

New Testament Dedications

What we are learning in Cameroon

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Prayer of dedication by church leaders for the New Testament in Kenyang (Photo: Zac)

1. Introduction

The word “dedication” can be understood in different ways, depending on the context in which it is used. Here we are talking about the context of Bible translation. The dedication is the stage of the translation program during which, through a Christian ceremony, the use of the newly produced material (printed document, audio recording, etc.) is officially inaugurated.

It is a consecration, a joyful celebration, a radiant crowning of many years of hard work. Such work often requires significant sacrifices and takes a lot of resources. It is also work that, over time, will likely have caused the actors to climb countless mountains and experience much frustration and stress. The main actors alone know what it is really all about. As for the “partygoers” who arrive on the day of the dedication, they remain mostly on the periphery.

The dedication ceremony is therefore a high-profile event in a translation programme. It brings with it expectations and hopes to be fulfilled. This is quite normal. However, if you look at the event in various contexts and for various reasons, it often has its failures and errors: several other interests

take precedence over the product being dedicated. This can be highly detrimental to the promotion of the product, to its hand-over to the community and consequently, in the long term, to the effective interaction of the members of the community with the Scriptures.

This paper comes from careful observation of trends over 15 years (from 2005 to 2020) of the organisation of New Testament dedication ceremonies by CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy). It is true that I had the privilege of leading the organizing committee of the dedication of the new CABTAL headquarters in Yaoundé in 2007. There are some similarities, but here we limit ourselves to the specific context of New Testament dedications. I am sure that these observations are not a Cameroonian particularity, nor are they specific to the translation programmes in which CABTAL is involved. The list of languages and their dedication ceremonies is as follows: Kom in Fundong in 2005, Mundani in Wabane in 2006, Ngiemboon in Batcham in 2007, Nomaande in Tchekos in 2010, Denya in Keshan in 2010, Kenyang in Manfe in 2010, Bakossi in Tombel in 2012, Oku in Oku in 2013, Yemba in Dschang in 2017, Yambetta in Kon Yambetta in 2017, Nugunu in Ombessa in 2017, Ngomba in Bamendjida in 2018, Ngombale in Babadjou in 2019, Tunen in Ndikinimeki in 2020 and Pinyin in Yaoundé in 2020. As the ceremonies unfolded, my role often varied: as a simple observer, as a leader of a delegation (sometimes of pastors and contact persons from urban churches and sometimes of the media), and finally as a Scripture Engagement consultant. In the following section, we will consider some observations and dangers before making recommendations.

2. Observations, threats and dangers

The observations noted here are not necessarily what happened at the dedications in the communities I listed. But we want to learn about the dangers and threats so we can guard against them. We will consider them in three groups.

The first observation **is the tendency for dedication ceremonies to be held hostage**. The ceremonies in themselves have no choice. It is the actors who lead them in the wrong direction. There are sometimes an incredible number of speeches. Elites and other respectable personalities sometimes have ulterior motives. This is the case with politicians of all parties. As soon as an opportunity is given to them, they think they are at a political rally and take advantage. This attitude is not only found among politicians. It can also be observed among certain church leaders who are not free from denominational bias. For them, we will speak of doctrinal position-taking. As a result, ceremonies are often cluttered with things that are not strictly speaking related to the New Testament dedication. For example, there is little room given to the reading of the Holy Scriptures during the dedication. It should also be noted that the work with the language communities to build local leadership often encounters other kinds of challenges at the time of the New Testament dedication. For example, there can be extreme appropriation of the programme by the community. This can be serious if the appropriation is done by inexperienced community leaders, or promoters of traditional culture. This can lead to disorientation.

