converts. In this continent-wide multi-religious setting, there are conflicts and terror attacks, waged in some countries along religious lines. At the same time, there are inter-religious dialogues on national and continental levels that strive to bring peace, harmony, and understanding.

Among Christian Churches there are also ecumenical endeavours to build closer mutual understandings and joint programmes like theological education, Bible translations, work

among refugees and victims of famine and political conflicts, to make peace, and to strive for reconciliation. For purposes of promoting Church ecumenical relations, there is the continental All Africa Conference of Churches and other regional and national organisations. On the global scale, African Christianity works with bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Anglican Communion, and Orthodox Churches. The Roman Catholic Church is present all over the world through its structures, organisations, and programmes, to serve and witness. Many churches are linked with other Church families locally, regionally, and globally. The churches are also linked through their use of the media and the computer, as well as personal interactions, communication, exchange visits, education, study, and conferences.

There are dialogical discussions and meetings between Christians and Muslims, addressing common human concerns such as peace,

reconciliation, poverty, human rights, human traffic, slavery, refugees, and displaced persons. The biggest and oldest interreligious organisation is the Programme For Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) founded in 1959. This organisation endeavours to foster “relations between Christians and Muslims in faithful witness, peace and peaceful coexistence.” It features national branches, and is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya.

Many universities offer courses and conduct research in all the different religions of Africa and beyond. One such is the University of Nairobi, where Professor Jesse Mugambi is Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies, with students from many religious and ecclesiastical backgrounds in Africa and further afield.

**C. Personal Experience of Translating the Bible
from the Greek (*a Biblical Language*) into
Kiikamba (*an African Language*).**

My Approach to the Translation: Basically, my translation is an attempt to make the original (Koine) Greek New Testament speak face to face with Kiiikamba, the receptor language. Ideally, this effort will result in two versions that *depictone and the same Bible (NT)*. As far as possible, the Greek New Testament becomes essentially the Kiiikamba New Testament. In turn, the Kiiikamba New Testament wears (in reverse) virtually the garment of the Greek New Testament. Such was the goal of my translation task.

1. *Word of God.* I set out to translate the Greek New Testament into Kiiikamba considering it, first and foremost, as the sacred “Word of God.” To that end I committed my energies, time, academic skills, experiences (of teaching, writing, and research into the New Testament), and my knowledge of the Kiiikamba language, my mother tongue for speaking, teaching, writing, and research. Overall, the modest and challenging aim was to make this the best possible translation of the Bible into Kiiikamba.

My approach to this scripture as the Word of God, distinguished it from any other form of translation. Since my school days and throughout my life, I have undertaken much translation and oral interpretation, in Kikamba, English, German, and some Kiswahili. The oral interpretations have included conversations, sermons, speeches, and stories. The written texts comprised articles, books, instructions, lectures, letters, novels, and stories.

This translation of the Greek New Testament I considered to be an undertaking radically different from all other translations and interpretations that I had ever done. I felt that the book was something beautiful, pure, sacred, and special. It deserved high respect, and demanded profound concentration, maximum carefulness, and complete commitment. I needed to be within the project and the project within me.

As I worked on the translation, I felt intensely bound to the book in body, mind, and spirit. It became a living part of me. Even when I was away

from the desk where I worked on it, or away from the house for several days, it travelled with me; it was in the food I ate, it was in the planes in which I flew, it was in the bed where I slept, and in the dreams that intercepted my sleep.

2. I started my translation work abruptly and without preparation or planning for it. From 1956 there existed already a Kiikamba Bible. As the years went by, the Bible Society of Kenya developed a plan to publish a new or revised edition.

Consequently, it published the New Testament in 2002, while proceeding with the translation of the Old Testament as part of the commitment to the publication of the complete and revised Bible. When I saw and began to read that revised Kiikamba New Testament, I compared it with the Greek text and felt uncomfortable, for the two diverged and did not align well with each other. Spontaneously I translated several verses (John 1:1-5) directly from the Greek into Kiikamba, just to see what they would look like.

Little did I imagine then that this was like dipping toes in the waters of a river or pool, before plunging in to swim with the whole body. My translation of these first five verses “enticed” me; I could not detach myself and move away. I tried a few more verses, then a full chapter, and another... Alas, something pulled me deeper and deeper from the surface, and further and further from the edge of the waters. (Actually I cannot swim. I had a drowning experience as a young boy, and since then, I fear swimming in a place where I cannot stand on my feet and breathe. But I don’t fear to use the swimming pool figuratively.)

And so, without planning or training, I plunged into translating the Greek New Testament into Kiiikamba. I found the work absolutely fascinating, deeply challenging, totally exhausting, but profoundly rewarding.

In course of the translation, I equipped myself with various sources of assistance, including some twenty New Testament versions in nine African and

European languages.⁹ Additional sources included dictionaries and lexicons of the Greek New Testament and of other languages, commentaries, concordances (Greek, English, and German), encyclopaedias, and various books about Jesus and the New Testament times (economic, social, cultural, and political life), and the internet.

3. Addressing the Kiikamba Orthography

The issue of the Kiikamba orthography surfaced from the very beginning of my translation undertaking. So I paid close attention to it, confronting it radically, as it is at the heart of writing Kiikamba. Beginning in the early twentieth century, writing Kiikamba has followed an orthography that was in various ways foreign. I had to refine the common missionary Kiikamba orthography, by adjusting it to the correct pronunciations and intonations of the language as we, the Akamba, speak it. That made it "smooth," "natural," and

⁹. Bärndütsch (part of Swiss German), English, French, German, Greek, Gikuyu, Kiikamba, Kiswahili, and Latin.

“indigenous,” compared to the “rough foreign accent” embedded in the missionary orthography.

This refined orthography made it easier to read Kiiikamba and understand it when read aloud or silently. In that way, the readers and hearers could feel at home in the translation, as it reproduced their (our) own native, (and not foreign) accent, and pronunciation. Consequently, this Bible translation found a natural (instead of ‘foreign’) home, among the Akamba and fitted into their use of the nuances of the language.

(a) The orthography used hitherto was originally foreign due to the fact that missionaries from America and Europe introduced writing and reading to Ukambani and most of Africa. Thanks to them. That was their greatest and most fundamental contribution to African life, besides announcing the Gospel where it was unknown, and being the first to establish schools where there were none. It is to their credit that literacy has transformed Africa more radically than anything else since the nineteenth

century. The first Kiikamba publication was the Gospel of St. Mark, published in 1850, that the German missionary, explorer, and linguist, Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810 –1881), translated into Kiikamba. He was also the one who “reduced” Kiikamba into writing.

(b) Many missionaries learnt Kiikamba very well, a major achievement on their part. However, they inevitably spoke Kiikamba with a foreign accent.

(c) It was from the perspective of their foreign accent that the missionaries wrote Kiikamba. They established schools where they taught and obliged us to write Kiikamba, according to that foreign accent. If you made a mistake at school and deviated from their way of writing, you failed their examinations, to the detriment of your future.

(d) In the twentieth century, it was the missionaries who wrote the ‘foreign’ Kiikamba publications and gave permission (endorsement) to any Akamba writers to have books published. The major Kiikamba publications were (and are) the

Bible (at first portions, then the New Testament 1920, and eventually the whole Bible 1956 ff.), and several editions of hymnbooks. They wrote and published the Kiikamba booklets for use in the mission elementary schools.

So, I had to tackle the Kiikamba orthography at two levels. One was the level of the alphabet. When Kiikamba was written phonetically, the English-American alphabet, minus six letters (c, f, j, p, q, x), was adopted. However, the missionaries also adapted two of the letters and added them to the alphabet. These are Ii and Uu, with a tilde (wave, worm, ~ ~) on top, which became Ññ and Ũũ. These “*we letters (I & You)*” outnumber the ones without waves or tildes. Early missionaries did this to assist them in pronouncing Kiikamba words.

These missionary letters, Ññ and Ũũ, were and are used in Kiikamba publications up to this twenty first century. They fill every line, every verse, every page, and every book of the Kiikamba Bibles and hymnbooks. They are overwhelming, rendering each

page aesthetically ugly. For example, in the 2011 Kiiikamba Bible, there are 41 such letters (ĩĩs and ũũs) in the first five verses of John 1, or some 420 in chapter 1, about 9,000 in the whole book, and over 200,000 in the New Testament.

We Akamba do not need such aids in pronouncing the words concerned. In fact, these waved “we letters” (~ ĩĩs and ũũs) slow down the Kiiikamba writing and reading rate. Today, the people do not use them in their private letters, notes, reports, and records. But children have continued to use them in schools. And when someone occasionally uses the two letters in private correspondence, he or she often applies them wrongly or omits them by mistake. Someone who tried to learn Kiiikamba (with this orthography) called them “the burden of learning Kiiikamba.” To me, they are redundant, ugly, and worm like. So, I discarded them in my translation.

