

**CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM WITHIN CHURCH  
MEMBERSHIP  
A CASE STUDY OF THE CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF  
BUNIA IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

By  
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*The opinions expressed in this dissertation do not necessarily reflect the views of the South*

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that all sources used or quoted have been properly acknowledged, unless otherwise indicated. This work has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Signed: Enosh Anguandia Adia Edre

Date: April 15, 2015

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, the late Reverend Samuel ADIA EDRE and Mrs. Lois KABILE ADEMA, whose love for God and for his people set me in the way of Christ and modelled my love for the development of true Christian faith in those who believe in Jesus.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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Third, Dr. Keith FERDINANDO was more than just my supervisor; he not only guided the process, but also encouraged me during dark moments of discouragement until the time I started seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

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Enosh ANGUANDIA Adia Edre

April 15, 2015

## **ABSTRACT**

This study into “Christian nominalism in church membership: A case study of the church in the town of Bunia in the Democratic Republic of Congo” is an attempt to describe one of the major problems in the growth of the Christian population in the Bunia churches in particular and the African church in general.

The purpose of this study was to create awareness among church leaders of the challenges of nominal Christian faith in their respective church memberships, to examine the correlation between their awareness or lack of awareness of the problem of nominalism in their churches and the alleged nominal faith of their church members, and to suggest practical steps for pastors in Bunia to effectively address the challenges of Christian nominalism in order to bring transformation in the life and ministry of their respective local churches.

The following are tentative conclusions drawn from the findings of the research into the understanding of Christian nominalism in church membership in Bunia churches:

- (1) Regarding Christian nominalism in Bunia church memberships, the majority of church leaders and members acknowledge the presence in their church memberships of people who appear to be or are regarded by others as true Christians but are not. The testimonies of former nominal church members imply that some church members and even church leaders have gone through the rite of water baptism and are “actively” involved in the church, but without genuine repentance and authentic faith in Jesus.

- (2) Christian nominalism is understood both as a condition of those who are not Christians at all and as a condition of those who are Christians but who have not grown spiritually. The study shows that the Bunia churches understand nominal Christians more as church members not growing spiritually than those who are not Christians at all.
- (3) The pastoral leadership may be to blame for, among other things, not preaching the biblical gospel clearly, not doing appropriate evangelism, not following up those who convert to Christ and not being role models in their lifestyle.

The research findings of the understanding of Christian nominalism in Bunia church memberships have the following implications for the church and for the field of practical theology.

- (1) Much needs to be done for Bunia churches to enable them to start effectively confronting Christian nominalism and its challenges. Churches should ensure that evangelism is done not only outside the church but inside it as well. Doing biblical evangelism is one mark of a healthy local church.
- (2) Pastors need to exercise serious pastoral oversight of the flock to avoid filling the church with unconverted members. They will do this by feeding God's people, being godly role models for them and watching over them.
- (3) This study of Christian nominalism can also offer an opportunity for further research on, among others, the impact of a denomination's doctrines on members' understanding of what it is to be a Christian, the issue of "quick methods" in winning people to Christ, the relationship between the size of a local church membership and Christian nominalism and the influence of secularism and religious pluralism on the development of Christian nominalism.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background of the study**

#### ***1.1.1 The reality of the growth of the Christian population in Africa***

A study into Christian nominalism in church membership may come as a surprise when one considers the tremendous growth of the Christian population on the continent. Africa is said to be the new centre of world Christianity as the Christian population grows faster on this continent than on any other part of the planet earth. From a continent that in 1900 had only 9.1 % of its total population as Christians, Christianity in Africa now boasts of having 48.8 % of the continental population (Mandryk 2010:33; see also Bediako 2000:3; O'Donovan 2000:1; Johnstone 2001:2, 19-21; Jenkins 2002:3).

Indeed, the facts are that Christians form the majority of the populations in many African countries. Christianity is now said to be the religion of nearly half of Africa's population, with the Christian population growing from 7.5 million in 1990 to 504 million in 2010, respectively 9.1 % and 48.8 % of Africa's total population (Mandryk 2010:33). Moreover, Africa is now said to have the largest population of evangelicals<sup>1</sup> of the world's continents, having spectacularly grown from 1.6 million (1.5%) in 1990 to 182 million (17.7%) in 2010. The

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelicals, used here in the broadest sense, are those who are committed to the historic doctrines of the Christian faith, believe in salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, emphasising

Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), in which are situated the Bunia churches in the research study, is one of the African countries with the largest percentage of Christians in the population (Tiénou 2001:156). The reader is directed to more documented studies on the African Christian growth such as Barrett (1982), Hildebrandt (1996), Walls (1996), Winter (1999), Walls (2001), Jenkins (2002), Sanneh (2003), Bediako (2004), Jenkins (2004), Kalu (2005), Sanneh (2005) and Turaki (2007).

### ***1.1.2 Obvious concerns***

Against this background of tremendous growth, the present study draws attention to an emerging phenomenon that will significantly challenge the explosive growth of the Christian population, namely the presence of people in local church memberships who are “Christians” in name only. Initial informal observations are that Christian nominalism seems not to be a major preoccupation of the pastoral leadership in many churches. Yet it is becoming a major challenge in many African countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Mandryk has pointed out that “large numbers have no clear grasp of repentance and faith in Christ nor of salvation by grace not works” (2010:271). He has suggested four major causes of Christian nominalism. First, he says, there is an inadequate preaching of the gospel in many church denominations. Second, Mandryk points out that church leaders and members are satisfied with a superficial response to the gospel and lip-service to God. Third, he says, pastors and church leaders fail to follow up those touched by the preaching. Fourth, there is a notable lack of biblical knowledge in most local churches. These observations by Mandryk appear to corroborate the present study’s assumptions of church leaders’ lack of awareness of the problem of Christian nominalism, or, at best, their ignorance of the challenges of nominal Christianity within church membership.



### **1.1.3 The challenge of Christian nominalism**

In light of the above, this study attempts to analyse the phenomenon of Christian nominalism in Bunia churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and whether the pastoral leadership is aware of it or not. The research seeks to analyse churches' general responses to the problem by listening to church leaders and members in selected churches in the town of Bunia as a sample.

The assumption leading up to this study is that the growth of the Christian population in the churches researched carries with it an obvious concern for the presence of Christian nominalism within church membership, a concern noted elsewhere by Adeyemo (2009:85), Stott (2007:21), Tiénou (2001:156), Uzodinma (2001:26), O'Donovan (2000:218-219), Grebe & Fom (1997:29) and Van der Walt (1994:109). The motivation for this study is that the phenomenon has received no substantial attention in the scholarship on African Christianity, in contrast with the attention given to the numerical growth of Christianity on the continent. Greater interest in the numerical growth and multiplication of churches may have distracted researchers from studies into the quality of the Christian faith in Africa. For example, though Johnstone & Mandryk (2001:19) mention Cameroon, DR Congo (2001:200-201), Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda among the countries in Africa where nominalism is a great challenge, the study of nominal Christianity is seldom researched and documented in these countries. It can be said that the study of nominal Christianity in Africa is still in its infancy. In western Christianity, however, Gibbs (2000:20) has addressed the phenomenon, referring to it as "nominal Christianity", or "nominality"<sup>2</sup> in the church. Cunningham (1991:54) provides the following definition of a nominal Christian that is, to some extent, a working definition for the present study:

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow from Gibbs (2000, chaps 1-3) the term « nominal Christianity » that I use throughout the present study to mean the situation or state of nominalism. I have chosen to use "Christian nominalism" to differentiate nominalism from its use outside the church context, namely in philosophy or physics.

Normally the nominal Christian is one who admits believing in God; believing in the historic person of Jesus, who died and rose again as God's Christ; and who has some awareness that it is important to recognize God in life. Such people usually pray, occasionally read the Bible, may or may not attend worship or give financially to the church. What they do not do is admit a personal relationship with Jesus that has transformed their lives, seek God's will in prayer and Scripture for every day's activities, faithfully minister to the needs of others through their church, or live all of life under the active, personal lordship of Christ. Those who do these things are known as disciples, or committed Christians. The others are nominal Christians.

In line with this definition, as far as Bunia churches in the DR Congo are concerned, the present study ventures to make a preliminary contribution to addressing the phenomenon of Christian nominalism by understanding the perceptions of church leaders and members regarding the presence of nominal Christians in their church memberships. My ministry experience, of which six years were spent as a teacher in a Bible school, eight in the pastoral oversight of a local church, and since 2005 as lecturer in a theological seminary in Bunia, has confirmed the existence of a nominal faith in church membership in the DR Congo in general and in Bunia churches in particular.

One assumption of this study is that many Bunia churches pay little attention to the challenge of nominal faith because they are satisfied with numerical growth to the detriment of growth in spiritual maturity and vitality. Local churches seem to endeavour more to attract larger number of adherents than to require evidence of genuine repentance from sin and of true faith in Christ and to nurture members in growing deeper in their spiritual maturity. It seems that the most important thing for church members is to regularly attend church services. Little attention, if any, is paid to the depth of believers' relationships with God, nor to their daily lifestyles as followers of Christ. Moreover, it appears that in some churches some pastors fail to model a Christian lifestyle to their church members.

Unless these challenges are effectively and urgently addressed, the foundations of the future church in Africa are being, in the words of Uzodinma (2006:48),

“compromised and eroded”. It means that laying solid foundations for the church of the next generation will require that due attention is given to the problem of Christian nominalism, especially in church memberships.

#### ***1.1.4 The presence of nominal Christians in Bunia churches***

The following two observations are preliminary testimonies to the presence of Christian nominalism in the churches researched. In April 2009 Shalom University of Bunia organised a workshop for pastors and church leaders in the town of Bunia. Speakers were a team from Calvary Ministries (CAPRO) based in Nigeria. The key verses of the workshop were from 1 Corinthians 1:22-24,

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

About 95 leaders from seven church denominations within the Église du Christ au Congo (ECC or Church of Christ in the Congo) and five churches from the Regroupement des Églises de Réveil au Congo (RERC or “Regrouping of Revival churches in the Congo) attended the workshop<sup>3</sup>.