The first fact observed is the tendency for dedication ceremonies to be held hostage

The second observation is **disorganisation, often leading to a kind of disorientation**. It manifests itself in various ways. Let us give some examples. When the Church, which is expected to play the leading roles in a dedication ceremony, is pushed to the side or simply alienated from the ceremony, it is a great disorientation. It may happen in some cases that the selected readers are not sufficiently literate. On at least one occasion, we have seen readers reading not from the dedicated New

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Testament, but from a piece of paper. It must be said that this piece of paper, even if it is an extract from the printed New Testament, is inappropriate here. I have already had the experience of correcting such an error in the middle of a ceremony. In the same vein, we have sometimes heard “unbiblical” preaching. This means that the preacher does not focus his message on the Word of God. Sometimes also, invited journalists can be overzealous in handing their microphone to

anyone in the ceremony to do an interview. This is dangerous for the translation of the Bible. Then there is a tendency for too much traditionalist pressure in the ceremonies. We are cultural actors and should express our faith properly through or from our cultures. But unfortunately, there are some over-zealous promoters of traditional customs. We can thus find ourselves in certain dedications with inadmissible syncretic intrusions. This is another serious disorientation. This can reinforce the traditionalists present at the ceremony in their practices. Imagine that they find in our ceremonies, for example, their music and dances as well as the various other symbols and ceremonial arts of their cultures and traditions, unredeemed! It is a terrible spiritual confusion. Finally, the disorganisation and disorientation may simply be due to poor ceremony protocol.

Third, there are **uncertainties that arise in some ceremonies**. They may accompany the participants home after the ceremony. Some of these arise from poor protocol mentioned above, poor communication, various intrusions, etc. As in other types of ceremonies, it is unfortunate that photographers, for example, crowd the stage to the point where the general public is unaware of what is going on. Also, the Master of Ceremonies or the promoter may be completely unfamiliar with the translation programme. There is therefore a risk of miscommunication, for example on sales promotion. Other uncertainties relate to the mismanagement of stock and sales income. Thus, at the end of some New Testament dedication ceremonies, it may happen that the great thirst and expectation of many people are not satisfied. Indeed, the mere possession of a copy of the New Testament cannot quench this thirst. It is a kind of illusion that can turn the holder against their newly purchased book. Beyond the container, we must go into the content. Uncertainty becomes greater for the non-literate speaker who discovers indecipherable characters when opening his or her copy.

Uncertainties are also revealed through the abundant stocks of unsold New Testaments. At this point the community and the Bible agency begin to ask: “How are we going to address this?” The problem lies mainly in the current way of seeing things, maintained mainly by the translators and some financial supporters. They view the dedication of the New Testament as marking the end, the crowning of the Bible translation programme. The result is that funding is cut and there nothing for literacy and Scripture Engagement activities. As a result, large stocks of unsold New Testaments clutter storerooms and are piled up in corridors.



Dedication of the NT in Kenyang: an octogenarian holds his 2 copies tightly (Photo: Zac)

3. Solutions and recommendations

We will talk about a three-phase process: before the dedication, the dedication itself, and after the dedication.

3.1. Before the dedication

Prior to the dedication, there are a number of things that can be done inside and outside of the community that contribute to an effective dedication. This is an answer to the question of when to start preparing for the New Testament dedication.

It would be a mistake to suggest that one should think of the New Testament dedication only when one sees the light at the end of the tunnel in the translation. The plan seems to be to maintain the sense of surprise. But this surprise can be quite unpleasant in some cases. Thus, preparations for the dedication of the New Testament should begin at the initial stage of the programme. They should be considered and mentioned during vision-sharing and mobilization of the community. Speakers should not only know where they are starting from, but also where they are going to. This is very important in raising awareness and thus in the appropriation of the translation programme by the population. Often, people need to see the end in order to be more motivated. However, when raising awareness, we must explain to them that the road ahead will be short or long, depending on their commitment.

3.1.1. Give people a taste of the translated Scriptures

In many translation programs, the translated texts remain the property of a few people for a long time. They are sequestered, privatized in almost untouchable computers. We need to change this by entering into dialogue with the other actors in the programmes. We need to initiate Scripture Engagement early on. This contributes significantly to the preparation and familiarization of people with the Scriptures during the translation process. For example, portions of translated and verified texts should be continually made available to speakers. Portions, sections, chapters, or entire books should be circulated early enough in the community before the dedication of the entire New Testament. The SE community outreach workers are responsible for this work: getting approved texts off the computers and into the churches and the community at large. Also, drafts that need to be tested are of interest to SE. The testing sessions help the translation teams to check the quality of the language. But from SE's point of view, they are SE sessions, and also a taste given to speakers of the language to prepare them for the final package. The testing sessions should be put to good use.