(e) The second level of missionary orthography dealt with the spelling of words. Missionaries who wrote Kiiikamba, especially in Bible translations and

hymns (also all being translations), did so according to the way they spoke the words. They thus wrote the words according to their foreign accent, and made us learn to write Kiikamba according to that foreign accent. For example, the missionary spelling of our language is *Kĩkamba* or *Kamba*, and one person is *Mũkamba*. But the way we say these words is: *Kiikamba* and *Muukamba*. In the foreign orthography the Kiikamba word for a child is written *kana*, which should be *kaana*, according to the way we Akamba speak.

(f) Thus, the writing of Kiikamba has been severely *foreignised*. Nobody is to blame. It was the way the missionaries introduced literacy in Ukambani, for which gratitude and appreciation are due. When people read Kiikamba, they do so according to that foreign accent, but without audibly reproducing the foreign accent as such.

My translation embraced the task of *deforeignising* Kiikamba orthography. This proved to be time consuming, involving detailed reflection

and in some cases, testing exactly how people spoke (pronounced) the words concerned. My Bible (NT) and other recent publications are setting the pace for a deforeignised Kiikamba orthography. However, it will take time to reach the largest portion of Akamba people, some five million of whom live in Kenya, parts of Tanzania and Uganda, as well as overseas in Europe, America, and Canada.

More and more Akamba writers are *deforeignising* written Kiikamba in their publications, while other Akamba are doing the same in their private writing. The public is quietly moving away from the old orthography, such as in letters and emails, and the general use of the computer. However, there are millions of copies of books written in the missionary (foreign) orthography, and these will survive for decades. This new orthography will also be subject to modifications, adjusting to the changing context.

(g) Style of the written language, to complement the traditionally oral Kiikamba

The first publication in written Kiiikamba was the Gospel of St. Mark (1850) that the German missionary, Johannes Krapf, translated into Kiiikamba. Before that the Akamba did not know or use the art of writing and reading. They communicated in words, anecdotes, artistic symbols, bodily signs and symbols, music, proverbs, songs, and symbols from natural objects and phenomena. When the missionaries established schools from the beginning of the twentieth century, writing and reading won the attention and affection of the Akamba, and became a new and integral part of the indigenous culture. That process proceeded slowly in the first half of the century but accelerated thereafter. Kiiikamba has now become a literary language.

So, the style of written Kiiikamba must develop and take concrete shape, and maintain its new status. The written language must run parallel and complementarily to the traditional oral language. Foreign writers and translators of the scriptures and

hymns could not contribute much to this process. It must emanate from within, from the traditional and native users and speakers of the language. Other aspects of the Kiikamba language include: alliteration, articulation, beauty in the use of words, music, poetry, proverbial sayings, rhythm, sentence construction, songs, sounds, symbols, and word signs. In my translation work, I made use of the flexibility of the Kiikamba language, and endeavoured to include these elements of style into the translation. In that way, I kept the written language faithful (true) to the Kiikamba spoken by Akamba people.

D. Items to which I paid Running Attention in the Translation

1. Faithfulness to the original Greek text and use of the Critical Apparatus

I aimed at being faithful to the original Greek New Testament, so that it would come face to face with the Kiikamba language into which I translated it. In

a sense, there is no “pure or exact original Greek text,” for that purpose. This is due to several factors.

(a) The New Testament is not a “single book” as such, but a collection of books (chosen out of many).

(b) Different authors wrote these books. (c) The books originated from different dates in the early days of the Church.

(d) They were written in different parts of the Mediterranean region and neighbouring countries. (e) Even if we assume that they were (nearly) all written in the Koine Greek, many were soon translated into other languages, as the Church (or Christianity) spread in every direction from Jerusalem. They were (individually, and not collectively) translated into an increasing number of languages, in addition to being copied and used for (and by) ethnically, linguistically, religiously, sociologically, and geographically different Christian congregations and individuals.

The earliest fragments of the New Testament available today, are four papyri with portions from the Gospels and Revelation, dated from the second

century. Papyrus 152 (P⁵²) is generally accepted as the earliest extant record of a canonical New Testament text. It is dated around 125 AD, contains John 18:31-33; 18:37-38, and is located at Manchester, England. Papyrus 90 (P⁹⁰) contains John 18:36 -19:7 from the late 2nd century and is located in Manchester, England. Papyrus 98 (P⁹⁸) 150 AD (?) is in Cairo, Egypt, containing Revelation 1:13-2. Papyrus 104 (P¹⁰⁴) from 150 AD, contains Matthew 21:34-37; 21:43,45 and is located in Oxford, England. More fragments of manuscripts from subsequent centuries appear in the languages of Bohairic, Coptic, Ethiopic, Greek, Latin, and Syriac. They number more than 3,000; scholars have grouped or classified them into Papyri, Uncials, Minuscules, and Lectionaries.

The earliest printed manuscript of the Greek New Testament is the Textus Receptus. Desiderus Erasmus (1466-1536) from Rotterdam assembled the book from handwritten texts, and published it in 1516 in Basel, Switzerland. It became the standard

Greek New Testament and was named the Textus Receptus (the Received Text). Many Bible translators used it, including Martin Luther (1483-1546) for German, William Tyndale (1484 -1536) for English and the English King James Authorized Version (1611).

By the end of the 19th century, scholars who worked on the ever increasingly discoveries of the Greek New Testament fragments and book manuscripts had begun to indicate corrections and improvements to the Textus Receptus. These took the form of new editions and versions of the Greek text, together with the critical texts, as the Apparatus Criticus (Critical Apparatus) of the New Testament. They help us today to align the Greek text as closely as possible with the original manuscripts of the different books. They highlight the original writings, even though none of the very first handwriting is available. The earliest texts are fragments on papyrus from (about) 125 AD and the 2nd century, as indicated above. The text of the Greek New

Testament (in different versions), as we have it today has undergone a long and complex journey in geography, history, language, and theology. This is largely reflected in the body of the *Apparatus Criticus*.

Bible translations and revisions from the twentieth century use the Greek editions that have been adjusted to, or contain in footnotes, the critical apparatus. They are in some respects different from the textus receptus and constitute considerable improvements, leaning towards the original texts. Some editions and versions include as footnotes material from the critical apparatus, such as versions by Erwin Nestle, Kurt and Barbara Aland, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Bible Societies, the American Bible Societies, and the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. I based my translation on some of these and found the critical apparatus most helpful. The latest is *The Greek New Testament Fifth Edition* 2014, specifically designed for use in translation work, and which is used as I

write this paper and prepare a possible second edition of my Kiikamba Bible. In the sample texts that will be considered later, it will be seen how rich the apparatus is as a source for studying and translating the Greek New Testament.

2. Considering Moderate Akamba Literacy Rate

The adult literacy rate for Kenya in 2012 was reported to average 72.2% of the population, ranging between 87% and 8% in different parts of the country. But literacy competence would be reflected in far lower figures. My impression is that the literacy rate among the Akamba is well above the country average, but I have no official statistics to substantiate that assumption.

In any case, the Akamba like other African peoples, have access to the Bible largely through hearing it read aloud at Church services, at home, at school, in conferences, and market places where evangelists preach to mixed audiences. For that reason, I paid conscious attention to “reading” the

translation aloud and “hearing” it so read or recited. To test this concern, I used to read aloud (alone in my work room), passages and verses from the translation as I went along. This enabled me to obtain a feel for the sound of the words, and how the tongue handles them when read aloud. I also tested many passages and readings among Akamba listeners, and adjusted the translation accordingly.

3. Sentences, Verses, and Clarity

In doing my translation, I was very aware of the Akamba readers and hearers of the Bible. A good proportion of them cannot read; many of those who once could read, slowly lose their reading and writing skills, while others cannot read well at night because of feeble light, and some cannot read small script comfortably. Older persons tend to lose their hearing and seeing capacities, and many cannot afford hearing aids or reading glasses. Furthermore, in many families there are no Bibles. The majority of the population has contact with the Bible more

through hearing it read rather than reading it for themselves. So, I felt that my translation should facilitate clear hearing and understanding of the Bible, when it is read aloud in churches, schools, homes, and market places. I made the sentences and verses generally short and compact. I conveyed the content of texts as clearly as possible, so that the hearers would readily understand.

4. Addressing the cultural, physical, and educational considerations of the reading and hearing audience

I approached this concern in three ways: 1) I made the sentences and verses deliberately shorter rather than longer, rendering it easier to read aloud and easier for the listener to follow and remember. 2) I emphasised the flow of the language, again for purposes of reading aloud and listening. 3). Where possible I emphasised the rhythmic sound in words and sentences.