Participants acknowledged the presence of people within the membership of their respective church denominations who showed no evidence of genuine faith in Christ, even though they had been baptised and, for some of them, were regular partakers of the Lord’s Table. To the question why so many of their church members were not true disciples of Jesus Christ, participants of three working groups came up with the following overall answers: 56% of the 95 participants said that many preachers had no living word to deliver to the

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<sup>3</sup> The following ECC church denominations attended the workshop from April 7 to 9, 2009 : Communauté Évangélique au Centre de l’Afrique (CECA 20), Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte (CEP 45), Communauté Emmanuel (CE 39), Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l’Afrique (CBCA 3), Communauté Nations du Christ en Afrique (CNCA 21), Communauté Évangélique du Christ au Cœur de l’Afrique (CECCA 16), Communauté Évangélique de Pentecôte en Afrique Centrale (CEPAC 8). The five RERC churches present at the workshop were Reach Unto the Nations (RUN), Louange, Eglise de Victoire en Jésus-Christ (EVJC), Christ Bon Berger (CBB), Eglise Corps de Christ (CC).

congregation, by which they meant that there was a lack of Bible-based preaching. They said that many sermons in their Sunday worship services were not deep exploration of the scriptures, but rather texts taken out of their contexts or just interpreted allegorically. While 29% cited the influence of African traditional beliefs and practices on believers in times of crises, 15% said that many church members joined the fellowship of believers just for emotional or cultural reasons or for special events such as weddings, baptisms or funerals.

In another experience in the same year, a team of pastors of which I was a member conducted workshops on spiritual growth some 300 kilometres north east of Bunia town. The workshops were organised in three “Sections”<sup>4</sup> of CECA 20, namely Kumbuku, Adja and Ariwara. Senior pastors and church elders from 36 local churches attended. Overall, there were some 275 participants including women and youth ministry leaders, of which 62% claimed they were working hard to help believers grow in spiritual maturity, but very few were actually showing signs of such maturity. Instead, they lamented, large numbers of church members didn’t seem to grow at all. Many believers lived in sexual immorality, even among pastors and church elders; others resorted to African traditional practices in times of crises such as sickness, death, calamity, loss, etc.

These pastors acknowledged that despite much preaching and teaching, very few church members were showing signs of spiritual growth. The issue here seems to be the poor content of their preaching and teaching. After the workshop, half of these leaders admitted that the spiritual growth of their church members was not really a top priority of their pastoral ministry. Instead, issues such as church committees, church finances, fundraising for church building, among other things, were taking precedence over the spiritual nurture of believers. Many of these pastors said the reason for little time for the pastoral

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<sup>4</sup> According to the CECA 20 Church Constitution (2008: art 17c), a Section (the former mission station) is an administrative entity regrouping three or more local churches. In the case of Sections above, Adja is a regrouping of seventeen local churches, Kumbuku twelve and Ariwara seven.

ministry was that they worked in their gardens to make a living in order to survive because their salaries often referred to as “soap”, were derisory. To supplement this meagre salary, some said they had a full time job outside the church, and therefore had little time left to nurture their congregations. Baptism classes, understood in most of these churches to be disciple-making, were being left to untrained lay leaders, they conceded. After completing the six-month course, candidates submitted to oral examinations and those who succeeded were baptised. For most church leaders, after baptism neophytes were expected to regularly attend church services “in order to grow”. Little attention seemed to be given to help them grow spiritually apart from Sunday worship services.

## **1.2 Overview of Bunia churches**

### ***1.2.1 Geographical location of Bunia***

The town of Bunia is situated in the north-eastern DR Congo and is the headquarters of Ituri district in the Province Orientale<sup>5</sup>. Bunia covers an area of 57.6 km<sup>2</sup> (22.24 square miles). Bunia is located north of the equator at 1° 34" latitude north and 30° 15" longitude east. The town stands at an elevation of 1,277 metres (4,190 feet) on a plateau about 60 kilometres west of Lake Albert in the Great Rift Valley, which forms the border of the DR Congo with Uganda and about 25 kilometres east of the Ituri Forest.

Bunia is a rapidly growing city of about 400,000 inhabitants. The city of Bunia and its immediate neighbourhood is a fertile land and rich in gold and minerals,

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<sup>5</sup> Administratively, a town (or a small city) in the DR Congo is organised as a *Cité* led by a *Chef de Cité*. A *Cité* is divided into *Quartiers*, each led by a *Chef de Quartier*. Bunia is currently divided into twelve *quartiers*. A large *Quartier* is divided into *Sous-Quartiers*, each led by a *Chef de sous-quartier*. A *Quartier* is then divided into *Avenues*, each led by a *Chef d'Avenue*. An *Avenue* is organised in *Rues* (streets). At the time of this research, Bunia had still the status of a *Cité* (Town).

though the region is struggling to recover after a long history of despotic government followed by 10 years of war that ended officially in 2003. According to the new Constitution of the DR Congo (2006: Art. 2) Ituri district is to become one of 25 new provinces of DR Congo and Bunia will be the capital city of the new Ituri province.

The town of Bunia is an important commercial centre, strategic for cross-border trade as well as internal trade. A dirt highway connects the town and the north-east of DR Congo with Kisangani to the west and with the province of northern Kivu to the south. A second dirt highway connects Bunia with the Republic of Uganda and the Republic of South Sudan in the north-east. The third unmade road links the town of Bunia with the small port of Kasenyi/Tchomia on Lake Albert by a 60-kilometre dirt track. Lake Albert forms the natural border of DR Congo with the Republic of Uganda. Kasenyi has a 100-metre jetty from which boat transport can link with Mahagi-Port at the north end of the lake, and with Butiaba on the Ugandan side and Pakwach on the Albert Nile. The town of Bunia is also linked to other parts of the country by its airstrip, situated at an elevation of 4,045 metre (13,271 feet). Bunia airstrip or Murongo National Airport links Bunia to other towns of the Orientale province as well as to other provinces of DR Congo, including the capital city of Kinshasa. There are also direct non-stop flights to Entebbe International Airport in Uganda.

Two rivers, Nyamukau and Ngezi, run through the town of Bunia. A third river, the Shari, flows along the north-western outskirts of the city. Budana dam, which generates electricity for the town, is built on the Shari. The Shari then flows into the Ituri, a river around thirty-five kilometres west of Bunia. The town of Bunia is divided up into twelve *quartiers* namely Bankoko, Kindia, Lembabo, Lumumba, Mudzipela, Ngezi, Nyakasanza, Rwambuzi, Saio, Salongo, Simbilyabo, and Sukisa (see map in Appendix 3).

### 1.2.2 Population of Bunia

<b>Nº</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	2008	144,565	44,68	165,152	53,32	309,717
<b>2</b>	2009	160,135	46,42	184,824	53,58	344,959
<b>3</b>	2010	179,125	46,69	204,482	53,30	383,607
<b>4</b>	2011	184,144	47,65	202,329	52,35	386,473
<b>5</b>	2012	156,098	47,46	172,796	52,54	328,894

*Table 1: Population of Bunia from 2008 to 2012 according to gender as per the annual census at the Office of the Chef de Cité, Bunia.*

Table 1 above shows the population of Bunia from 2008 to 2012, over three hundred and fifty thousand. It indicates that on average the female population formed the majority of Bunia population, representing over 53% against 47% for the male. More details are given in table 2 below.

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>0 – 9</b>	21,718	5,6	26,701	6,9	48,419	12,6
<b>10 – 19</b>	31,877	8,3	38,157	9,9	70,034	18,2
<b>20 – 29</b>	41,658	10,8	48,804	12,7	90,462	23,5
<b>30 – 39</b>	40,347	10,5	44,230	11,5	84,577	22,0
<b>40 – 49</b>	19,869	5,1	22,164	5,7	42,033	10,9
<b>50 – 59</b>	12,161	3,1	12,541	3,2	24,702	6,4
<b>60 – 69</b>	8,237	2,1	8,485	2,2	16,722	4,3
<b>70 – 79</b>	3,263	0,8	3,366	0,8	6,629	1,7
<b>80 – 89</b>	9	0,0	18	0,0	27	0,0
<b>90 and over</b>	1	0,0	1	0,0	2	0,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>179,140</b>	<b>46,6</b>	<b>204,467</b>	<b>53,3</b>	<b>383,607</b>	<b>99,9</b>

*Table 2: Population of Bunia town by age groups and sex as per the 2010 annual Census from the office of the Chef de Cité.*

The figures in table 2 above are based on the 2010 population census in the town of Bunia. The table shows that the population of Bunia was 383,607. It shows that at every age group, the number of women exceeds that of men. In total the female population represented 53.3% against 46.6 for the male. An analysis of the figures indicates that 54.4% of the population was less than thirty years old. It means that the majority of the town's inhabitants are very young. The figures may also help to understand trends in the churches researched, which are made up mainly of children and young people.

### ***1.2.3 Ethnic diversity in the town of Bunia***

As for all rapidly growing cities, Bunia has drawn in members of almost every ethnic group in the surrounding area. Though the first settlers are believed to be the Bira, many tribes from the Ituri district are now present in the town. Among major Ituri ethnic groups indwelling Bunia there are the Alur, Bira, Hema, Kakwa, Lendu, Lugbara and Ngiti. From outside the Ituri district Bunia is also home to Bembe, Budu, Kongo, Lese, Logo, Lokele, Luba, Mangbetu, Mbuza, Nande, Ngbandi, Rega, Songe, Topoke and Zande ethnic groups, among many others. Apart from the ethnic diversity that is characteristic of the DR Congo, there are people from other African countries such as Uganda, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, as well as Europeans, Americans and Asians now living in Bunia. Some of the foreigners are United Nations workers or members of Non-Government Organisations. Others are missionaries, traders or businessmen.

The Congolese population of Bunia uses Swahili or Lingala, two of the national languages in the DR Congo. Foreigners use French, the official language. But most ethnic groups use their mother tongues in personal conversations. This complex mixture of ethnic groups, tribes and races in the town of Bunia has a



bearing on Bunia churches' ministry as will be analysed in section three of this study.

#### ***1.2.4 Overview of ECC and RERC churches in the town of Bunia***

The complex ethnic diversity in the town of Bunia also means that many religions are present in addition to Christianity. The majority of the Christian population of Bunia is from the Roman Catholic Church. The protestant church denominations, with which the study is concerned, can be divided into mainline church denominations referred to as ECC churches and the fast-growing "revival churches" referred to as RERC churches.