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3.1.2. An organising committee

The organising committee for the dedication is set up by the Interdenominational Committee (IDC). CABTAL's approach, which is shared worldwide, is to have Bible translation programmes run locally by the churches present in the language area concerned. These churches form a legal association called the Interdenominational Committee. It is important to have an IDC that manages the translation programme and therefore also conducts the New Testament dedication ceremony. The organising committee must be like the IDC. That is, it must include and reflect the full ecclesiastical diversity of the community. It should be more colourful than the IDC as a functional structure. At this stage, if there are still churches on the fringe of the translation programme for whatever reason, this is the last opportunity to involve them. The organising committee should be extended to include the language committee, elites and partners. The latter, with their expertise, should have a consultative voice, as we hope they will in the course of the translation programme.

Under the supervision of the IDC, the organising committee plans the dedication in its various aspects. It ensures that the community is aware of and involved in the event. Communication is done both internally and externally to the community. This includes formal and informal invitations to any person or organisation involved. The committee is also responsible for seeking permission from the relevant authorities for public events. It organises and monitors advance sales of the New Testament. It proposes a detailed programme for the dedication ceremony, etc. This committee also ensures the selection and preparation of literate mother-tongue readers. It is always good to have a mix of ages, men and women. A preacher should also be chosen, a native speaker of the language, literate and therefore able to read directly from the dedicated New Testament during their sermon.

3.1.3. *The site and logistics*

It is always advisable to choose a place that is easily accessible to all. It should be easily identifiable to attract even the curious who may not have known about it beforehand. As much as possible, the site should also be doctrinally neutral. A church site would be highly suitable for this Christian ceremony. It all depends on the work done in advance by the IDC. Otherwise, a church setting may be a limiting factor for some speakers and even members of other denominations who may not have been able to break away from inter-denominational struggles. Also, a non-ecclesiastical setting gives the church the opportunity to reach out to the general population. Thus, a school, the festival square, the municipal stadium, the market, a community hall, etc. would be ideal settings. In any case, the church

Pray for the Lord's protection over the site

should not confine itself to a small setting to hold such a ceremony. The ceremony should be as open and inclusive as possible. Before the day of the dedication, the organizing committee should work on the site to pray and develop the plan for the layout. It would be careless and naive to go out on the day of the dedication with the New Testaments and bring them to a site that has not been "prepared". Pray for the Lord's protection over the site.

The logistics for a New Testament dedication can vary depending on the site and the size of the event. For a small site with few people invited, you may not want to go to great lengths. However, if you are going to hold the ceremony in a school courtyard, a market or a municipal stadium, you will need to have suitable equipment. This includes tents and chairs, a stage if possible, a mobile lectern, umbrellas, tarpaulins, tables, a reliable source of electrical power, drinking water and a good sound system. Copies of the ceremony programme should be printed in advance and made available to those responsible for ceremony protocol. The preparation committee should also plan the procession. This phase is highly spiritual, but it must be expressed in a culturally acceptable manner from a theological point of view. We will come back to this.

3.1.4. *Activities and visits in advance*

The Bible agency should continue to provide help to the community by assisting in the planning of the event. When the date is proposed by the community, if conditions permit, the Bible agency should send at least one member of staff to the field to work with the leaders on the details. This means thinking about the list of speakers, the entrance of the New Testament, the symbols that will be used, the bearers, etc. This also means that the route to the lectern where the Translation Consultant will be waiting must be thought about in advance.