The Kiikamba language has an inherent rhythm when read aloud or spoken. Where possible, I constructed the sentences and verses such that the rhythm and sound and beauty of the language would be clear, for both the reader and the listener. So, I targeted my translation to both the readers and the hearers of the Bible. The numbers of those who can read and possess Bibles are limited, while the hearers or listeners are many. The readers are more or less confined by physical limitations, while the listeners can be hundreds of kilometres away and hear it through preachers, the radio, mobile telephones, television, and videos. In most cases, only one person at a time can read the Bible, but hundreds and thousands can be simultaneous listeners. More Akamba people get to know the Bible by hearing it read than by reading it. My Bible translation acknowledged this reality as much as possible.

For both reading and listening purposes, I sought to accent the Bible content by means of clear words,

phrases, and sentences, so that the Bible could effectively communicate, both visibly and audibly. It was ultimately for that reason, that I translated the original Greek language directly into Kiikamba. Thus can the reader read it in an almost “pure” and “original” form, and the hearer can hear it in an almost its “pure” form. It was my concern that nothing be lost from the Bible in the transmission between the Greek and the Kiikamba languages. Equally, nothing from the Bible should be lost between the reader and the hearer, whether in Greek or in Kiikamba, even while fully appreciating the complexity of Bible translation.

5. Gender Attention and Adjustments

The grammar of the Kiikamba language features no gender distinctions. Therefore, it was not necessary to wrestle with gender restricted expressions as would be required in Greek, English, or German. However, there are passages in the Greek New Testament which address mixed groups

by mentioning only the male gender. In such cases, I have widened the expressions to make them inclusive of both male and female. Herewith a few examples.

Matthew 5:23. Greek: ἐὰν οὖν προσφέρῃς τὸ δῶρόν σου ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον κἀκεῖ μνησθῆς ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ. English: “If therefore, you are presenting an offering at the altar, and you there remember that your **brother** has something against you, leave the altar and” The audience at the Sermon on the Mountain, included both female and male persons. It is very obvious that Jesus included everybody, to read (tell them): “... remember that your brother **or sister** has something against you...” My rendering in Kiiikamba is specifically inclusive, mentioning both brother and sister: Kwoou, ethiwa we ukaete muthinziyo waku kithembeyoni, na ukalililkana kana mwanaainya kana mwitwainya waku ena undu yuulu waku,which is clearly what Jesus meant or said.

Our Lord Jesus lived in a male dominated society, not unlike many African traditional societies. However, Jesus broke from that practice and mixed freely with women and defended their dignity. For example, he once held a theological conversation with the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well at Sychar in Samaria (John 4:1-43). He defended and protected the woman caught in a sex act when the crowd was about to stone her to death (John 8:1-11). A group of women accompanied him in his travelling ministry. Women were the first witnesses and proclaimers of his resurrection.

In some passages of his letters to the parishes (local churches), St. Paul mentions "brothers." But clearly the congregations and parishes consisted of both men, women, and children. In such cases, I have added "and sisters" in my translation. For example: I Corinthians 3:1 *Κἀγώ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην λαλῆσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ....* 'And I, **brothers**, was not able to talk (speak) to you as

spiritual, but as bodily, as to infants in Christ.’ Surely the congregation in Corinth consisted of both women, men, and children. So, the gender can rightly be adjusted here to read: “... brothers and sisters, was not ...” Here, I rendered this verse in Kiikamba accordingly: Indi nye, anaaiya na eitwaiya, ndyaatonya kuneena nenyu ta mwi andu ma kiiveva, indi ta mwi ma kiimwii.

There are other writers in the Greek New Testament that also use gender exclusive language. For example, Hebrews 13:1 calls for the maintenance of love: [Ἡφιλαδελφίαμενέτω](#) ‘Let brotherly love remain (continue).’ The wording (in English) is gender exclusive and discriminatory. A gender sensitive reading would be the following: ‘Let love continue among brothers and sisters.’

The addressees of this epistle (by an unknown writer) are obviously congregations of both men (brothers) and women (sisters) and children. Christian love which our Lord Jesus made the core of identity of his followers, is from all and towards

all those who associate with him (John 13: 35 [ἐντούτῳ γινώσκονται πάντες ὅτι ἐμοὶ μαθηταί ἐστε, ἐὰν ἀγάπην ἔχητε ἐν ἀλλήλοις](#)). ‘By means of this (mark of identification, identity) all persons will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for (in) one another.’

Accordingly I translated Hebrews 13:1 to read: *Wendano wa anaaiya na eitwaiya niwikalae*. I used the flexibility of the Kiikamba language, from the root of love“ –end-, and employed the noun “wendano.“ This fortifies the admonition (love) to mean: ‘let strong lasting mutual love among the brothers and sisters (one another) continue and remain forever (always, without boundaries of time).’ So, this Kiikamba wording, *wendano*, throws particular light on the meaning of loving one another and each other.

Wendo simply means love, which can lie dormant or flow from one person to another whether or not that other person reciprocates. It can also be applied towards non-living objects, or an activity, such as

loving butterflies, loving music or playing football. But the Kiikamba word *wendano*, mutual love, is invincibly stronger because it is love flowing both directions, from joint subjects towards joint objects. *Wendo* (love) alone is like one hand loving someone or holding an object. *Wendano* is like both hands with fingers intertwining, creating joint love, and loving two persons simultaneously from-and-towards-each-other. That is what Hebrews 13:1 is urging as normal in every direction among Christian brothers and sisters. This is firmly ingrained in the Kiikamba word, *wendano*.

6. *Removing Anti-Semitism*

In the Gospels mention is made in several places of those who criticised or opposed Jesus. For example, in John 5 Jesus healed a crippled person on the Sabbath. This provoked intimidation against him. Verse 18 says: διὰ τοῦτο οὖν μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι.... Translations in many versions render it thus: “Because of this,

therefore, the Jews sought to kill Him...” They translate the words *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* as the “Jews.” This is seen by many as an anti-semitism. And there are many similar expressions in the Gospels and in Acts.

In my translation I render John 5:18 *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* as: *(anene ma) Ayuti = (officers, chiefs) of the Jews..*

The context and the social-religious situation indicate clearly here and elsewhere that it is not collectively the Jewish people who seek to kill Jesus, but their officials (leaders), especially the religious authorities. In a number of other similar references, I use the same translation in order to suppress or avoid anti-semitism. One reason for reducing or eliminating anti-semitism from the text, is that the Akamba have no tradition or basis for nurturing anti-semitism, which is a deeply rooted “cancer” in western society and history.

The peak of western anti-semitism is clearly depicted in the European translations of Romans 11:28, *κατὰ μὲν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἐχθροὶ δι' ὑμᾶς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας.* In

rendering the word ἐχθροὶ Bible versions in European languages refer here to Jews as “enemies (of God).” The German Luther Bible refers to the Jews as “einde Gottes,” or “feindlich gesinnt;” in the *Hoffnung für Alle* (German), “sind viele Juden zu Feinden Gottes geworden;” German *Gute Nachricht* (Good News), “Sie sind Gottes Feinde geworden;” the Norwegian, “er de fiender;” King James Bible (1611 ff.), ... “they are enemies for your sakes;” *English Standard Version*, “As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake;” *American Revised Standard Version*, ... “they are enemies of God;” *Nueva Biblia Latinoamericana de Hoy*, “En cuanto al evangelio, son enemigos por causa de ustedes...” *La Bible du Semeur BDS* (International Bible Society 1999), “Si l’on se place du point de vue de l’Evangile, ils sont devenus ennemis de Dieu pour que vous en bénéficiez.”

I have found only one exception amongst the many other translations in European languages,

namely the translation into Bärndütsch (one of Swiss German ‘dialects’), by Hans and Ruth Bietenhard, *Ds Nöie Teschtamänt bärndütsch*(1984) which reads: “Si sy Gägner vo der guete Botschaft, und das chunt öich zguet“ (They are opponents (challengers) of the Good News, and that is to your benefit). My Kiiikamba translation of Rom. 11:28 reads:

“Tukisisya wula Uvoo Museyo mo nimaleanite nawo (With regard to the Gospel, they have declined/rejected it).”

European Bibles have served widely as the basis for translations into African (and other) languages. Consequently, the translation of Romans 11:28 reflects the same anti-semitism from Europe. For example, in Swahili *Biblia* 1952: “Basi kwa habari ya Injili wamekuwa adui kwa ajili yenu;” Kiswahili New Testament 1989, ”Basi Waisraeli ni maadui wa Mungu...;” Kiiikamba Bible, *Mbivilia Ûvoo Mũseo Kĩkamba kya Ìvinda yĩ* (Nairobi 2011): “Ngalĩkonĩ ya Ûvoo Mũseo, Ayuti matwĩkĩte amaitha ma Ngai...;” Gikuyu Bible, *Ibuku rĩa Ûhoro Ûria*

Mwega (Nairobi 2007), “Tondũ wa kũrega Ũhoro ũrĩa Mwega Ayahudi nĩmaagĩire ũthũ na Ngai...”