##### ***1.2.4.1 The church of Christ in Congo***

The church of Christ in Congo (Eglise du Christ au Congo, ECC) is a conglomeration of church denominations from conservative Protestants, Pentecostal and charismatic denominations formed at the 1970 assembly of the Congo Protestant Council (Barrett, 1982:759; see also Mandryk, 2010:271). The protestant church in the DR Congo was started in 1878 by the Livingstone Inland Mission (LIM) at Palabala in the lower course of the Congo River (Thiessen, 1955:217). Its work would later be transferred to the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS). Missionary societies that joined the effort for the evangelisation of Congo include the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) in the lower and upper Congo, the Plymouth Brethren in south-eastern Congo, the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the western part of Congo River, the Northern Methodists in the southern Congo, the Southern Presbyterian church of the United States in the upper part of Kasai River, the southern Methodist Episcopal church in the central Congo, the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in north-eastern Congo, the Unevangelised Field Mission (UFM) in central Congo and the Heart of Africa Mission (HAM) in northern Congo, among many others.

From the first protestant missionary conference in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) in 1902, these first missions founded the Protestant Council of the Congo (CPC) that was changed into the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) in 1934. The organisation was officially registered with the government in 1942. From thence onward, all the Missions became “Sections” of ECC. Later all the churches started by these missions became known as ECC “Communautés”.

However, the structure of a single Protestant Church was imposed by the government edict in 1972 in which President Mobutu “decreed that only six organised religions were permitted to operate and own property: Catholic, one Protestant Church (ECC), Kimbanguist church, Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish” (Mandryk, 2010:269). Today the ECC brings under one umbrella over 80 Protestant denominations or Communautés, each maintaining its own ecclesiastical traditions and structures as well as fraternal ties with churches outside the DR Congo (Mandryk 2010:271). In total, ECC denominations have established over 320,101 congregations scattered in all the current eleven provinces of DR Congo and shepherded by over 16,730 pastors. The number of baptised members is estimated at 25,504.220. About 14 of these ECC denominations have planted churches in the town of Bunia as shown in table 3 below.

<i>Nº</i>	<i>Initials</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Congregations</i>
3	CBCA	Goma	North Kivu	Baptist	1
5	CELPA	Bukavu	South Kivu	Pentecostal	2
8	CEPAC	Bukavu	South Kivu	Pentecostal	2
11	CAC	Boga	Orientale	Anglican	5
12	AOG	Isiro	Orientale	Pentecostal	1
16	CECCA	Isiro	Orientale	Presb/Congr	1
20	CECA	Bunia	Orientale	Presb/Congr	17
21	CNCA	Kisangani	Orientale	Episcopal	2
26	CLMC	Bukavu	South Kivu	Methodist	1
37	CADC	Kinshasa	Kinshasa	Pentecostal	1
39	CE	Bunia	Orientale	Brethren	8
45	CEP	Bunia	Orientale	Pentecostal	3
47	CAFC	Mambasa	Orientale	Brethren	1
55	CEBCE	Goma	North Kivu	Baptist	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>14</i>				<i>46</i>

*Table 3: Number of churches ECC denominations have planted in the town of Bunia*

Table 3 above gives, in the first column, the numbers under which the denominations are registered with the Government of the DR Congo. From the second column onward, it gives the initials of the French names of the denominations, their headquarters and province of origin, their church tradition, as well as the number of churches they have planted so far in the town of Bunia. It indicates that 14 Protestant denominations have planted 46 congregations or more in the town of Bunia to date. The denominations represent traditions such as Baptist, Episcopal, Pentecostal, Presbyterian or

Congregationalist and the Brethren, among others. The largest of them all is CECA 20, the church planted in DRC by Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in 1912. CECA 20 has planted at least one local church in each of the 12 *quartiers* composing the town of Bunia. In total, CECA has planted 17 churches in the town of Bunia, representing 37% of ECC churches in the town. CECA 20 is followed by CE 39, the church founded by Emmanuel Mission, which has planted eight churches and the Anglican Communion with five churches planted in the town of Bunia. Their prominence in comparison to other church denominations in planting churches in Bunia may be explained by the fact that, unlike other denominations, these three denominations have their headquarters in Bunia.

#### 1.2.4.2 The RERC churches

The second category of Protestant churches researched in the town of Bunia is known in DR Congo as the “Regroupement des Eglises de Réveil au Congo” (RERC)<sup>6</sup>. These are fast-growing church movements in the DR Congo. In her article “Les églises de réveil en Afrique central et leurs impacts sur l’équilibre du pouvoir et la stabilité des Etats: Le cas du Cameroun, du Gabon et de la République du Congo” Fallut (2012:3) states that “revival churches” appeared on the African continent in the early twentieth century and spread all over Africa in three waves. First, American religious movements swept West Africa, especially Liberia, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo and Nigeria. The second wave, she says, coincided with the independence of African states in the 1960s

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<sup>6</sup> RERC or the regrouping of revival churches in the DR Congo is an effort to bring them all under one roof. For more information and readings on “revival churches” in the DR Congo, I refer readers to the following three studies: Mwan-a-Mongo in note 9 below; Raquin E 2005. Représentations et recompositions locales à Kinshasa: Les églises de réveil et les fan-clubs comme réponses sociales à la crise (Local representations and re-compositions in Kinshasa : Revival churches and fan-clubs as social responses to the crisis). In DP Mukawa & G Tchouassi (eds), *Afrique Centrale: Crises économiques et mécanismes de survie*, 289-308. Dakar : CODESRIA; Elongo LV 2002 (Octobre). La surchristianisation au quotidien à Kinshasa : Une lecture de l'autre face de la religion (The daily over-Christianisation in Kinshasa : A reading of the other face of religion). *Congo-Afrique*, 368, 463-479.

and covers the period until 1980. The spread of these churches, she argues, was due to the Christian population's dissatisfaction with mainline church denominations as well as with the social and political management of their countries. The third wave of the spread of revival churches started in 1990, the year Gabon voted for freedom of association and Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville introduced freedom of worship.

In his doctoral dissertation<sup>7</sup>, Mwan-a-Mongo (2005) identifies two factors that contribute to the emergence of "revival churches" in the DR Congo. First, he mentions the arrival of American evangelist TL Osborn in Kinshasa in 1980. He contends that Osborn's evangelistic crusades accompanied by miraculous healings and casting out of demons deeply transformed the religious landscape in the country. Though Christians admired the strong organisation of the Roman Catholic Church and the initiative of the Protestants to put the Bible in the hands of believers, many were disappointed by the disorganisation among the Protestants and reproached the Catholic Church for "hiding" biblical truths from the faithful. As a result some of the most dissatisfied started "prayer groups", calling themselves "shepherds" and advocating spiritual gifts to the detriment of formal training.

As the second factor Mwan-a-Mongo mentions the democratisation process in the 1990s in the DR Congo (2005:94). He suggests that the political crisis due to the failure of the Mobutu regime as well as the breakdown of the national economic system left most Congolese disillusioned. In support of this view Raquin (2005:289) has this to say regarding the emergence of pastors of "revival churches" in Kinshasa:

Disenchanted, the inhabitants of Kinshasa tried to get out of this political, economic and urban crisis by joining together in unusual venues: revival churches and fan clubs (...). It is in this context and in

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<sup>7</sup> Mwan-a-Mongo DN 2005. Les églises de réveil dans l'histoire des religions en République Démocratique du Congo: Questions de dialogue œcuménique et interreligieux (Revival churches in the history of religions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Questions of oecumenical and interreligious dialogue). Doctoral dissertation, Université Lille 3 – Charles de Gaulle. Lille, France. Available at [www.univ-lille3.fr](http://www.univ-lille3.fr).

these places that appeared some people of character who monopolised the Kinshasa media landscape and made their voice heard across the capital.

Bazonzi (2006:5) for his part identifies two main causes of the proliferation of these revival churches. One of them that relates to the present study's understanding of Christian nominalism is the influence and impact of the urbanisation of Africa, which resulted in a massive exodus from villages to towns. O'Donovan also observes this phenomenon. He states that urban growth in Africa has come with heavy cost to the moral, social, physical, practical and spiritual life of Africans (2000:40-54). Urbanisation has destabilised existential securities, leaving many Africans unprepared to face the many challenges in their daily life such as sickness, hunger, death, failure in life, education, travel, etc. It is in this context that Bazonzi points out that revival churches exploit these situations, neglected or overlooked by most of the mainline churches, in order to attempt to satisfy the deep desires in the Africans' spiritual quest.

Today, revival churches in the DR Congo are united under the umbrella organisation known as "Regroupement des Eglises de Réveil au Congo" (RERC). According to Bazonzi (2006:3), this national structure was established in order to represent all those revival churches that came into being after the government edict which created the ECC. The aim was to exercise discipline over church leaders, resolve conflicts between member churches, oversee the application of the statement of faith, and promote unity and collaboration among member churches, among other issues. Bazonzi mentions the important impact of RERC member churches on the social, economic and political life of the Congolese nation. In Kinshasa alone, he says, eight of the thirteen radio stations belonging to religious groups are owned by revival churches. In Kinshasa revival churches own nine of the eleven television channels belonging to religious groups (Bazonzi, 2006:7).

RERC churches are classified into the following categories: those churches promoting prosperity theology, those emphasising spiritual warfare and

deliverance from sorcery and possession, those focusing on spiritual power and authority and those churches emphasising sanctification. Though some of these churches are a mixture of two or more of the elements above, one of these elements is dominant in their teaching and ministries.

The growing influence of these “revival churches” cannot be ignored today as in the previous decades. Mwan-a-Mongo (2005:115) goes further to suggest that mainline ECC churches rethink the Gospel in light of the spiritual liveliness and faith of revival churches. Mossière (2013:270) argues that revival churches and their affiliated structures are contributing towards a prosperity theology within the African context. For Mossière, revival churches believe that they contribute in the fight against the general poverty mentality of the African people.

But it is also evident that many of these “revival churches” lack biblical teaching. They appear to use the Bible, but too often passages are taken without serious consideration for their context. Adeleye (2011:82) mentions an example of churches promoting prosperity gospel on the basis of Genesis 8:22, which says, “As long as the earth endures seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease”. The church teaches that believers’ tithes and offerings to God are “seed faith” that believers receive from God as much as they sow as seeds, and that those who give nothing will receive nothing from God, because God only multiplies what one has first given. From this passage, all the church’s ministries are built on this “seed-faith” principle. The reason is, as Mwan-a-Mongo (2005:113) points out, that biblical exegesis has no place in the preaching and teaching ministry of many RERC churches. They generally hold the Scriptures as the sacred word of God, but see no need for careful reflection on these Scriptures. Some of their preachers oppose formal training in Bible schools or theological seminaries by arguing that Jesus never went to university, or that nowhere in the Bible is it said that one should go to a Bible school in order to preach and teach the word of God. This negative attitude towards any serious study of the scriptures can be a cause of the shallowness of the Christian faith in these churches.