As a prelude to the dedication, CABTAL has accompanied communities in recent years with cultural activities under an ethnoarts strategy, Gospel and culture workshops, awareness rallies, etc. But already in 2006, the Director of Language Services (DLS) of CABTAL challenged a coordinator during the preparation of the dedication of the New Testament: "The question we are asking you is to know what efforts the organizing committee is making to ensure that many members of all local denominations will take part in the dedication ceremony."

The visit from the member of the Bible agency must also help to define and agree on the type of ceremony. This is essential in order to establish the objectives and to make a good choice of each

element. The programme of the dedication ceremony must be worked out together, and the number and type of speakers, the duration, etc. must be agreed upon. It should be remembered that the New Testament dedication ceremony is indeed a Christian ceremony. This seems self-evident. But it needs to be understood by all involved. So, when people go, they must be aware that they are entering the presence of God.

Finally, it is important to ensure that subscriptions for the purchase of the New Testament are started well in advance.

3.1.5. *The first contacts with the New Testament*

The above-mentioned rallies can be done the day before the event, with boxes of copies of the New Testament still packed. This is the current practice. But at the level of CABTAL, there is more in the way of these first contacts with the New Testament. Let us give two examples.

CABTAL is privileged to have a New Testament Typesetting and Editing Centre. For some years now, when the translators finish the technical work, two copies of the New Testament are produced. It is the New Testament - the translator's copy. A ceremony is held to present the translator's copy to the target community. A prayer of dedication is made for the further process towards printing. Several communities in Central and West Africa have experienced such events at CABTAL. Apart from this contact, when they are informed, Cameroonian communities now tend to go to the port of Douala to receive the final copy of their New Testament, back from the printing overseas. This exposes, if it were still necessary, the great thirst of these communities for the Word of God.

3.1.6. *The type of ceremony and its content*

We have already spoken a little about the ceremony. We need to insist on the necessity of the centrality of the Word of God. This Christian ceremony has the right to integrate the cultural and artistic aspects of the people, without becoming desacralized. To avoid this, a study must be made by the preparation committee, to avoid introducing a foreign fire into a highly spiritual ceremony dedicated to God and his Word. Demons or competing deities at work in the invisible world should not be allowed to take advantage of possible ignorance on our part or inattention in the blur of uncontrolled actions. One can find so-called neutral cultural practices that can be inserted into the cycle of Christian redemption (Manyim 2017)¹. To recognise this in the artistic expressions, the local church must take time before the dedication to study and sift them in the light of the Scriptures and illuminated by evangelical theology. This applies especially to the ceremonial stage of the solemn entry of the New Testament. We shall return to this. But it should be noted that, although the ceremony is Christian, it need not be confined to the ordinary liturgy of a denomination. Nor does this open the

¹ Manyim, M. Z. (2017). *Évangile et culture, jalons de réconciliation*. ADG Editions, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

door to a certain ecumenism. The ceremony is public, open and promotional. It is first of all open because it includes different Christian denominations, as well as non-Christians whom the Church wants to attract to the Christian faith. That is why the general public, in fact the whole community, is invited to attend. Finally, the ceremony is promotional because the Church wants to place the fruit of many years of work in the hands and hearts of every speaker. All the speeches and interventions must contribute to this. It is about:

- Presenting the fruit of a long and hard work.
- Giving the Word of God its centrality in the ceremony.
- Promoting and recommending the authoritative product.
- Giving the Church its responsibility with this new tool.
- Challenging the entire community to make the message of the Scriptures their own.
- Distributing and selling the product.

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What about the duration? It is advisable to allow an average of four hours for the whole ceremony. This includes the beginning with the playing of the national anthem, for example, and ending with the final prayer. All stakeholders and the organizing committee should agree on a commitment to good time management. In one correspondence, a DLS from CABTAL wrote to a coordinator exactly one month before the dedication day: “We understand that each speaker will have five minutes. And the master of ceremonies must absolutely respect the time.”² In any case, it is important to give significant time to the essential elements of the ceremony. On paper, one of the best dedication programmes I have seen was for the Mundani NT. It was 4 hours long, on June 17, 2006. It ran from 9:30am to 1:30pm. It was to start with the choir procession at 9:00 am and stop at 10:30 am, after 12 speeches closed by the word of the Sub-Prefect. This was in theory. However, the rigour of the programme was imposed by the very difficult access to the site. Wabane is located in the open country and can be reached on foot by a very steep and slippery slope. It takes ordinary people hours to get there.