Calling the Jews “enemies of God” is a devastating and malicious accusation. This has been in European Bibles since the Luther Bible of 1545 (“Nach dem Euangelio halte ich sie für Feinde/vmb ewren wille“²⁸). Martin Luther (1483-1546) attacked the Jews furiously in his lectures, sermons, and writings. In his last sermon in Eisleben he called upon the Christians (inhabitants) there to drive out the Jews from his town, for refusing to convert to Christianity. Three days later he died, but his anti-semitism continued in European Bibles and society until today. In the hands of the Nazis, it led to commit the genocide that exterminated six million Jews, in addition to robbing them of their dignity and destroying or stealing their possessions. Europe has not outgrown racism and anti-semitism, still evident in the 21st century.

There is no linguistic, textual, exegetical, or theological basis in Romans 11:28, to refer to the

Jews as “enemies of God.” The root word ἐχθρὸς (ἐχθροὶ plural) has various meanings, including: (substance) enmity, hostility, personal enemy, or opponent, depending on context. In Romans 11:25-32, the context is St. Paul’s deep concern that not all the people of Israel have accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he believed that “they will be saved” according to the promises of God since the time of their ancestors.

Using the word ἐχθροὶ in this context indicates that according to his experience and knowledge, the Jews had generally rejected, or opposed, or resisted the Gospel. *Absolutely* in no way would St. Paul call the people of Israel (Jews) “the enemies of God.” Nowhere in the scriptures are Jews labelled “enemies of God.” Both Jesus and Paul were Jews, and Paul would never call him and himself “enemies of God.” Only western anti-semitism has labelled them so in translations of the Bible, and exported the same translations to Africa, Asia, and Oceania. I

protest against anti-semitism, against racism, and against this pollution and misuse of the scriptures!¹⁰

7. *Regional Language variations*

A number of different Kiikamba words of the same meaning are used in three counties of Ukambani: Kitui, Machakos, and Makueni, which are administrative (and not linguistic) entities. These are words that differ completely or slightly in pronunciation. That is a feature of languages all over the world. Where applicable in such cases, I have placed the regional variations in brackets. For example, to steal in Machakos and Makueni is *kuya*, while in Kitui it is *kung'eya*. However, all the counties use one and the same word, *king'ei*, for thief and *ung'ei* for theft. The road (or street) is *lelu* in Makueni and Machakos, but *taali* and *lelu* in Kitui.

Generally, people adjust readily to each other's regional accent and vocabulary, and communicate

¹⁰. See further discussion: Mbiti, John S., Challenges of Language, Culture, and Interpretation in Translating the Greek New Testament, in *Swedish Missiological Themes Svensk Missions Tidskrift*, Vol. 97, No. 2, Uppsala 2009, pp. 141-164.

without obstacles, sometimes even with a smile. Including the words in brackets also helps to expand people's vocabulary beyond an immediate region, just as people constantly interact with one another within and beyond their geographical or administrative areas.

8. Checking the Translation against other NT Versions

In addition to translating from the Greek language, I also checked and used 20 other versions in 9 African and European languages. I took into consideration the Critical Apparatus. Similarly, I used commentaries, dictionaries, and other language tools. To the first draft I devoted nearly 8 months (224 days, working at rates of 2-14 hours a day, seven days a week). This was when I not preoccupied with other obligations such as giving guest lectures, travelling, and being with family members in Switzerland and Kenya. Additional and more hours, days, weeks, and months were devoted

to the five subsequent revisions that were made, until I felt that no further refinement of the translation could be made.

9. Kiikambanisation of Names, and Transmitting Words and Concepts that are foreign to Akamba thought and language

(a) Names of persons and places in the Greek New Testament are foreign to the Kiikamba language. Their usage in the Kiikamba Bible (1920 NT, 1956 Bible, 2002 NT, 2011 Bible, and my NT 2014), and various hymnbooks, has adapted and shaped them into Kiikamba. In my translation I have used the names as they are presented in previous Kiikamba Bibles, changing the orthography slightly to conform to the Akamba pronunciation. There are no declensions of names or words in Kiikamba, except the use of adjectival suffixes.

Kiikamba is largely written phonetically. Some letters of the western alphabet are absent in Kiikamba, or are approximately substituted by

others, namely: C (ky, s), F (v), J (y), P (mb, v), Q (k), R (l), X (s), Z (nz, s).

Examples in English, Greek, and (my) Kiikamba

David, Δαυίδ, Ndeviti

Elizabeth, Ἐλισάβετ, Elisavethi

Israel, Ἰσραήλ, Isilaeli

Jerusalem, Ἱεροσόλυμα Yelusaleme (but
Yelusalemu in Kiik. Bible 2011)

Jesus Christ, Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Yesu Kilisto (but
Klisto in missionary orthography, Kiikamba
Bibles, and hymn books)

Mary, Μαρία, Μαριὰμ, Malia, Meli (both used in
Kiikamba)

Moses, Μωϋσῆς, Mwose

Zachaeus, Ζακχαῖος, Sakayo

*(b) Translating or transmitting Words and
Concepts of the New Testament that are foreign to
Akamba thought and language*

This is a difficult area in translation work. It involves the concerned languages, cultures,

sociology, histories, worldviews, religions, speakers of the languages, and contemporary impact on the concepts concerned. I approached this issue in several ways, depending on the relevant words (concepts, expressions) and contexts. One approach was to consult previous Kiikamba Bible translations (1920, 1956, 2002, 2011). Such biblical words and concepts generally have settled in Akamba reading of the Bible and conversation, to the extent that people would know them even if they do not fully understand the inherent concepts. This has been happening in the process of what I would term as Kiikambanisation. Some examples are:

ἄγγελος muulaika (from Hebrew **malak** מַלְאָךְ)
angel

βάπτισμα uvaatisyo Baptism

ἐκκλησία ikanisa Church

Another approach was to render as closely as possible a transliteration of the word in Greek, Hebrew, or English, into a Kiikamba format. Two such examples are the above words for baptism

uvaatisyo (baptisma in Greek) and angel, muulaika (malak in Hebrew).

The third approach, and one that I used extensively, was to create new words and expressions from roots of Kiikamba words. By using prefixes, infixes and suffixes, many verbs are capable of expressing related concepts from the root of the verb. Similarly, with adjectival prefixes nouns can be made to convey different concepts.

For example, one can create a list of over 20 words (terms, concepts) from the root of the Kiikamba word for love, wendo (root: –end-). Thus: kawende (very little love between persons, feeling a liking towards another person), kawendo (little love), kwendana (love one another), kwendeesya (pleasant, attractive, admirable, adorable), kwendanganga (love or like step by step, bit by bit), kwendwa (be loved, be liked), kyendetheesyo (that which makes attractive or likeable), mwendani (one who loves, likes), mwendandu (one who loves persons or human beings), mwendani (one who loves),

Mwende (the loved one, female personal name), mwendetheesya (one who makes attractive, recommender, advertiser), mwendi (one who likes, a fan of), mwendwasa (aunt on father's side), Mwendwa (the loved one, male personal name), mwendwainya (aunt on mother's side), mwendwau (uncle, aunt), wendani (feeling of love), wendano (ongoing mutual love), wende (love between persons, e.g. male and female, husband and wife), wendeesyoy (that which is lovable, pleasant), wendetheesya (making attractive, e.g. advertisement).

By using the Kiikamba language flexibly, I was able to borrow many (verbal and noun) concepts from the Greek New Testament. For example, the concept of eternal and eternity is absent in Kiikamba. However, I constructed words that stretched the imagination in that direction.

10. Testing the translation among the Akamba:

In course of revising the translation, I shared and discussed many passages, words, questions of clarity, and flow of language with a cross-section of Akamba people. I distributed and read out many selections of texts to different Akamba people – school children, students, teachers, traders, young people, elderly persons (like my own mother, Velesi Mbandi Mutuvi (1908-2010), women and men, farmers, and workers in hospitals or offices. In this way, I was able to garner people's reactions to the translation in general, and to my de-foreignised orthography.

Discussing these issues with them gave me assurance that people readily became conversant with the translation, and that it was communicating *to them* as well as communicating *with them*. I could then fine-tune the translation to their understanding, making it easy and pleasurable to read the Kiikamba New Testament and listen to it being read aloud.

Involving a goodly number of people in that way

provided valuable opportunity to cheque and adjust the translation with regard to:

- (a) Choice of words for their meaning, their sound, and effectiveness in communicating
- (b) Clarity for the reader and listener (hearer)
- (c) Content of the translation, to see if the Kiiikamba words are faithful renderings of the original Greek text
- (d) Flow of the sentences and passages, when read silently or loudly
- (e) The vocabulary, especially since I applied up-to-date language as used by the people today.