There are many false teachings and wrong ideas in these revival churches, one of which is the superstitious use of the Bible and of the name of Jesus. Some of these churches teach that having a Bible under one's pillow when sleeping or in one's pocket when travelling will protect against evil spirits, evil eyes, misfortunes and witchcraft. Some of these preachers brandish the Bible when driving out demons. Some of these RERC churches "are led by charlatans who use their pastoral position for personal gain rather than to serve the faithful" (Mandryk, 2010:271-72).

The present research identified 35 RERC churches in the town of Bunia. Because their number keeps growing, it is often difficult to have exact figures. This is due to the fact that while new churches appear, some old ones disappear for some time and reappear some time later. Others split or just merge with existing churches. Others change names and structures, sometimes making it difficult to differentiate RERC churches from ECC churches and even from Africa Independent churches (AICs). Because a sizeable portion of the Christian population in the DR Congo belongs to these RERC churches, what is happening in these churches will shape the quality of the Christian faith in this country, for ill or for good. Walls was probably alluding to this when saying,

Today, the signs suggest that what the Christianity of the twenty-first century will be like, in its theology, its worship, its effect on society, its penetration of new areas, whether geographically or culturally, will depend on what happens in Africa, in Latin America, and in some parts of Asia (2002:32).

### **1.3 Research problem**

The key question, which is also the main research problem is, "How far is nominal Christianity a problem in the churches of Bunia?" The following sub-questions can be derived from the key question:

- What is nominal Christianity?



- To what extent and in what ways do the Bunia churches recognise the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships?
- To what extent is the Bunia churches' understanding of the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships sufficient or deficient?
- How might the Bunia churches respond more effectively to the problem of nominal Christianity?

## **1.4 Research Hypothesis**

The underlying hypothesis of the present research is threefold. First, it is that the majority of pastors and church leaders in Bunia town acknowledge the presence of nominal Christians within their church memberships, but have no clear cognizance of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism because their definition of what it is to be "a Christian" is inadequate. In their view a true Christian seems to be one who has been baptised, partakes of Holy Communion, and regularly attends worship services and other church activities.

Second, many pastors and church leaders are apparently satisfied with increase in attendance at church worship and other activities, to the detriment of nurturing believers into being disciples of Jesus Christ.

Third, many church members do not seem to understand what it means to be a Christian and what makes them Christians. The important thing seems to be local church membership, to the detriment of experiencing the transformational impact of the gospel on their daily lifestyles.

## **1.5 Value of the research**

The relevance of the present research is threefold. First, the study will provide data regarding church leaders' awareness of nominal Christian faith in church membership across denominations in the town of Bunia.

Second, based on the data collected, the study will also propose practical action steps to enable the pastoral leadership of the target church denominations to effectively confront the challenges of Christian nominalism in their respective churches.

Third, this research will be a valuable tool in the hands of the teaching staff in Bible schools and theological seminaries to improve the curriculum and teaching methods in order to meet the felt needs for spiritual growth in the local churches.

## **1.6 Research Design and Methodology**

### ***1.6.1 Research design in practical theology***

In order to design this research, which falls in the field of practical theology, I have adapted the Loyola Institute of Ministry (LIM) model of practical theology (Smith 2008: 206-210; see also Heitink 1999:131-32), understood in this study as a critical reflection on the praxis of the Church in society (Heitink 1999: 113-14; Wyk 1995: 97-98). The LIM model follows four steps. The first identifies a real-life problem, presented as a matter of concern, an unsatisfactory situation. In the present study this first step, which form the introduction, states the background of the problem and analyses the phenomenon of Christian nominalism in relevant literatures.

The second step in the LIM model describes the present situation, interpreting “the world as it is” (Smith 2008:206). This step focuses on investigating the situation to find out why it is the way it is. The study makes use of descriptive research to discover the real problem, how and why it developed to an unsatisfactory situation.

The third step in practical theology research design is to interpret the world as it should be. This analysis of the “preferred scenario” requires historical and critical exegesis of some materials from the tradition being investigated, such as scriptural passages, church constitution and teachings, etc.

The final step is the development of an action plan to move from the unsatisfactory situation to the preferred scenario.

### ***1.6.2 Research design of the present study***

The above four sections of the LIM model have been rearranged and expanded to five chapters (sections in the LIM model) to fit the flow of ideas in the present study as described in the outline below.

Chapter 1 is the introduction of the study. It presents Christian nominalism as an unsatisfactory situation in Bunia churches. The chapter articulates the problem, its background and the methodology followed to clarify the research problem. It also reviews relevant literature on the subject of Christian nominalism.

Chapter 2, the LIM model’s “preferred scenario”, seeks to answer the question “what is nominal Christianity” from a biblical perspective. It does this by examining selected scriptures passages in both the Old and the New Testaments and drawing implications for Christian nominalism in church membership.

Chapter 3, the LIM model’s “present situation”, seeks to find out to what extent and in what ways the Bunia churches recognise the problem of nominal Christians within their memberships.

Chapter 4 of the present study is the continuation of the LIM model’s “present situation”. It seeks to find out the extent to which Bunia churches understand the problem of nominal Christianity within their respective church memberships.

Chapter 5 looks into practical suggestions as to how Bunia churches might respond more effectively to the problem of nominal Christianity.

Chapter 6 is the conclusion of the research.

### ***1.6.3 Pilot testing***

The study developed its own instrumentation for data collection, namely interview schedules, questionnaires and personal observation. The researcher constructed two sets of questionnaires, one for church leaders and another for church members. These comprised structured self-administered questionnaires as well as semi-structured open-ended questionnaires for focus group interviewing.

Before embarking on a field survey of the targeted churches in the town of Bunia, the questionnaires were pilot tested among theology students at Shalom University. Questionnaires were distributed to twenty-four students of the Spiritual Development class at the Master's level. Half of the students were ordained ministers who had been pastors of local churches before coming for further studies. They were asked to respond to questions intended for pastors. Students from the other half, who had never had pastoral experience in a local church, were assigned questionnaires designed for church members.

Feedback from the questionnaires helped in reformulating some questions, omitting others while adding new ones. The final draft had ten questions for church leaders and nine for church members. For church leaders, the first five questions had to do with their age, educational level, current position in the local church, the year when their local church was planted in the specific location, and the average membership of the church. For church members, the first four questions concerned their age, sex, when they became members of the local church, where they came from (if coming from a different church to join the current church), and the reason for becoming a member of the current local church, where applicable.

#### **1.6.4 Population sample**

The research team composed of 25<sup>8</sup> members surveyed protestant local churches in all the twelve *quartiers* making up the town of Bunia. At least one local church was investigated in each *quartier*, though some *quartiers* had more than one local church researched. Overall, 22 local churches were selected and researched, 18 of them from ECC and four from RERC churches.

Selection criteria for local churches included the following: existence in the location at least for nine years, average membership above fifty, and belonging to an ECC or RERC umbrella denomination. In each local church, the research team interviewed at least five in the pastoral leadership, including women where applicable, and ten church members, both male and female.

#### **1.6.5 Data collection techniques**

Techniques for data collection included interviews (whether personal or in focus groups) and questionnaires. To help ease conversation flow, questions were translated from French into the two Congolese national languages spoken in Bunia, namely Swahili and Lingala, depending on the language best understood by respondents. For the educated respondents, French questionnaires were used. Questionnaires included closed-form questions, to allow for ease of quantitative analysis, and open-form questions, to allow for research into any further issues raised by the respondents.

Apart from interviews and questionnaires, researchers also used personal observation. They spent time with church leaders outside ministry-related

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding numbers, the following rule guides the writing of numbers throughout the work: in the text, numbers 1 up to 10 are written in letters. From eleven upward, they are written in numbers. So in the text, I write one respondent or three students or ten church members but 11 respondents, 120 church members or 24 students. Exception is made for chapter numbers, which are written as section 1, section 2, section 5, etc., and Bible verses such as John 1:12-13, Isaiah 46 or Psalm.148.

situations. They also participated in Sunday worship, and the weekly church activities of the local churches researched. They took part in the elders' court once a month during the period of the survey. They attended church events such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, fundraising, and communal work as specified by the church calendar. They visited church members in their homes throughout the survey period.

#### ***1.6.6 Questionnaire Sample***

Questions to church leaders included items such as their own definition of a Christian, the average number of church members they thought were Christians, whether there were unbelievers among their registered church members, whether or not church members appeared to be growing spiritually and the indicators of such growth.

Questions to church members and students included topics such as the date on which they became members of the actual church, why they decided to attend the specific church, their assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ, the indicators of their personal spiritual growth, the obstacles to spiritual growth and how their local church was helping them to grow spiritually.

#### ***1.6.7 Limitations***

Although the research identified 46 ECC churches and 35 RERC churches in the entire town of Bunia, it did not investigate all of them for many reasons. First, the selection criteria meant that only 20 of the 46 ECC churches were selected. However, two failed to return questionnaires. As for the RERC churches, only 15 out of 35 churches are officially registered. However, only four churches welcomed the research team. It means that many more data might have been collected from the churches not researched.

Second, although 77% of the pastors investigated were aged between 26 and 55 years, 13.6% had primary school educational level and 54.6% have secondary school level. Only 31.8% had university degrees. This low educational background may have affected the understanding of Christian nominalism by most of the local church pastors.

## **1.7 Review of relevant literature on Christian nominalism**

This study reviewed the following literatures that have a bearing on the understanding of Christian nominalism.