3.2. The dedication ceremony itself

We will touch on a few of the things that are essential.

3.2.1. Preliminaries

It is here that one must call upon all one's know-how and teamwork skills. Everything has been thought out in advance, and now it is time to get down to business, without stress and without a false note. Everyone involved must play their part and play it well, taking care not to step on each other's toes. At the same time, we need to be alert in order to remedy any shortcomings or to make adjustments.

² CABTAL (2006). NT dedication program. DLS.

It is important to remember that the focus of the day is on the Scriptures in the mother tongue. It is necessary to stage the event and put it in place with the appropriate protocol.

3.2.2. *The speeches*

Speakers cannot be improvised. Likewise, pre-selected speakers should avoid improvising their interventions. The organising committee must ensure that this is the case before they are introduced. This includes the highest authorities (or their representatives) of the main stakeholders in the translation programme. A clear protocol order must be established according to the rules of the art. The content and duration of the interventions must also be meticulous. They must know how much time they have for their remarks. A winning strategy is to give them their exact time minus one minute for example. This information should have been given to them during the preparations. It is good to know that if you are inviting an administrative authority for example, you will probably be asked to provide background information for their speech in advance. Again, an effort should be made to avoid subjecting the audience to a plethora of long, boring and out-of-context speeches.

3.2.3. *The solemn entry*

At this point, one can feel the tension rising in the ceremony. It is a tension mixed with joy, anxiety, great expectation, thirst, curiosity, etc. All this is justifiable and normal. The procession with the New

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Testament should recall the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11). The colouring of this entry is cultural and should reflect the honours culturally given to the highest authority. Thus, the copy of the New Testament will have to be packaged and transported as would be done for a great treasure in the culture. There is no question here of doing the same as one would have seen elsewhere. Some use a bag, a chair, others a basket, a calabash, a prefabricated house, etc. Then there is a need for local

people to carry it. The symbolism of all these elements used, including the costumes, music and dances, must be deciphered. How do we decipher them? In Ndikinimeki, the New Testament in the Tunen language, was well wrapped and carried by a child who was sitting on a traditional chair, carried by local people on their shoulders. This symbolised innocence and purity.



Dedication of the NT in Tunen: little girl carrying the NT who will herself be carried (Photo: Zac)

We are reminded of the triumphal entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a colt, which no one had ever ridden on before. Other communities put the New Testament in a bag carried by strong men. This symbolizes conquest, successful hunting, etc. The whole procession is accompanied by orderly dancing and shouts of joy. It is recommended that the IDC and the translation team (or their designated representatives) be the ones to accompany the copy of the New Testament to the translation consultant.



Dedication of the NT in Bum: procession by traditional chiefs (Photo: CABTAL)



Dedication of the NT in Yambetta: procession (Photo: Zac)



Dedication of the NT in Ngiemboom (Photo: CABTAL)

3.2.4. The statement of the Bible translation consultant

There are several types of advisors or consultants in Bible translation ministry. It is the translation consultant who is the person required to certify the new translation. It would be ideal if this consultant has worked on the checking of the translation of the same New Testament. In addition, he or she must be accredited. To this end, Ginny Bradley, a translation consultant, says: “Of course, the veracity of the consultant's statement depends on the person’s credentials, so it may be helpful to specify that this person is a fully qualified consultant.”

The details given in the statement of conformity of the New Testament by the translation consultant may vary according to the circumstances. But to stick to the basics, this statement contains two important aspects namely:

- **Quality:** the work was done according to internationally recognized and recommended standards
- **Authenticity:** the new translation is indeed the Word of God and is as trustworthy as any other translation.