The people expressed much interest and amusement in the reading or hearing of this fresh translation. They discussed “heatedly” some of the words and their meanings in the context of the Bible! They were captivated by this new experience of sharing in the actual translation of the Bible.

E. Challenges and Potentials of Translating

Sample Texts

In this subsection, select texts are considered as examples of how I went about translating them from Greek into Kiikamba. There are linguistic challenges, textual challenges, cultural challenges, theological challenges, and anthropological challenges. At the same time, there are opportunities, and possibilities for understanding and theological engagement through African languages in dialogue with biblical languages.

1. *Translating Mark 1:1*

Consider Mark 1:1 Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ. Let us render it here in English as: ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.’ In Kiikamba: Wambiliilyo wa Uvoo Museyo wa Yesu Kilisto, Mwaana wa Mulungu. Two “*the*” definite articles are missing in the Greek, before *the* beginning (Ἀρχὴ), and before *the* Son of God (υἱοῦ θεοῦ). As the grammar of the Kiikamba language does not contain articles, the absence of these articles in the Greek text was not relevant in

my translation.

The term, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the Gospel, the Good News, Uvoo Museyo, as used here, does not occur as a formal term in Kiikamba, as there was no such concept prior to the arrival of the missionaries. But in daily life, people speak about or exchange *uvoonews*. Any news may have various attributes, associations, or ‘credentials’ of being: bad, good, false, fictitious, incorrect, joyful, heavy, light, long, neutral, new, old, provocative, sad, shocking, short, or true. During the twentieth century, Christian teaching and the use of the Bible in Ukambani fittingly formalised the term Uvoo Museyo, for the Gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον), the Good News. So, in my translation I have used this term, since it has now been formally accommodated in Christian circles all over Ukambani.

In Mark 1:1, the Kiikamba expression Uvoo Museyo (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) by itself does not immediately indicate the content of the term, Good News (Gospel). So, it is more or less “empty” or

“neutral.” As in the Greek text: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ, in English it can mean “the good news” (Gospel) **about**, or “the good news” **brought by**, or “the good news **of (belonging to)** Jesus Christ the Son of God. In Kiikamba, the expression Uvoo Museyo τὸ εὐαγγέλιον (the Good News) carries five potential (and inclusive) meanings or implications: 1.

Belonging to Jesus Christ; 2. **Brought by** Jesus Christ; 3. **Declared or announced by** Jesus Christ; 4. **Describing** Jesus Christ; and 5. **Originating from** Jesus Christ.

Thus, the Kiikamba language render τὸ εὐαγγέλιον intensely christological. That in turn means, “good, joyful, new, and true NEWS.” It was, as it were hidden, unknown, historically non-existent. Therefore, there is a sense of secrecy about it, for which reason it is now unveiled, rendering it a historical beginning, wambiliilyo. That is the launching point, the opening up, the emerging, the making public, the announcing of that which is not

only new, but good. It “begins” now with Jesus Christ. He is in effect simultaneously both the Content and Proclaimer of this Good News, *Uvoo Museyo*. Jesus Christ is **the** Good News, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον itself, and the Good News is Jesus Christ Himself. There is also a sense of urgency: since it is Good News, it should be announced immediately and widely, it should be heard without delay. It is destined to go on beyond the horizon. Good News has no boundary.

There is the inherent implication in τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, that it brings joy and happiness – joyful news, happy news, thrilling news, exciting news. Otherwise it would not win the epithet “good.” And it is good because it is the news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Kiikamba word *museyo*, with its root – *seyo*, contains much more than just *good*. It is saturated with all that is good, with “pure goodness:” admirable, assuring, attractable, attractive, beautiful, calming, cheerful, clean, comforting, consumable, edible, usable, usefulness, encouraging, good-

looking, fine-sounding, healthy, heartening, hopeful, joyful, kind, lovely, peaceful, pleasant, publishable, smoothening, soothing, supportive, tasteful, that which must be shared (by being announced), and trustworthy. Such is τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the Gospel, the Good News, which makes its advent in this verse. It is without competition and competitors, and without blemish. It is complete, unique, representing all fullness.

Here τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is qualified and quantified by the word Ἀρχὴ (beginning, wambiliilyo). In Kiikamba, wambiliilyo has two implications.

Firstly: It has no precedent. It is really **new and fresh NEWS**. It is unique news, since this is its first occurrence. It deserves full attention, not only for physical ears but for the total society which never had it in the past, in its traditions, or in its history. If it is *about* Jesus Christ, it is distinctive since there was no such news earlier on, and no such Jesus Christ. If it is *carried* by Jesus Christ, it is unique since no one else ever brought such news to the

world before, for there was no such person prior to this one.

Secondly: Wambiliilyo (Ἀρχή) points to the state of being deeply and firmly grounded. It is the primordial beginning point. It is unshakable Good News (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, Uvoo Museyo). That means that this particular news associated with Jesus Christ is firm, reliable, durable, and cannot be shaken or uprooted. All that attests to its existence as truly GOOD NEWS. Wambiliilyo points to the foundation of a building, and in this case the reference is to Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Foundation. Simultaneously and paradoxically, he is the foundation of that which he is. This can be expressed in another way: it is, the Self-Founding or Self-Originating of the Good News of, by, about, and in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

In the critical apparatus, some sources have only Jesus while others have Jesus Christ. On the basis of theological considerations, I chose “Jesus Christ.” That makes the source and substance of the Good

News (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, Uvoo Museyo), intensely and exclusively christological. The Good News (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the Good News (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον). So, Mark 1:1 is about Jesus Christ, and the whole book is about him. Some scholars consider this verse to be the title of the book. That would definitely be fitting.

Another item of differences in the critical apparatus is the reference to Jesus Christ as υἱοῦ θεοῦ (the) Son of God (Mwaana wa Mulungu). Some witnesses omit reference to “the Son of God,” and some omit the article (the). Still others speak of υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (Son of the God) and υἱοῦ τοῦ κυρίου (Son of the Lord). In my translation I opted for υἱοῦ θεοῦ. It is theologically indispensable and inevitable that Mark would introduce Jesus Christ at the correct and divine level. The other Gospels do that as well, in the infant narratives of Matthew and Luke, and in the exposition of the Logos being with God from the beginning and being God, according to John 1:1-5, 10-14.

The designation of Jesus Christ as (the) Son of God (υιοῦ θεοῦ Mwaana wa Mulungu) fits very well into Akamba religious tradition. They (like other African peoples) have since ancient times known and acknowledged God, Mulungu. They refer to God with four central attributes: *Mulungu Asa* (Parent, Father-Mother), *Mumbi* (Creator, Fashioner, Maker, Moulder, Originator, Potter), *Mwatuangi* (Cleaver, Distributor, Maker of details, Splicer), and *Mwene-Vinya-Woonthe* (the One having all power, the Almighty).

Other concepts regarding Mulungu include: One Who cares over people and creation, Comforter, Giver of Children, Giver of rain, Healer, Hearer of invocations and prayers, Immortal, Invisible, Judge, Just, Keeper, Loving, Receiver (of petitions, prayers, and sacrifices), shepherding, preserving, protecting, and spirit (not of bodily or physical form). The first four of these attributes are like the creed with which Akamba spontaneously speak of Mulungu, God.

Foreign missionaries and later, anthropologists

who came to Ukambani (Kenya) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used the word Mulungu in describing Akamba religious life (blessings, invocations, prayer, sacrifices, spirituality, and worship) as their (our) name (word) for God. However, overseas missionaries who came after the World War I (1914-1918), gradually introduced the word Ngai for God, used in the scriptures, hymns, prayers, Christian teaching, and preaching. Anthropologists and sociologists retained the word Mulungu. Eventually Christian circles more or less abandoned the word Mulungu and instead, retained the word Ngai, except among members of the older generation.

In Akamba thought, Mulungu invokes awe, adoration, attracting deep reverence (sense of worship), and is personal, since Mulungu is the Creator and Upholder (Sustainer) of all things. The word Ngai does not indicate the same depth and breadth of meaning as Mulungu. More than fifty African peoples and languages in eastern, southern,

and central Africa use the word Mulungu or the equivalent. That is a linguistic pointer to the antiquity of the concept of God in African Religion.¹¹ There are other examples of common regional words for God, all over Africa. Throughout my translation I used the word Mulungu for God. Many Akamba have welcomed this usage, and some have begun to use it in writing, prayers, and conversations.

So, when Mark 1:1 mentions that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ Mwaana wa Mulungu), Akamba automatically accept this statement at face value, without difficulty. While the word mwaana in Kiikamba is gender neutral (meaning child, or person born, or begotten, or parented by or belonging to ...), people assume that biologically Jesus was a “male (child).” In Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:31 there are references to him being born as a male child (son) of Mary and Joseph. In Akamba religious thought, God (Mulungu) is neither

¹¹. See, for example, John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, Second Edition, Acton Press, Nairobi 2012.

male nor female, and the language does not feature gender designations about him or anyone. The people hold God to be Spirit, and Creator; “He” can have a child. People think of themselves as children of Mulungu. They have no problem calling Jesus Christ “the Son of God – Mwaana wa Mulungu,” since God is the source of all being, the parent (Asa) of humans, and everything “belongs” to God.