### **1.7.1 *The World Christian Encyclopedia by David Barrett (1982)***

*The World Christian Encyclopedia: A comprehensive survey of churches and religions in the modern world AD 1900-2000* is the first ever thorough survey of the Christian church in each of the 223 countries in the world, carried out in 1982 under the general editorship of David Barrett. A significant feature of the Encyclopedia is its definitions of a Christian from the viewpoints of religion, Christianity, public profession, church affiliation, practice, church attendance and belief, as follows:

#### **1.7.1.1 *Definition of a Christian***

In relation to Christianity, Barrett's survey divides the world into two: Christians and non-Christians. It defines Christians as "all who call themselves followers of Christ, in public or in private or who regard themselves ... as part of the community or who claim to be such" (1982:68). This definition builds on the United Nations 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 18), which states that every individual has the right to say to what religion he belongs.

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* classifies those who call themselves Christians into two main sub-divisions: professing and crypto-Christians. The former are those who publicly declare they are Christians when asked what their religion is. It defines “professing” Christians as “those publicly professing (declaring, stating, confessing, self-identifying) their preference or adherence in a government census or public-opinion poll, hence known to the state or society or the public” (1982:70). In the case of the DR Congo (then Zaire), Barrett reveals that protestant professing Christians represented 29 per cent of the Christian population of the country in the 1980s, against 48.4 for Roman Catholics and 17.1 per cent for African independent churches (1982:758). Crypto-Christians, however, are “Christians who for reasons of family, personal safety, status, employment or other factors do not declare or reveal their commitment to Christ or expose their faith to public or state scrutiny or enquiry but prefer to keep it private” (1982:49).

#### *1.7.1.2 Nominal Christians in relation to church affiliation and church attendance*

Barrett further places professing Christians into two sub-divisions: affiliated and nominal. “Affiliated Christians” are “all persons belonging to or connected with organised churches”. They are church members because their names are on the churches’ books or records. Affiliated Christians are further described as the “total of all individuals attached to or claimed by the institutional churches and organised Christianity and hence part of their corporate life, community and fellowship, including children, infants, adherents, catechumens, and members under discipline”. In the DR Congo Protestant affiliated Christians represented 23% of the national population, against 48.1% for Roman Catholics in the 1980s (1982:758). “Nominal Christians” are defined as “those professing but not affiliated to churches” (1982:70). For Barrett, people in this category may individually be Christians, but because they are not part of the organised churches’ corporate life, community or fellowship, they are nominal Christians. For reasons good or bad, he says, these Christians do not belong to the visible



and organised community of believers, but they define themselves as Christians, though from the local churches' point of view, they are regarded as Christians in name only (1982:51). According to Barrett and this definition, nominal Christians in the Democratic Republic of Congo represented 3.2% of the Congolese Christian population in the 1980s (1982:758).

#### *1.7.1.3 Personal assessment of Barrett's definitions*

Barrett's book is valuable for its wide documentation and coverage of various aspect of Christianity worldwide. It reveals that the definition of nominalism is fluid and depends on the perspective of the one making the definition. In this case Barrett's definition of nominalism is based on the absence of church affiliation, church attendance and involvement in church activities.

His differentiation between a true Christian and a nominal one is based on a person's participation in church services and the local church's planned activities. It classifies people according to whether they go to church regularly, occasionally or irregularly. According to Barrett, those who attend church only on civic occasions or state festivals are nominal Christians, as are those who attend church service only for special family occasions such as baptisms, weddings and funerals (1982:52).

The particularity of the present study, however, will be to examine nominal Christianity within church membership, that is, among those who come to church regularly, whose names figure in their local churches' records and who actively participate in the spiritual life of the local churches. Overall, Barrett defines Christians in external, visible terms, whereas the present study defines them in terms of their inner spiritual lives, their experiences of the immanent yet transcendent God of the Christian faith.

### ***1.7.2 The Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOP) on nominalism***

From the evangelical viewpoint, an important contribution to the debate on nominalism was made by the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelisation held in Pattaya, Thailand (1980). Of particular significance are its working groups on “Christian witness to nominal Christians among Roman Catholics” (LOP 10), Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among the Orthodox (LOP 19), and “Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Protestants” (LOP 23). Of equal significance was the Lausanne International Consultation on Nominalism held at High Leigh, Hoddesdon (U.K., 1998), especially the “Statement to the Churches on Nominality”. The three Lausanne Occasional Papers (1980), referred to in this study as LOP, have the following three significant features. First, participants in the consultations acknowledged the existence of nominal Christians respectively among Roman Catholics, the Orthodox and Protestants. Second, they noted that nominal Christians are to be found within church memberships as well as outside the church community. Third, all three mini-consultations recognised the need for evangelical churches to rethink their various ministries in light of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism. Findings relating to Roman Catholics and Protestants are of particular interest to the present study because these two denominations constitute the majority of the Christian population in the town of Bunia.

#### ***1.7.2.1 Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics***

The Lausanne mini-consultation on nominal Christians among Roman Catholics was made up of over 250 delegates from fifty-four countries. Its purpose was to gain an understanding of nominal Christians among Roman Catholics in order to formulate a strategy of evangelisation among them. They worked with the assumption that a mere confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord is not enough unless it is accompanied by a Christ-centred life, obedience to the word of God and growth “in the knowledge and worship of God, in fellowship with the

Body of Christ in the local church, and in doing the work of God in the world” (LOP 10, 1980:2). The above working group defined a true Christian as “one who has responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord” (1980:4). According to the participants, a Christian, “in addition to having made a commitment to Jesus Christ, will reveal a life-style that is in contrast to that of the natural, unredeemed man”. They recognised that “the heart of true Christianity is being a disciple of Jesus Christ in the terms of faith, love, and obedience” (1980:5). The group argued that among Roman Catholics there are some who “are truly born again and committed to the Lordship of Jesus”. The Lausanne working group defined a nominal Christian as

a person who has not responded in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord. He is a Christian in name only. He may be very religious. He may be a practising or non-practising church member. He may give intellectual assent to basic Christian doctrines and claim to be a Christian. He may be faithful in attending liturgical rites and worship services, and be an active member involved in church affairs. But in spite of all this, he is still destined for eternal judgment...because he has not committed his life to Jesus Christ (1980:5).

The value of this definition is that it underlines personal and living faith in Jesus as essential. For the Lausanne working group, personal and living faith in Jesus can be seen in the way the person trusts and depends upon God and his word as well as in the way he or she involves God in his or her daily activities, choices and plans. True faith in Jesus Christ can also be seen as the person grows spiritually, in the way that he or she progressively displays love in word and deed to God and neighbours.

A valuable finding of this working group is that it identified two main causes of nominal faith in the Roman Catholic tradition. The first is the tendency to consider a Christian in terms of baptism. The Roman Catholic Church considers all baptised members as genuine Christians. Second, the working group argued that the teachings of the Catholic Church have no clear support from the biblical doctrine of justification. The biblical gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is

weakened by insistence on water baptism and good works as necessary to salvation.

In light of the above causes of Christian nominalism among Roman Catholics, the Lausanne working group suggested that any effective process of evangelisation that aims to produce growing Christians must emphasise “commitment to the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, repentance and reconciliation to God, acceptance of the cost of discipleship in following Christ, incorporation into Christ's community and engaging in responsible service in the world for Christ” (1980:6).

#### *1.7.2.2 Nominal Christians among Protestants*

LOP 23 gave the following definition of a nominal Protestant Christian:

A nominal Protestant Christian is one who, within the Protestant tradition, would call himself a Christian, or be so regarded by others, but who has no authentic commitment to Christ based on personal faith. Such commitment involves a transforming personal relationship with Christ, characterised by such qualities as love, joy, peace, a desire to study the Bible, prayer, fellowship with other Christians, a determination to witness faithfully, a deep concern for God's will to be done on earth, and a living hope of heaven to come (1980:5).

This definition, written from an evangelical perspective, underlines personal encounter with Jesus Christ and commitment to him as central. It also acknowledges that such a commitment can be seen through the daily behaviour and lifestyle of those claiming to be Christians. The definition does not include the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, suggesting that these are not essential elements in defining a true Christian. Instead, it suggests certain criteria by which the claims of being a true Christian can be “measured”. They include qualities such as love, joy, peace, for example, the fruit of the Holy Spirit displayed in a believer (cf. Ga. 5:22), the desire to read and meditate on the word of God, praying and witnessing to Christ, among other things.

Another feature of the Lausanne working group's definition of nominalism is that it identifies five types of nominal Christians among Protestants in relation to church attendance. First, there are those who attend church regularly and seem to worship sincerely but who have no vital personal relationship with Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Second, there are those who attend church regularly but for cultural reasons only. Third, there are those who attend church only for major church festivals (Christmas, Easter, etc.) and ceremonies (weddings, baptisms, funerals). Fourth, there are those who hardly attend church but maintain a relationship with the church either for security or family or even traditional reasons. Fifth, there are those who have no relationship with an organized church and never attend church but nevertheless consider themselves as Christians.

A further significant feature of the Lausanne working group on Christian nominalism is its statement on the state of many so-called evangelical churches, where there is insufficient preaching and teaching of the rich biblical gospel. Many churches, the working group acknowledged, have not understood grace. This lack of understanding may be to blame for the existence of nominal Christian faith in these churches. The working group's observation was the following:

In some situations, nominality has been tolerated, if not encouraged, by pastors for reasons of prestige and even financial advantage. In some churches, an undisguised message of justification by works is preached, leading either to pride or a sense of hopeless inadequacy in the hearers. Too often, churches have failed to give help and support to those who have professed conversion. Too often, there has been an undue emphasis on uniformity in non-essential matters. Too often, there has been a lack of concern for those without Christ. Too often, prayer has been crowded out in the life of individuals and of fellowships (1980:9).

Many of the remarks in the above quotation will be discussed in chapter three of this study. For now, it is worth noting the working group's emphasis that it is the church leaders and pastors in many evangelical churches who are to blame for nominal faith in their church memberships. Overall, the working group's analysis

of nominalism among Protestant churches, church leaders and church members makes an important contribution to the debate on Christian nominalism, and calls for further research into the problem in evangelical churches.

#### *1.7.2.3 The Lausanne International Consultation on Nominalism (1998)*

The Lausanne International Consultation on Nominalism came as a follow-up to the recommendations of the 1980 Lausanne Consultation in Thailand. The Consultation was organised in the United Kingdom in 1998 by Christian Research of the United Kingdom, under the auspices of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation. It featured 65 church leaders, theologians, leaders of Christian organisations and researchers from 15 countries representing all six continents.