Translation consultant Ginny Bradley³ has done several certifications in Cameroon (Kenyang, Denya, Bakossi, Noni among others). Here is an example of the statement made on December 22, 2011, at the Noni New Testament dedication:

"As the senior translation consultant responsible for checking the translation of the Noni New Testament, I can confirm today that this translation has been carried out with all possible care and expertise.

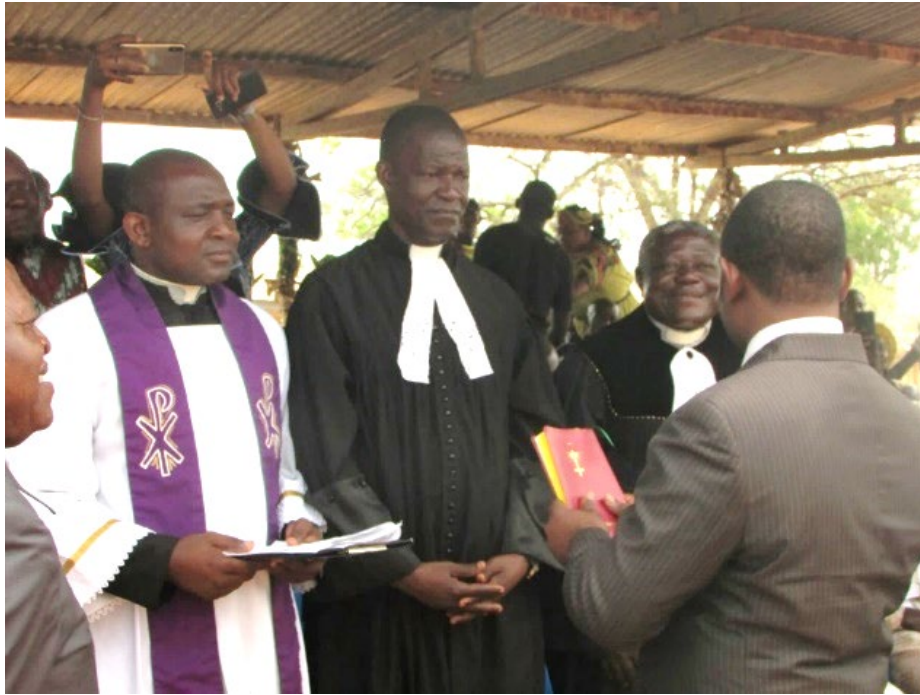
The translators responsible for the work were trained in Translation Principles, including how to maintain the accuracy of the meaning of the original text. A check was made with speakers of the language to ensure that, while following the natural style of the language, the meaning was accurate. Church leaders were consulted throughout the project to approve the choices of the key terms used in the translation.

After carefully examining each translated passage to verify that the meaning of the translation is the true representation of the original text, I declare today, by the grace of God and to His glory, that this translation is the Word of God in the Noni language.

In practice, the translation consultant does not hold up the New Testament to present it. Instead, they hold it in their hand, making sure that the audience knows that this is the document they are talking about.

After their certifying statement, the translation consultant hands over the copy of the New Testament to the sponsoring Bible translation organization (ACATBA, ACOTBA-SUBO, ATALTRAB, BTL, CABTAL, NBTT, SIL, Wycliffe, etc.). The highest public authority of this organization is the person indicated to receive the copy of the New Testament from the hands of the translation consultant. That would be the Director General. He takes it and gives it to the church leaders.

³ Ginny Bradley, translation consultant for the NT in Noni. Karl Grebe had checked much of the text. He was standing next to Ginny when she made the statement on 22 December 2011.



Dedication of the NT in Tunen: General Director of CABTAL presenting the NT to the church leaders (Photo: Zac)

3.2.5. Prayer of dedication

The church leaders pray together over the copy of the New Testament. Just at the end of the prayer, several more copies of the New Testament can be distributed to them for the procession towards the general public. In this way, each church leader can hold a copy of the New Testament as they walk around the square. This procession with several copies of the New Testament has a special symbolism: the Word is now available and belongs to all denominations and churches in the language community. This demonstrates the unity of the church before the audience and allows each participant in the ceremony to identify with his pastor holding the New Testament. In principle, it is therefore recommended that church leaders hold up the New Testament for presentation to the congregation.