So, in the Akamba view the description of Jesus Christ as “the Son of God – Mwaana wa Mulungu” is not impossible. In Kiikamba, the word mwaana refers to both child and adult person from or born of ‘parent(s),’ or originating from ‘parent(s).’ In fact, the people welcome it as a radically new and unique designation, which occurs nowhere in the traditional religiosity of the Akamba (or Africans for that matter). Jesus is linguistically and specifically the “only Son” (Child-Person, Mwaana) of God (Mulungu). Nobody else can be given the designation “Mwaana wa Mulungu” – “A Child, Person, or Being originating from or begotten of

God.” Basically, it is a term of relationship, and not of age or size. Mwaana has a plural form, *aana*, but this cannot be used in connection with God. There are no *aana ma Mulungu*. Likewise, *kaana* (child) cannot be singly *kaana ka Mulungu* (child of God). However, collectively, people may speak of being “the children of God” (*syaana sya Mulungu*). But singly, nobody would call himself or herself “child of God” (*kaana ka Mulungu*).

For Mark to designate Jesus as “Mwaana wa Mulungu” (υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ) means in Kiikamba that Jesus Christ is unique since nobody else can be referred to in that way. The Kiikamba designation renders him christologically outstanding and “separate” from all other beings, totally unlike other beings. It is what John’s Gospel (3:16) says about God giving Jesus to the world as “the only begotten Son” of God (ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν).

Persons in Ukambani are traditionally identified or known as: “A of Father B or Mother C, who in turn is son or daughter of K or L. The Akamba maintain

long oral genealogies, which they recite as: I am ... Son / Daughter of..., of..., of..., and so on.” There are other African peoples who also maintain oral genealogies. But none of such names in the genealogy would be designated or call herself/himself by name as XY Mwaana wa Mulungu (Son/Daughter of God). In this regard, Jesus Christ alone enjoys a special, personal designation as “**THE** Son/Child-Person (Mwaana) of Mulungu.” That is a unique, exclusive, and selective affirmation, designation, and recognition of his being divine. In Jewish tradition, Jewishness is traced or passed on through the mother, to whom a child is physically attached from the very moment of conception.

So, in Kiikamba language and cultural tradition, the designation of Jesus Christ as Mwaana wa Mulungu (υιου̃ του̃ θεου̃ Son of God) is a special, once-for-all (hephapax) christological attribute of Jesus. This is the Markan genealogy of Jesus Christ. It is the divine genealogy of Jesus, parallel and

complementary to the human genealogies that Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 record. In Akamba tradition, a person's genealogy is the insoluble identity of the person as a human being, belonging to human beings, and bound to human beings. In Akamba customs, from a very early age, a child is made conscious of her or his identity in this way: older persons ask the child the question: What is your name? *Answer:* I am A. Who are you? I am daughter =/son of B. And who was B? *Answer:* Son or daughter of C. And whose daughter or son was C?

The child learns to recite names of her or his genealogy. Among the Akamba, the genealogy runs through, though not exclusively, the male (patriarchal) line. But in that line female names are also included, referring to women who may not have had husbands, but nevertheless bore children. A child may memorise up to ten or more names of the genealogical line (I have a genealogy of 12 names, going back some centuries ago).

Traditionally, the Akamba did not write; people

learned such genealogies by heart, and recited them when necessary. Genealogies linked people together, so that clans and sub-clans evolved, as further points of identity. Persons identified themselves through genealogies, clans, and sub-clans. Narrowing the identity are “gates” (*miviya*), which link relatives with four or five genealogies. Narrower than *miviya* (“gates”) were (are) *misyi* (homesteads), which are large families (so called ‘extended families’), comprising relatives from two to three generations. Such extended families would live close to one another or within walking distance, or in other ways remained aware of one another if they lived far apart.

So, a person’s genealogy is the person’s biological, historical, and social identity. It is God that provides this human identity, and a person cannot acquire it, buy it, or even forfeit it. According to the Akamba understanding without genealogical identity, a person is not a person, does not belong, and cannot have any place in society. The person is a

non-human stranger, without a name.

This title of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is extremely important in Akamba tradition and society. The title gives him the necessary and essential credentials for his identity, “the Son **OF** God.” Therefore, he is identifiable and identified in that way by the Akamba and thence by all human beings. So, this Markan expression is the key to the christological identity of Jesus Christ to whom, about whom, of whom, and from whom is all τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the Good News, Uvoo Museyo, the Gospel. According to the Akamba worldview, this identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God labels him with the unique identification mark of his humanity **AND** divinity. The mystery of the incarnation is paradoxically hidden and revealed in this title of Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*.

With that exclusive identity, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ (Jesus Christ the Son of God, Yesu Kilisto Mwaana wa Mulungu), Mark the evangelist introduces Jesus as an adult. He begins his ministry

at once, after John the Baptist has baptised and introduced him to the public. The book of Mark repeatedly mentions the immediacy with which Jesus carries out His ministry. About forty times he uses the expression καὶ εὐθὺς (at once, and without delay), in connection with the movements and activities of Jesus and those associated with Him.

Mark portrays Jesus as dynamic, industrious, and active. Even after the resurrection, he notes that Jesus continues to be very active through His followers. He concludes his Gospel account of him, with a portrait of the same busy Jesus, according to verse 16:20 ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ, τοῦ κυρίου **συνεργοῦντος** καὶ τὸν λόγον βεβαιοῦντος διὰ τῶν ἐπακολουθούντων σημείων. ἀμήν. “And they (disciples) went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with (through) them, confirming their word with miraculous signs. Amen.”

The christology of Mark unfolds after the initial identification of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. His

(symbolic) genealogy begins with God and continues indefinitely with God. It has no ending. The Akamba can readily grasp such a portrait of Jesus Christ and integrate him into their worldview and spirituality. Today (2016) some 90% of the Akamba people identify themselves as Christians, and their number is increasing at a rate higher than the demographic growth.

2. Translating the end of John 3:16

The end of John 3:16 reads ... ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον. In Kiikamba and other Bibles the translation is “have everlasting life ... ethiwe na thayu utathela.” I found this rendering of αἰώνων here to be theologically inadequate. These Bibles render ζωὴν αἰώνων in quantitative terms of time, the length in time. However, in this context, αἰώνων has to do with the quality of life that is eternal.

So, I translated this phrase with *thayu wa tene na tene*, eternal life. This is qualitative life. It is christological. It links the believer’s life in Jesus

with the eternal God. Otherwise life can be “everlasting,” can be long with many years, but be meaningless, miserable, painful, and excruciating. What Jesus brought is life *eternal* (not everlasting as such) and life in fulness in him. Jesus did not speak merely of everlasting life, living forever. He himself did not have everlasting life on earth and died young, nor did he promise it to those who believed in him. Instead, he had eternal life, and that is what he gives: ἐγὼ ἦλθον ἵνα ζωὴν ἔχωσιν καὶ περισσὸν ἔχωσιν. ‘I have come so that they may have life, and may have it in its fullest measure/abundantly’ (John 10:10).

The term ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον is a foreign concept in Kiiikamba thought. But Akamba Christians hope for and await “everlasting life” after death, through this and other misleading “colonial” translations. However, life with eternal quality begins here and now in Jesus Christ. This Greek verse needs to be theologically and correctly translated.

The Akamba do not define or explain thayu (ζωή life) biologically, religiously, philosophically, or physically. They assign qualifications to it, according to the object that has life. For a human being, they may say she or he has a good life (e thayu museyo = friendly, healthy, good-natured), bad life (thayu muthuku = unfriendly, hurting others, bewitching others, evil), short (mukuvi), long (mwaasa). About the body of a person: he or she is alive (e thayu), has no life (ndwi na thayu, dead = nde thayu); a plant is living (muti ni mwiyu), a plant is dead/dry (muti ni mumu).

Thus, in Akamba thought, life is not in a vacuum. It is a relational, qualitative, quantitative, time related (positively or negatively) phenomenon. They believe that a person lives beyond physical death; but they do not know (or define) exactly what “lives on,” nor where, nor the duration. It is here that Christians speak of “everlasting life” (instead of “eternal life”), and hope that it will be “in heaven.” They also have been taught, that while some people

will go to heaven, unbelievers and bad people will be cast into hell and into “everlasting” punishment by fire. This is the belief that Christians firmly hold, and sing, pray, and preach about it.