One contribution of the Lausanne Consultation was its focus on churches and church ministries to provide a way out of Christian nominalism. It underlined the importance of pastoral care and evangelisation to win nominal Christians to true faith in Christ. It suggested that local churches committed to evangelism and disciple-making might be able to detect nominal faith and help nominal Christians to discover true faith in Christ. Another contribution of the Lausanne Consultation was its recommendation that particular attention be given to second generation believers, particularly children aged between twelve and fifteen. It noted that in many churches baptised children constitute the majority of registered church members. These groups need more attention from the pastoral leadership of the churches that are willing to confront the problem of Christian nominalism. To a certain degree, the Lausanne definition of a nominal Christian constitutes a working definition for the present study as will be seen in the last three sections of the study.

### **1.7.3 Eddy Gibbs *In name only: Tackling the problem of nominal Christianity* (2000)**

The third contribution to the debate on Christian nominalism is Eddie Gibbs' discussion of the problem of nominalism from a western perspective. Gibbs currently holds the McGavran Chair of Church Growth at Fuller Theological seminary (USA). With his previous experience as pastor of a Church of England parish, he is credited with the first detailed portrait of nominal Christianity in the western world in his book *In name only: Tackling the problem of nominal Christianity* (2000).

Gibbs offers valuable contributions to the understanding of Christian nominalism. One of these is his identification of various forms of Christian nominalism. First, he argues, individuals and even entire communities may self-identify as Roman Catholics, Lutheran, Anglican, etc., but only by virtue of their birth or because that particular tradition is identified with their national, tribal or family identity. This kind of nominalism, Gibbs argues, arises within the context of Christendom in the western world and in nations where European Christian traditions were imported as part of colonial influence. The second form of nominalism is, according to Gibbs, the result of rapidly growing churches, which fail to nurture new believers in the faith. As a consequence, the growth impetus will not be sustained beyond the first generation of believers. This, he argues, represents the greatest challenge facing the vibrant churches of Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia experiencing unprecedented numerical growth (2008:611). The third category of nominal Christians is made up of what Gibbs identifies as those who were once part of the church but who have since stopped being a part of the regular worshipping congregation.

Second, Gibbs identifies the major cause of nominal Christian faith as the failure by churches to disciple believers, especially from the second generation onward. For him, churches "must first recognize themselves to be part of the

problem before they can begin to contribute to the search for solutions” (2000:13).

Third, Gibbs analyses Christian nominalism from a biblical perspective, across both the Old and New Testaments. From his study of the Old Testament distinction between the faithless majority and the faithful remnant Gibbs identifies nominalism as a chronic problem. The people of God constantly rebelled against God and against Moses in the books of Exodus and Numbers, abandoning God and worshipping foreign gods. The book of Judges shows Israel slipping back repeatedly into a vicious circle of sin and idolatry. After short periods of faithfulness and stability, the people fell back into sin and the Lord abandoned them to an oppressor. They cried out for help and God sent a deliverer. This vicious circle signals, according to Gibbs, nominal faith. The Old Testament shows how Israel developed a false sense of security due to material prosperity, and at times people substituted mere ceremonies for real sacrificial service. All this stood against God’s clearly revealed will on worship.

In the New Testament, Gibbs observes that nominality was anticipated in Jesus’ teachings and evidenced in his followers, one of whom eventually betrayed Him. Gibbs sees nominality as an emerging problem in the New Testament church, with the warnings against false teachings, a partisan spirit among believers and unacceptable characters traits in church members, among other things (2000: ch 2). A case in point here is Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples. After spending about three years in close relationship with Jesus Christ, Judas agreed to betray him. He himself ended up committing suicide. Jesus called Judas “the son of perdition”. The same potential can be in the hearts of nominal Christians as they choose to ignore God’s grace.

Based on this biblical perspective on Christian nominalism, Gibbs goes on to develop a strategy to help the church address more adequately the challenge of nominal Christianity both within the ranks of her members and among those outside the flock. Gibbs starts by identifying factors that inhibit churches in their response to the challenges of reaching out to nominal Christians. He mentions,



among other things, the church's confinement to church premises, programs that are inwardly focused, the church's dependence on inadequately trained leaders, and a greater concern to gather a crowd and increase membership than to grow people and community. Gibbs then suggests strategies to win back nominal Christians. Though Gibbs writes from a western viewpoint, some of his strategies may be rearranged to fit the context of the churches being researched, and these will be considered later.

#### ***1.7.4 Bungishabaku Katho (2003) To know and not to know YHWH***

The fourth contribution to the debate on Christian nominalism is from Professor Bungishabaku Katho, currently the Principal of Shalom University of Bunia. In his doctoral dissertation entitled "To know and not to know YHWH: Jeremiah's understanding and its relevance for the church in DR Congo", submitted to the University of Natal in 2003, Bungishabaku Katho goes from a critical exegesis of Jeremiah's use of the term "to know YHWH", particularly in the context of social justice, idolatry, self-aggrandisement and the new covenant, to draw implications for church health in the DR Congo (2003: chs 2-5).

Katho does not write directly on Christian nominalism. His research addresses the superficiality of the Christian faith in the DR Congo, despite the country claiming to have the largest Roman Catholic community in Africa, the world's most influential francophone protestant movement and Africa's biggest independent church. He points out that Congolese Christianity remains an outward religion, in that Christian faith is something one exhibits on Sundays during worship services, with no impact on the inner attitudes and beliefs and on worshipers' daily lifestyle. He argues that outside the context of church worship, the Christian faith appears irrelevant. The Christian faith of Congolese believers, Katho argues, does not really help them in resolving their differences, which they instead take to civil courts. Their faith hardly affects the use of their money and their political life. For him, the irrelevance of the Christian faith was clearly seen during the ethnic bloodshed in Ituri district between 1997 and 2003,

where rival ethnic groups almost destroyed each other. For him, if large numbers of professing Christians are unable to positively influence and transform the political, economical and social environment of the country, then there is a serious concern about the kind of faith Christians profess.

Katho also argues that for some Congolese churches and pastors, the Christian faith is a way of surviving. They use their position in churches as a way of making money rather than sincere service to God and to his people (Katho 2003:422). Some of them are self-proclaimed “Apostles” or “Prophets” who exploit hearers’ credibility to extort money from them for their personal interests. They enrich themselves while the ordinary church members live in abject poverty. Their behaviour casts doubt over the nature of the Christian faith they profess. It is not a secret that some of these church ministers have left the church leadership to take a position in the politics of the country. One of them, Jean-Marie Runiga, Bishop of “Jesus Seul Sauveur” church founded in Kisangani in the 1990s, became the political leader of the rebel movement known as M23. If the faith that Congolese people profess in God does not prove itself in action such as love for God and for neighbours, there are reasons for concern.

The present study departs from Katho’s view in that it seeks to address the nature of the phenomenon of nominal Christian faith and its root causes. While Katho is concerned with the superficiality of the Christian faith in DR Congo, the present research is concerned with a nominal, in fact non-existent faith. An earlier study into the nature of the Christian faith in the DRC would probably have helped solve the dilemma of the fact that the faith of so many Christians has so little effect on the transformation of the nation. That is what the present study attempts to do in a survey of local churches in the town of Bunia which has the aim of finding out their church leaders’ and members’ perceptions of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism.

### **1.7.5 Abby Day (2011) *Believing in belonging***

The fifth contribution to the understanding of Christian nominalism is that of Abby Day, a Research Fellow in the department of anthropology in the University of Sussex (UK). Abby Day wrote *Believing in belonging: belief and social identity in the modern world* in order to examine the responses to the religious questions in the 2001 census in the United Kingdom. She discovered that 72 % of the population identified themselves as Christians. Writing from the point of view of anthropology, she brings valuable insights into why people who are not Christians still identify as Christians. She explores three main reasons for such identification.

Exploring how people “believe in belonging” from an anthropological and sociological point of view, and in the context of Europe (UK) and North America, Day identifies three types of nominal Christians, namely natal, ethnic and aspirational. Natal Christian identity, she argues, is characteristic of those who say they are Christians because they were born of Christian parents and were christened or baptised in their childhood. These people used perhaps to go to church in their childhood but no longer do so today. Some do not believe in core Christian doctrines, for example, life after death. Ethnic nominal Christians, Day argues, claim to be Christians just because they are British. They do not believe in God and never attend church services, but they are Christians because they see England as a Christian country, and so Christianity is an ethnic marker of Englishness. National identity, rather than commitment to the Christian faith, is the basis of their self-identification as Christians. Aspirational nominalism, she says, describes those who affiliate themselves with Christianity, but who are not church goers. Though such people admire their friends’ faith they do not adhere to it personally.

Day (2011:188-9) highlights two major aspects of Christian nominalism. First, for some it is possible to be religious without believing in God at all. People may attend church services, participate in church rites or get involved in apparently

religious activities, but without inner belief or conviction in God. Further, some people may align to an institutional affiliation just to ensure a place for their children in a religious school.

An important feature of Day's book is the notion of natal, ethnic and aspirational nominalism. Though written in the European context, this book has relevance for Christianity outside Europe and North America. For the churches being researched in Bunia, all three forms of nominalism may apply in one way or another. Day's research underlines the need for pastors and church elders to ask the reason why people want to join churches. The research also underlines the need to clarify the Gospel of Jesus Christ when proclaiming it.

#### ***1.7.6 Hawkins & Parkinson (2011) What 1,000 churches reveal about spiritual growth***

The sixth contribution to the present study of Christian nominalism in church membership comes from Willow Creek Community Church, Illinois, which initiated a survey of several churches in the United States resulting in the book entitled *Move: What 1,000 churches reveal about spiritual growth*, Hawkins and Parkinson (2011). Though not directly written on the subject of Christian nominalism, the book is relevant to this study.

A significant feature of this survey on church health is that the book moves beyond size and numbers to answer the following questions: "Are all the things we do...that these people generously support *really* helping them become fully devoted followers of Christ...or are we just giving them a nice place to go to church?" (Hawkins & Parkinson 2011:15).