3.2.6. Bible reading and preaching

At this point, the stewards should ensure that everyone has stopped moving around. The readers will each read directly from a printed copy of the New Testament, which they will emphasise. The number of readers may vary. It may be more than just the readings for the sermon.

Likewise, the local preacher will speak to his people in their language using and reading directly from a copy of the dedicated New Testament. The preaching here must not only value the Word of God, but also clearly hold the community accountable for its responsibility to receive and obey that Word.

The preaching here must not only value the Word of God, but also clearly put the community in front of its responsibility, i.e. its choice to receive and obey this Word

3.2.7. *Let's go back to the simplified process*

- Solemn entry in a cultural and evangelical procession.
- Presentation of the New Testament to the translation consultant.
- Statement of authenticity by the Bible translation consultant.
- Presentation of the New Testament to the director of the Bible agency.
- Transmission of the New Testament to the leaders of the churches.
- Prayer of dedication of the New Testament by the church leaders.
- Presentation of the New Testament by the church leaders to the community and its representatives.
- Bible readings.
- Preaching in the mother tongue.
- Sales.

3.2.8. *Direct sales*

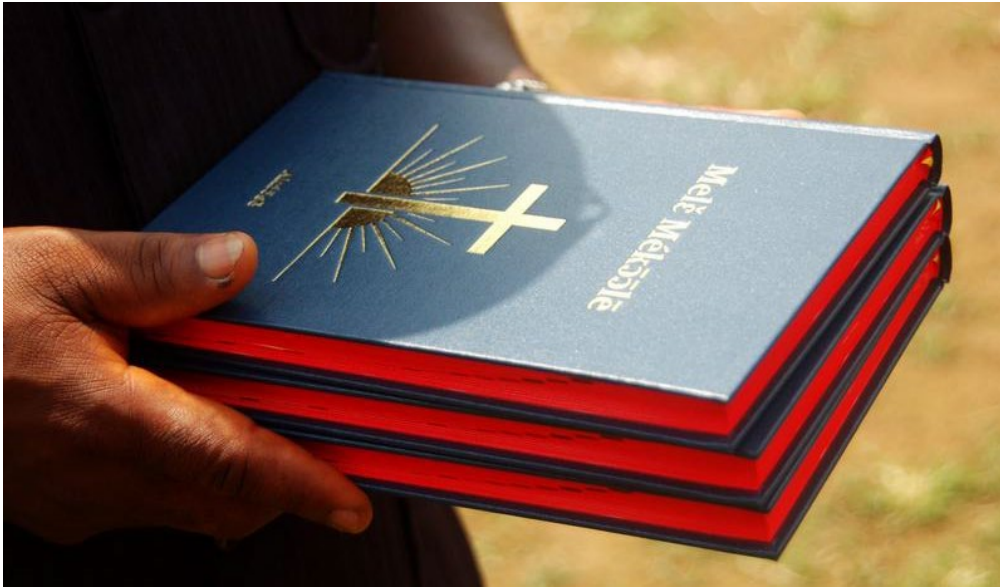
Promotional sales in the form of public bidding seems to be popular with some IDCs. It allows the programme leaders to raise some additional funds over the normal price of the New Testament. The bidding strategy with the highest bidder works in some cases. But in other cases, it is too often unsuccessful. This is sometimes due to the clumsiness of the person running the process. It can also pose an ethical problem. What good is it spiritually to have bought the “first New Testament” at the dedication? Let us imagine for a moment that by a combination of circumstances or unintentionally, the highest bidder was a declared and known anti-Christ in the community. What an image and what an impact in the community!