3. *Translating Galatians 1:5*

Galatians 1:5 reads: ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν ‘To whom be the glory forever and ever’ (unto eternities of eternities). There is no Kiiikamba concept about “forever and ever or eternities of eternities.” Previous Kiiikamba Bibles have rendered this concept as, *tene na tene*, and that expression has settled into people’s usage. The Kiiikamba word *tene* conveys any time that has past or may happen soon or within a short while. For example, Mwalimu aendiye sukulu tene: The teacher went to school early. Vetelo aendiye Ameleka tene na ndaaisa kusyoka: Peter went to America a long time ago and has never returned. The word in the Bible and in the Lord’s Prayer is repeated, *tene na*

tene (long time and long time), to designate the English expression of for ‘ever and ever.’

However, this rendering falls short of the Greek expression, αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. So, in my translation I took the word tene, “magnified,” and pluralised it into matene, to mean ‘big stretches of time.’ Since the Greek has the genitive plural form (τῶν αἰώνων), I rendered the Kiikambaas: *matene ma* (possessive pronoun) *matene*, literally “the gigantic stretches of time of the gigantic stretches of time – the eternities of eternities,” which is exactly what the Greek is: αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. That way people can stretch their imagination without any boundary of time past, present, or future (if people may be used to a linear concept of time).

So, my translation is: Ula kwake nikwithiwe ndaiya kuvikiya matene ma matene. Aameni. To Him be the glory unto the gigantic (infinite, unending) stretches of the gigantic (infinite, unending) stretches of time. Amen. This can mean

every time direction – past, future, present and the unknown.

4. *Translating Ephesians 1:10 and anakephalaiosis*

Ephesians 1:10 reads in part: ...εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ (King James Version) “... that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven {the heavens} and which are on earth, *even* in Him.”

This verse is the basis on which St. Irenaeus (ca.125-202) formulated the theological concept of *anakephalaiosis*. That is, God’s summing up all things in Jesus Christ at the fullness (ripeness) of the times: ...ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ... Kiiikamba Bibles render this as:

The 1956 Bible version: ... (Ngai) atungianie syindu syonthe nthini wa Klisto = that God may (will) gather all things together in Christ.

2011 Bible version: ... Ngai kutungiana syindu syonthe vamwe... na Klisto ayithiwa mutongoi wasyo = God gathering all things together... and Christ to be their leader.

Mbiti translation (2014): ... (Mulungu) atungianiye syindu syoonthe nthini wa Kilisto ... = that God may gather together all things in Christ.

The Kiikamba Bible 2011 version uses the word *mutongoi* (leader) for Jesus Christ in this process of *anakephaliosis*. That is unfortunate, because the contemporary use of this term (leader) in Kenya (and elsewhere in Africa) has more bad than good connotations. The negative picture denotes those (political or business) leaders who are untrustworthy, leaders who cheat people, leaders who are engaged in corrupt activities, leaders who fight their opponents almost every time they give public speeches, some of whom are Church figures said to exploit their congregations and others said to steal money from local and overseas sources. Such accusations are not always true or correct, but

collectively they are not attractive descriptions. Of course, there are also many leaders who are dedicated to serving their communities, regions, countries and other humans regardless of religion, race, status, or origin. These are not often mentioned in the mass media. Some or all these contemporary “leaders” are seen or expected to be rich, living in big houses and driving or being driven in big expensive cars. They are seen as men and women of power – financial, political, religious, social, and “fighting.”

So, it is a grave mistake to call Jesus “mutongoi” (“leader”) in this verse. That distorts the Kiikamba theological content of *anakephaliosis*, and the christological cum eschatological impact of this verse. The *anakephaliosis*, utungianiyo mutweni kwa Kilisto, i.e., summing up together into the head(ship) of Christ, is a difficult theological and linguistic concept. It is abstract and theologically (too) elusive, to be elucidated in a single word or verse. The Akamba seem to leave it at that. In the

Akamba world, the words are translatable, but the concept is evasive.

One has to tread gently in translating this verse. It is the only place in the Bible where the word *anakephalaiosis* (ἀνακεφαλαίωω verb to sum up, summarize, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι aorist middle infinitive to gather up in one) is used of Jesus Christ christologically and eschatologically.

5. *Translating Revelation 22:21*

As evidenced by the critical apparatus, there are eight variations to the final verse of the Greek New Testament, Revelation 22:21, Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων. Ἀμήν (The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Mumo wa Mwiwai Yesu niwithiwe vamwe na oonthe. Aameni). The variations occur after “τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ of the Lord Jesus, be with... wa Mwiwai Yesu niwithiwe na...” Thus:

1. μετὰ πάντων with all (vamwe na oonthe);
2. μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων with the saints (vamwe na

atheu); 3. μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων. ἁμήν with the saints. Amen (vamwe na atheu. Aameni); 4. μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων. Ἄμήν with all of the saints, Amen (vamwe na atheu oonthe. Aameni); 5. μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ with all his saints (vamwe na atheu oonthe make); 6. μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων σου with your saints (vamwe na atheu maku); 7. μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν with you all (vamwe nenyu inywoonthe); 8. μετὰ πάντων ἡμῶν with all of us (vamwe naitu ithyoonthe).¹²

In the various translations it is not the practice (and not necessary) to include all the material from the critical apparatus, though diverse versions include footnotes with some of the variants. Faced with a number of variants, as in Revelation 22:21 (above), in my translation I could not use all of them, and had to make a choice. I took into consideration the Kiikamba language and how it could best express the variants. It is reasonable to translate all the eight variants by structuring the

¹². One critical apparatus source (046 from the tenth century) speaks of “the Lord Jesus *Christ*”. Others omit “the Lord” and speak of only the grace of Jesus.

words according to the flexibility of the language. I considered also the cultural-social setting, where the verse will be read, heard, and applied.

The Akamba set great value on blessings, and they invoke them both formally (ritually, ceremoniously) and more often informally. Therefore, this verse carries a great religio-social-cultural value for them (us). Because of intensive Akamba family and community (biological and sociological) ties, people's attitudes are geared towards the plural more than towards individualistic applications. For example, when members of a given family or friends part from one another, they mutually request greetings to be given to large numbers of other friends and families. When a visitor attends Church service, in most (all) cases, the minister (pastor, service conductor) will request the visitor to greet the congregation. The visitor greets the congregation and conveys greetings from her or his family and Church (Christians). In turn, the congregation gives her or him, greetings to take to the family or

congregation, as the case maybe.

I considered also the theological dimension of the verse, especially the expression: Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (The grace of the Lord Jesus, *Mumo wa Mwiyai Yesu Kilisto*). This is the kernel of this intensive christological blessing. In its long Christian usage, the word grace (χάρις) has acquired many meanings and various applications, including: attractiveness, benevolence, care, charisma, earthly goods bestowed by God, favour of God (divine), forgiveness, gift, giving freely, goodwill, graciousness, privilege, source of blessings and spiritual gifts. In its usage, grace carries or substitutes for the word blessing.

In Kiikamba, the word grace (χάρις) is translated *mumo*, but in its indigenous context, it is customarily used with two meanings: one as a proper personal name of individuals; two as an expression of the sense and experience of plentifulness with peace, tranquility, and contentment. Akamba people use it in this sense to speak about a good rain season with

plentiful crops and harvest.

Christian teaching in Ukambani, since the end of the 19th century, has spread and extended the use of the word *mumo* in the sense of *grace* (as listed above), This is largely applied in the context of giving the blessing (in Church or other worshipping contexts) and at meals. Of the Akamba population, approximately 90% are Christian (in 2016). Talking in Kiikamba about “the Grace of our Lord Jesus” alone as such, is an unclear concept and difficult to grasp concretely. But by connecting it with the word blessing it makes sense and enlivenes people’s understanding and appreciation. Grace and blessing become twins.

So, my translation of Revelation 22:21 places the emphasis on *grace* being christological and combined with the final blessing in the Bible. I used the critical text Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων. Ἀμήν: The grace of the Lord Jesus bewith all. Amen. Mumo wa Mwiyai Yesu niwithiwe vamwe na oonthe. Aameni. This effectively and

unequivocally invokes the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ upon *all the peoples of the world*. The other variants contain an element of selectiveness and exclusiveness, which is not a common notion within the Akamba cultural-social context and worldview. Inclusiveness is a better theological application.

As I could not use all the above variants, I considered the theological meaning of the variants in the critical apparatus, their historical place in the history of the New Testament, the (possible) original and different addressees of the book (Revelation), the cultural setting of Akamba readers and hearers of the verse which is customarily more inclusive than individualistic.

In my translation I selected and used: Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων. Ἀμήν. Mumo wa Mwiyai Yesu niwithiwe na oonthe. Aameni. (May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen). I considered the theological meaning of the variant readings in the critical apparatus, their historical appearance, the (possible) original addressees of

Revelation, and the cultural setting of Akamba readers and hearers of this verse. Traditionally Akamba society is widely inclusive, as demonstrated when giving greetings and sharing news.