Carried out first in Willow Creek church and ministries, the survey was then extended to over 250,000 congregants from 1,007 churches across four geographic regions of the United States from September 2008 to March 2010. The survey adopted as its working definition of spiritual growth Christ's teaching about the great commandment to love God and love others. Using statements

about spiritual beliefs and attitudes from the *Christian Life Profile Assessment Tool* created by Oak Hills Community Church in San Antonio, Texas, the survey asked interviewees how strongly they agreed with certain statements. Statements on spiritual beliefs asked about salvation by grace, the trinity, a personal God, Christ, the authority of the Bible, identity in Christ and stewardship. Statements on spiritual attitudes concerned giving away one's life, faith, time and money. Apart from spiritual beliefs and attitudes, the survey interviewed congregants individually on topics including their spiritual life history, church background, personal spiritual practices, spiritual attitudes and beliefs, in order to probe their attitudes, emotions and motivations in relation to spiritual growth.

The research aimed to “measure” the spiritual growth of church members by listening to them describing their relationship with Jesus. Spiritual growth was defined as believers’ “increasing love for God and for neighbours” based on the great commandment in the Gospel message (Hawkins & Parkinson 2011: ch.1; cf. Mt. 22:37-40).

The research classified church members as “babies”, “adolescents” and “adults” in their spiritual growth, using the imagery of Hebrews 5:12-6:3. The Bible speaks of spiritual babies and mature believers. Those believers who continue to exhibit childish behaviours are likened to babies, against mature believers who exercise their judgment to differentiate between right and wrong and do right. What the research does not address is the category of those who are in the church membership without a personal and living relationship with Jesus Christ, which the scriptures classify as “dead in their transgressions”, so spiritually dead (cf. Ep. 2:1, 5).

The value of this survey on the spiritual health of churches is that it reveals how the pastoral leadership is the critical bottleneck in the implementation of the congregation's spiritual growth. It was found that the leaders with hearts consumed with love for Christ made all the difference (2011: chs 11-16).

Despite the book's western orientation and methodology, this kind of research is urgently needed in Africa if church growth and church health are to move beyond measuring numbers to measuring hearts. The following implications derive from this book for the present study of nominalism. First, the responsibility for spiritual growth belongs both to the church and the individual. Second, it is the responsibility of the pastor and the church leadership to check the claims of those professing to believe in Jesus before they are admitted to membership. Third, unredeemed church members will not grow spiritually whatever programs or activities are planned for them. Their need is the message of salvation in Christ. Churches who fail to identify this need will be satisfied with increase in church attendance only. Fourth, there are those who are not Christians at all, but merely nominal, just as there are those who are Christians but who have not benefited from serious pastoral care. The local church must act as parents to nurture them into disciples. A common mistake in churches today is to think that their work is done once a new convert is baptised and admitted into the communion of believers.

## **1.8 Summary**

It is evident from the scholarship reviewed in this section that nominal Christianity is real and that it threatens the growth of genuine Christian faith in many churches in Africa as in other continents. Christian nominalism is variously understood in relation to religious affiliation, church attendance, and participation in church activities.

The present study attempts to go beyond mere church attendance to consider evidences of true repentance and faith in Christ and the implications of the Christian faith in the daily life and behaviour of church members. It seeks to underline the importance of going beyond size and numbers to "measure" the spiritual growth of church members and the importance of repentance of sin and faith in Christ as major elements in the definition of a Christian.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 raised the issue of Christian nominalism as a major challenge facing the massive growth of the Christian population in many African countries today. Specifically, it evoked the presence of nominal Christians in church membership, with reference to Bunia churches.

A working assumption of this study is that many flock into the churches without true faith in Christ. But how do we check whether one's claim of being a Christian is true or false? Can a true Christian become a nominal one? In other words, is nominal faith the result of a slide, that is, that nominal Christians start off as living, vital Christians and then 'slide' into nominality? Or is he or she simply always nominal, having started nominal and carrying on being nominal? While some respondents' view supports nominalism as the result of a slide from true Christian faith, this study assumes that a nominal Christian has never truly experienced saving faith.

The second major chapter of this study attempts to answer questions such as these. It focuses on biblical insights into the problem of Christian nominalism in search of a more comprehensive definition of the phenomenon. The chapter analyses biblical passages which may help to define a Christian and identify

early indicators of Christian nominalism, and draws implications for the study of Christian nominalism in the Bunia churches.

Christian nominalism is not a biblical expression but a theological construct of the present study. Gibbs has pointed out that “there’s nothing in Scripture that exactly corresponds to the nominality problem experienced by the contemporary church” (2000:39). Nevertheless, the Bible is not mute on who God’s people are, how they ought to relate to Him and what He expects from them. Insights from passages describing how to become God’s people in the Old Testament or His children in the New Testament may serve to shape a working definition of true Christian identity. Similarly, insights from those passages describing the people’s rebellion against and apostasy from God may contribute to the identification of symptoms and indicators of nominal faith in God. Lessons drawn from these biblical examples will lead, in the last section of the present study, to practical suggestions on how to move from nominal Christian faith to genuine faith in Jesus, in the Bunia churches researched in particular.

This second chapter of the study first analyses selected passages in the Old Testament that may be relevant to the research topic. Looking at Exodus 32, where Israel breaks its covenant with God, the research seeks to find the reasons for their failure, which may assist in identifying possible causes of nominal faith in God. It next analyses Judges 2, with the intention of examining Israel’s cyclical pattern of rebellion against God and its implications for the study of Christian nominalism. Finally, Isaiah 29 is studied as an allusion to Israel’s lip service to God, which may offer another indicator of Christian nominalism.

Next, the chapter begins its New Testament study with the first and the third chapters of the gospel of John, which describe how one becomes a child of God. These passages also suggest ways by which people think they can become children of God. They may provide a definition of what a Christian is and what s/he is not. Matthew 7 is studied because it records Jesus’ description of false prophets. They are prophets in name only and therefore fall into our



general category of nominal Christians. The first epistle of John is discussed because it explicitly describes false claims of being Christians. The epistle offers indicators of true faith in Jesus, as well as of false or nominal faith in Christ. Lastly, Jesus' messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation are analysed and, where applicable, lessons are drawn for the study of Christian nominalism.

Although the passages selected may not seem to relate directly to nominalism, their analysis may reveal some aspects of the phenomenon, offer indicators by which to recognise symptoms of nominal Christian faith and provide insights that can be applied to the study of Christian nominalism in church membership. The understanding of these insights can then be used in later sections to shape preventive measures to tackle the problem of nominal Christian faith.

## **2.2 Unbelief as indicator of a nominal faith in God: Exodus 32-34**

### ***2.2.1 Context of the passage***

The story of the golden calf in Exodus may shed light on the nature of Israel's faith in Yahweh. Durham (1987:416), Enns (2000:568) and Houtman (2000:605) share the view that the golden calf tragedy is part of a unified narrative, which covers Israel's rebellion against God (Ex. 32), Moses' mediation (Ex. 33) and God's restoration of the broken covenant (Ex. 34).

Barely after establishing the covenant bond with Yahweh (Ex. 19-24), in which Israel had publicly declared, "We will do everything the LORD has said" (Ex. 19:8) and "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" (Ex. 24:7), the people broke the bond in the tragedy of the golden calf. After the ratification of the Sinaitic covenant, Moses went up on the mountain to receive the

covenant law from Yahweh, and stayed there for forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:12-18).

In their struggle with this long absence of their leader (cf. Ex. 32:1) the people pressured Aaron and successfully forced him to make an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They apparently asked for a god because Moses was no longer available at hand to lead them. This was despite Moses' clear instructions to the elders of the Israelite community: "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them" (Ex. 24:14). Without Moses, the Israelites desired a visible representation of the God who had delivered them from the Egyptian slavery, but it led to the sin of idolatry, the very sin God had warned the community against in the Decalogue.

After Aaron had given in to their desire and made a god in the shape of a calf, the Israelites bowed before the idol to worship it, shouting: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (32:4). As the story unfolds, things get out of Aaron's control and the people indulge in debauchery and sexual licence, pagan revelry.

### ***2.2.2 The nature of Israel's sin***

The golden calf narrative reveals the nature of Israel's violation of the covenant, its root causes and God's reaction to their act of rebellion. Earlier when Israel accepted the covenant, they promised to obey it entirely (cf. Ex. 19:8; 24:3). But their request to Aaron to make gods who could lead them was clearly violating the commandment, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Ex. 20:4). And their worship of the idol was a clear disobedience to the command, "You shall have no other god before me" (Ex. 20:3) and "You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Ex. 20:5).

Some have identified Israel's reaction to the absence of Moses as the root cause of Israel's sin in the golden calf tragedy. Durham (1987:419) labels it "a

frightened impatience” while Enns (2000:569) calls it “a mixture of panic and contempt for Moses”. They tend to conclude that Israel’s request for a god was not a deliberate act of rebellion, but that they were forced to this act of idolatry by the turn of events due to Moses’ absence. Keil & Delitzsch (1981:220-21), however, are more convincing when they argue that the root cause of Israel’s sin was unbelief. In the face of the people’s promise to obey the covenant and God’s frequent reminders (cf. Ex. 20:23; 23:13), they argue, this act of idolatry was a deliberate rebellion against God. Moses’ absence is only used as an excuse, since Moses had clearly directed the people to wait for him. He even appointed Aaron and Hur to settle disputes among the people. “He said to the elders, ‘Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them’” (Ex. 24:14). Keil & Delitzsch argue that “the faith upon which their desire was founded was a very perverted one”. They mean that Israel’s faith not only clung to what was visible, but that it was also “corrupted by the impatience and unbelief of a natural heart, which has not been pervaded by the power of the living God, and imagines itself forsaken by Him whenever His help is not visibly and outwardly at hand” (1981:220).

God’s personal evaluation of Israel as “a stiff-necked people” (cf. Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9) supports the claim that unbelief was the root cause of Israel’s sin. Moreover, Israel’s reactions to crisis situations in the past confirm God’s evaluation. When they grumbled against God in the wilderness, the Israelites showed their lack of faith in God. Though they had just witnessed God’s deliverance from Egypt, they were unable to wait upon him when trapped against the sea with the Egyptian army in hot pursuit (cf. Ex. 14:10-12). In other instances, the people grumbled against Moses because they had no food (Ex. 16:2-3) and drinking water (Ex. 17:1). Despite having seen all God’s works, the Israelites were rebellious at heart due to a fundamental faithlessness. God made it clear that it is only by His grace that the people of Israel inherited the land he promised to their forefathers. He said: “Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people” (De. 9:6). Israel’s privilege of

being God's treasured possession was by God's sole grace, not depending on personal merit from the people.