**Itinerants or other sellers
should be prepared to go
to the buyers**

The ordinary sales themselves must be well organized. The price of the copy of the New Testament should be clearly indicated, and the reasons why it is not being distributed but sold. At the same time, clearly identifiable sales points should be presented at the site of the ceremony. Practical arrangements should be made for easy access to the sales

tables by anyone who wishes to do so. Itinerant salespeople should be prepared to go to the buyers. It is understood that each of those who manage a stock will have prepared sufficient change and keep good accounts of their sales.

In distribution, normally those who have subscribed and paid for their New Testament in advance should be served before general sales. A clear list of recipients should be made available to distributors. It is common in such situations to not know who would have been given a copy or not. So having a pen to check off names saves accounting problems in the end.



Dedication of the NT in Bakossi: purchased copies of the NT (Photo: Zac)

3.3. After the dedication

After the euphoria of the dedication ceremony is over, the work is not over. The community needs more than ever to interact with the Scriptures to experience transformation. Just as efforts will have been made since the time of the community mobilization, they need to be renewed at this stage to accompany each person's interaction with the Scriptures and enable them to find life. Therefore, the work of the translators is not finished, it is only beginning. The work of church leaders begins, with a new ferment, the true one. Therefore, a programme of activities should be developed in the churches. If the Word of God in the community does not produce transformation, it is not to blame. It is those who are called to share it who will be considered guilty.

Attention should also be given to the proper management of the stocks and sales income. In order to continue to sell the stocks of New Testaments, mini-dedication ceremonies can be continued. A dynamic team and a mechanism for promotion and sales must be put in place. Church leaders should set an example in the use of the New Testament in their churches and other gatherings.

Often after the dedication, funding for translation activities stops. This is because the objectives of the partners are not always those of the local church. This poses a serious missiological problem. CABTAL has understood this. It has put in place a strategy to seek local funding to manage its multiple strategies and Scripture engagement activities. This is an example to follow if we really want to see our communities transformed.

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4. Conclusion

Our reflection is intended to contribute to helping people enter into dialogue with the Word of God, as Wilt (2009, 145) suggests.⁴ The dedication of the NT is too momentous an occasion not to be taken seriously or to be left in untrained hands. It is a turning point in the translation programme. It must not be badly handled. For some involved in Bible translation, the stage of the dedication of the New Testament marks the culmination of the programme. But we believe that this step, while important, is not the end. It is rather the beginning. It is one of the key moments from which we can see the impact of years of work. Let us also note that the dedication of the New Testament in a language has an importance that goes beyond the borders of the country itself. It is an important event for the whole Bible translation family around the world. For it is, with all the symbolism that it carries, the official entry of Emmanuel into the community. Hill and Hill (2008, p. 54) state from their experience that: “When there are biblical texts translated into our language, God is translated into our world. He enters into a relationship with who we are at our core”⁵.

For some of those involved in Bible translation, the stage of the dedication of the New Testament marks the culmination of the programme. But we believe that this step, while important, is not the end. It is rather the beginning.

Let us contribute in a more significant way to quench the great thirst for the Word of God in our communities and the hope of individual and community transformation that it brings.

Questions for reflection

1. Propose an argument to support the absolute necessity of a New Testament dedication ceremony. Why couldn't the NT be launched in the simplest way possible?
2. How important is the combination of cultural aspects in the celebration during the dedication? What are the limits to be imposed on this combination and on what basis should they be determined?
3. Why do we insist on having a local language speaker to preach the sermon during the dedication?
4. New Testament dedication ceremonies are too often exposed to the risk of political and doctrinal position-taking. What are the implications of this and how can this trap be avoided?

⁴ Wilt, T. (2009). « Traduire la Bible en Afrique centrale : quelques questions récurrentes ». In *Lecture culturelle de la Bible en Afrique centrale* (p.127-148), André Kabasele Mukeng, Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole et Dieudonné P. Aroga Bessong (éds.). Éditions CLÉ, Yaoundé.

⁵ Hill, H. and Hill, M. (2008). *Translating the Bible into Acts. A manual for the proper use of the Bible in every language and culture*. Piquant Editions Ltd.

This article was translated from the original in French, which is available to download from <https://www.scripture-engagement.org>

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