I included the Amen as a theologically suitable word of blessing, even though it is a completely new (foreign) word for the Kikamba language. It is also found in some of the texts of the critical apparatus. Customarily and traditionally, the people terminate conversations, rituals, ceremonies, discussions, and departure from one another, with “Yii” (Yes, Accepted, Agreed), Niwo (it is true), Nuseyo (it is fine, good, acceptable between or among us). These words are peace-directed, assuring peace and togetherness, and invoking good sentiments towards one another. So, the Amen in the Akamba context fits very well and has acquired a powerful connotation, also being linguistically absorbed into Kikamba as if it were an original word. Akamba use it happily and solemnly at the end of the prayers and blessings, some hymns, invocations, and doxologies,

or as agreement with a point in a preacher's sermon. It is a most commonly used word among Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

However, most (if not all) of the Akamba people who use Amen do not know its origin (Hebrew אָמֵן, and Tanakh (Old Testament), its meaning ("So be it; truly") or usage in the Bible. In the Gospels Jesus uses the word Amen (ἀμήν) frequently (sometimes in duplicate). In such texts, I have translated it "Niwo ki" ("It is really the truth, it is absolutely true, truly"). Elsewhere in the New Testament, especially at the end of a sentence, verse, or book, I have left the word in its original form ἀμήν. In Revelation 3:14, Jesus Christ is named Amen. In my translation I have left it in that form, because it is a christological name of Jesus Christ.

The Akamba value blessings enormously, as they stand for that which is affirmative, caring, good, happy, inclusive, supportive of life, and valuable. Blessings are positive expressions of tying (binding) people in affection, love, and peace. They are the

social and spiritual fabric of society. It is persons of eminence, 'senior or higher' standing, or the person's status in the family or community (age, social and biological relationship, religious esteem, professional position, or administrative office) who confer, convey, give, and pronounce blessings to other (junior) persons, informally and formally (ceremoniously), privately and publicly.

For example, aging parents may formally and ceremoniously give blessings to their relatives and descendants, at one point before they die. The giver of blessings may spit on the hands and rub the spittle on the person (arms, cheeks, face, hands, or head) receiving the blessing – suspending and superseding any hygienic considerations. Or the giver may take a sip of water, beer, or milk, and mixing it with the spittle, spray it out from the mouth onto the recipients (their heads, arms, hands,) as a way of bestowing blessings.

People assume and believe that ultimately it is God who provides the benefits of blessings, who

actualizes what the blessing is intended to accomplish. Humans have no control over the fulfilment, content, intention, or realization of blessings. They leave that to God. For that reason, they may mention God in uttering the blessings, and may look skyward while lifting the persons (e.g. babies) or objects towards the sky (heavens), while invoking the blessing. Blessings are a form of prayer, appeal, gently pleading for the goodness of God.

Asking for, giving, and receiving blessings are an integral part of Akamba life. People request and pronounce blessings over almost everything in their lives: animals, aspirations, babies, bereavement, birth, business, cars, child birth, children, competitions, documents, elections, examinations, farewell, fields, fortune, funerals, furniture, good-luck, goods, happiness, harmony (in family and community), harvests, houses, life-partner, longevity, lost animal/object, love, marriages, matches, medicines, new acquisitions, on departing

to return home or go on a journey, on hunting expeditions, possessions, pregnancy, procreation, professions, protection, schooling, sickness, success, raids, rain, travelling, treatment, utensils, weddings, winning, war, water, and work. So, the blessings in the Bible or Christian life have a profound meaning for the people. They are part of the way of life, originating from Akamba customs and now integrated into Christian (and secular) life in all its branches.

F: Photographs

We are living in the world of rigorous visual communication that includes: advertisements, CDs, DVDs, cinema, computers, drawings, films, illustrations, mobiles phones, music, photographs, pictures, slogans, television, and videos. I felt strongly that the New Testament Word of God in Kiiikamba should make use of these visual aids. Many help to communicate the content of what might otherwise be difficult to visualise.

I visited Israel (several times), Greece, Jordan, and Rome in view of the translation work, to give me a closer feel and understanding of the context of the Bible as a whole, and the New Testament in particular. In the translation, I included 28 photographs that I have taken of places mentioned in the New Testament or connected with its message. The photographs include, for example, Bethlehem, Corinth, Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Rome. On account of costs, the publisher reproduce them only in black and white.

G. Revisions

After completing the first (draft) translation, I waited a whole year, and then made five revisions to the manuscript, till I felt that: (a) I could not make the translation any better; (b) it was (is) stylistically beautiful; and (c) it was worthy of the designation ‘Word of God.’ It became ready for publication. Even later, during the printing process, I continued to revise portions and further refine the manuscript.

The next path proved to be strewn with barriers, boulders, bumps, pebbles, and thorns, until miraculously friends – thanks to them – came to the rescue.

H. Publication and Distribution

Search for Publication: It was demanding, yet a real joy, to refine this translation. But it became difficult to identify a publisher. I approached twenty publishers in Kenya, Europe, and the United States. They all rejected my request or inquiry, giving various or no reasons, the main considerations of which were commercial, i.e., the costs involved.

Just as I was about to give up, a friend in Kenya enquired about the writing I was doing. I told him and other diners about my translation of the Greek New Testament into Kiiikamba. Spontaneously the friend said that the translation should be published and given to children in the primary schools of Ukambani, where people speak Kiiikamba. As I reflected seriously on this idea, I mentioned my search for a publisher of the

translation to another friend, Professor Jesse N. Mugambi at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. He took up this quest for me and successfully negotiated with the Kenya Literature Bureau to publish and distribute the book.

Financial contributions: I was delighted. Finally, now a window was opening. This became a project and I set out to raise money to cover the publication and distribution costs. Family and friends in Switzerland and the United States of America made financial contributions. A few months later the collected funds covered the costs of the first print run. So, the Kenya Literature Bureau could publish it in December 2014, and distribute it free of charge to some Ukambani primary schools in 2015.

So, I feel very grateful to Professor Jesse Mugambi for his “midwifing” of this first Bible translation from a biblical language (Greek), directly into an African language (Kiikamba), by an African scholar, issued by the first modern African publisher of the Bible. I have written this essay for his Festschrift as an expression of

my deep gratitude, and enduring appreciation of his multi-faceted academic productivity in teaching, writing, publishing, and presenting lectures in Africa, America, Asia, and Europe. May the Lord abundantly bless you, Jesse, and your family. Amen.

I. Challenge, Blessing, and Joy

I feel very happy and satisfied with this translation of the Greek New Testament. I undertook the translation on my own initiative, without being asked or sponsored by anyone. I felt that Akamba (and African) readers, listeners, and users of the scriptures deserve a high quality translation of the Bible. African Christianity of the twenty first century deserves a Bible that is genuinely sourced from biblical languages into African languages.

So, I determined to produce the first such translation of the New Testament in Africa. It fully engaged (*squeezed out?*) my resources: academic, physical, and spiritual. I invested into it all my creative faculties: energy, experience, knowledge,

resources, scholarship, and time, plus support and encouragement from my wide family and friends.

Even though I had in the past undertaken translations of various kinds in several languages, the exercise of translating the Greek New Testament presented a unique challenge. It was very hard work, but I enjoyed doing it, and would repeat it if it were necessary! Yes, a blessed task it was, about which I had never dreamt, and for which I had no professional training. Altogether, I experienced it as a privilege to translate the Holy Scriptures. It showered upon me fresh blessings that have enriched my life.

As I followed the Person of Jesus Christ step by step, word for word, chapter by chapter, book by book, from Matthew to Revelation, geographically from Bethlehem and Nazareth via Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, to Jerusalem, and historically from birth to death to resurrection and ascension, a fresh image of Jesus Christ emerged and formed in me. I developed immense admiration and adoration for

Jesus, I felt cemented to Him with endearment and bonds of love and affection that are too deep to express in words.

This comprehensive spiritual deluge and the joyful opportunity of translating the Greek New Testament into Kiikamba, makes me feel humbled. This became a truly living book to me. It portrayed afresh the living person of Jesus Christ, and drew me close to Him as my Lord and Friend. I reaped great joy and satisfaction from this translation exercise. I am glad that other people are now reading and hearing this fruit not only of my labours, but the labours of thousands of other people, who contributed time, material resources, and wisdom to make it a reality in book form. I cannot mention them all by name. I want to thank them for their interest, encouragement, support, numerous contributions, and participation in the process of translating, publishing, and distributing this Bible-New Testament.

But all praise be unto and remain with the Lord God, who inspired and enabled me to complete this

work in Kiikamba: UTIANIYO MWEU WA
MWIYAI YESU KILISTO – *The New Testament of
the Lord Jesus Christ*, Kenya Literature Bureau,
Nairobi, Kenya 2014. Amen.

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