The psalmist interprets this episode as a deliberate act of ingratitude to God. He says: "At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass. They forgot God who saved them..." (Ps. 106:19-21). Israel's attitude was completely incomprehensible in the face of all God's wonderful provision for them. In the New Testament, Stephen's words throw light upon the nature of Israel's sin: "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt" (Ac. 7:39). He interprets Israel's sin as a deliberate, obstinate disobedience to Moses and, therefore to God. The root cause of this disobedience to God was that in their hearts, the Israelites turned away from God. Instead, they turned back to Egypt. Their unbelief came from their heart.

Besides Israel's unbelief, Aaron's poor leadership in the absence of Moses may have contributed to Israel's faithless disobedience. As the person in charge of the people in the absence of Moses, he could have resisted them. He could have pointed the people to God by recalling his mighty acts of the past. He knew that Israel was prone to evil (Ex. 32:22) but failed to restrain them. By making the golden calf, Aaron acted out of fear. He went so far as to build an altar to worship the idol and, furthermore, even to announce "a festival to the Lord" the following day (Ex. 32:5). They thought they were worshipping the Lord, but did so in a quite unacceptable way. Having run wild (32:25), they indulged in debauchery and sexual licence (32:6), which often accompany idolatry (cf. 1 Co. 10:7-8; Ro. 1:22-24). Aaron's later confrontation with Moses (32:21-24) shows his own spiritual decline. Rather than taking the blame, he throws all the responsibility for the rebellion on the people by saying to Moses: "You know how prone these people are to evil" (32:22). He even denied that he personally crafted the idol (32:24; cf. 32:4). His example indicates the

responsibility of poor leadership for spiritual immaturity and, to some degree, for the nominal faith of the people of God.

### ***2.2.3 God's punishment of Israel's sin***

Unbelief caused the Israelites to forget the commitment they had made (cf. 19:8; 24:3) and rebelled against God. God punished the people by killing about three thousand idolaters on a single day (Ex. 32:27-28). He struck others with a plague (Ex. 32:35). They lacked vital faith in God, despite having witnessed God's marvellous interventions on their behalf from Egypt to the wilderness and their having been signatories of the covenant in Sinai. Because of their unbelief, that generation died in the wilderness. Only their children, with Joshua and Caleb inherited the land (Nu. 14:29-35).

### ***2.2.4 Implications for Christian nominalism***

The golden calf episode has contemporary significance and practical implications for the understanding of Christian nominalism in church membership.

First, the presence of on-going and persistent lack of trust in God despite various exposures to God's word can be an indicator of a merely nominal faith.

Second, it is not enough to be called God's people. One may be associated with God's people, go through the rites of baptism and Holy Communion, witness God's mighty works, behave in some ways like a Christian and be considered a Christian by the community, but still lack personal and living faith in God. Being a registered member of a local church does not automatically qualify a person for being God's child. True faith in God means a personal, dynamic and life-transforming relationship with God (cf. He. 11:6). Those within the people of God without such faith are his people "in name only".

Third, the lack of loyalty of heart to God may also indicate a nominal faith in him. The true Christian will be the one who gives most of his/her thoughts, time and effort to serving God, out of love for Him.

Fourth, pastors and church leaders may also bear the blame for nominal Christian faith within the community of God's people. They may encourage lip service to God for fear of losing their flock. They may be unwilling to confront the sins of their congregants and so their attitude may contribute to condone a sinful lifestyle for church members. They may set bad examples in the eyes of church members and thus lead them astray.

## **2.3 A faithless generation as God's nominal people: Judges 2:6-3:5**

### ***2.3.1 Context of the passage***

The book of Judges is about sin, both individual and corporate, and its consequences. It exposes both Israel's faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship with Yahweh. The stories in the book demonstrate that obedience brings blessing and restoration, while sin brings about God's punishment (Armerding 2000:174-6; cf. Brown 2000:132-3). The cyclical pattern of apostasy, oppression, supplication and deliverance dominates Israel's history in the book of Judges.

Judges 2 exposes some of the causes of Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship with God. It sets the religious background of the entire book by depicting the rebellion of the covenant people (Butler 2009:49). The chapter provides a summary outline of the spiritual background to the period of the judges (Younger 2002:84).

Theologically, chapter two is an evaluation of Israel from Yahweh's perspective. The nation has broken the covenant relationship with God, assimilating Canaanite culture and serving their gods. Block (1999:75) refers to this assimilation of the Canaanite culture as "the canaanization of Israel". While still retaining the name of Yahweh as their God, the people syncretised Yahweh's worship with forms and practices from their neighbouring nations (2:11-13, 17, 19).

### ***2.3.2 Nature of the new generation's sin***

After the death of Joshua and the entire generation who outlived him, "another generation grew up" (2:10). They are described as a generation who did not know Yahweh. They had no memory of all that God did to bring Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness into the land of Canaan. How did a whole generation grow up with no knowledge or memory of Yahweh?

There is a need to understand how the faith was transmitted from the first to the second generation in order to explain why this new generation was a faithless one. There are three views regarding who was to blame for the faithlessness of the younger generation. The first is the failure of the older generation. The second is a personal choice of the younger generation. The third is that each generation had a part to play in the transmission process and therefore each has its own share of the blame.

The flow of the passage does not appear to support the view held by, among others, Block (1999:123-26) and Adeyemo (2006:296-98) that the older generation failed to pass the faith on to the next. The passage states that the Israelites "served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him" (Jg. 2:7). There is evidence that they did pass on the faith as per Moses' charge to the Joshua generation in Deuteronomy 31. In Joshua 24:16-27 the passing on of the faith elicited a verbal confession from the oncoming generation, who "served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua

and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel” (24:31). The older generation is therefore not to blame for the newer generation’s rebellion against God.

In the passage God points an accusing finger at the new generation. He accuses them of doing evil, forsaking the Lord, following pagan gods of the surrounding nations, worshiping them and serving them, and thus provoking God to anger (Jg. 2:11-13). This generation’s stubbornness in returning to pagan worship every time their deliverer died (Jg. 2:19), becoming each time more remote from God than before, demonstrates wilful rebellion against God and the choice of the Canaanite religion as more fitting to their sensual nature.

Taking into account Thompson’s definition of “to know God” as “to recognize him for what he is, the sovereign Lord who makes demand on man’s obedience and especially upon obedience of his people Israel, with whom he has made a covenant” (1996:658), knowing God personally would have prevented this generation of Israelites from rejecting the God of their fathers and rebelling against him. They lacked obedience to God, which is quite the same as rebellion against God. Of the same view, Lindsey (2000:382) suggests that “to know” in Judges 2:10 probably has the sense of “acknowledge”, thus indicating “unbelief rather than ignorance”. One must suppose that the new generation’s knowledge of Yahweh had become purely nominal. In other words they knew, but they failed to interiorise the faith.

The truth being underlined in this analysis is that discipling the new generation, however crucial it may appear, will not guarantee an “authentic experience of God” if the new generation does not itself respond personally to the marvellous revelations of God. Cundall is correct that “each generation must enter into its own living religious experience; it cannot continue in the spiritual strength of its past heroes” (1968:67) and that the new generation’s attitude towards God could be a “wilful overlooking” of all the evidence of their tradition. That is why Gibbs underlines the importance of personal appropriation of the faith by any new generation when he points out that “the important issue is to recognize that



as soon as the second generation becomes the dominant group in the life of the church, nominality becomes a growing problem unless that generation has its own authentic experience of God” (2000:44). For him, when the second generation becomes the dominant group, there is the danger that they will refuse to hear directly from God and instead learn of God’s deeds through tradition rather than from first-hand experience.

### ***2.3.3 God’s reaction to the generation’s faithlessness***

God was aggrieved and angered by his people’s lack of faith in him. As a result of their disobedience and rejection, God gave up the people to their oppressors all around, actively intervening to bring them defeat in their battles against their enemies. Furthermore, he stopped driving out from Canaan the remaining nations that Joshua had allowed to remain there.

### ***2.3.4 Implications for Christian nominalism***

Judges 2 exposes the tragedy of a faithless generation. It raises some questions of significance for the study of nominalism. First, one wonders whether this generation was God’s people at all in the same sense as their fathers with whom God had made a covenant. Of course they were born into the people of God but as the second-generation adherents, they failed to personally believe in God and adhere to his covenant with their fathers. In the same way, being a registered church member does not necessarily mean that one is saved and a child of God. Being born into a Christian family, having been baptised, taking Holy Communion, being a church member, are no substitute for having a saving faith in Jesus. The need is for a personal, dynamic and life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

Second, while apostasy and rebellion imply that there was faith at the outset but then faith was abandoned, faithlessness or nominal faith implies that one has never experienced true faith before. It suggests that a person has adhered to a

faith tradition without a personal and living relationship with Jesus. Thus, it is possible to integrate into the membership of a local church, go through all the church rites and even get a leadership position, without any authentic encounter with Jesus Christ. This situation is most likely to be the case with the second and subsequent generations of Christians who may be only following their father's traditions without having personally committed their lives to Christ but.

## **2.4 Hypocritical worship: Isaiah 29:13-14**

### ***2.4.1 Context of the passage***

Isaiah 29:13-14 depicts a form of false piety denounced elsewhere in the Old Testament (cf. Is. 1:10-17, Ho. 6:4-6; 7:14; Am. 4:4-5, 5:21-25, Mi. 6:6-8, Je. 7:21ff and Ps. 50:8-15). It is a diatribe in the form of an indictment and verdict against the nation's abandonment of Yahweh (Blenkinsopp 2000:405; see also Childs 2001:218). In the form of an announcement of judgment, verses 13-14 express Yahweh's reaction to the people's effort to approach him. Childs (2001:214-17) and Oswalt (1986:532) see in the pericope a classic prophetic literary genre in the form of an accusation and an announcement of God's intervention.

### ***2.4.2 Nature of the sin***

Verses thirteen and fourteen seem to be an allusion to people engaging in cultic activity. This is indicated by the fact that they "come near" God and "honour" him. God condemns hypocritical worship in this pericope. Earlier in Isaiah 1:11-17, God expressed unhappiness for his people's formalistic religious rituals because the people had come to place more faith in the rituals than in God himself.

The pericope seems to link knowledge of God with sincerity of heart. In indicting the nation, God's chief accusation is that when the Israelites approach him to consult him or worship him, they do so only with their mouths and lips. This means that Israel's heart is far from God, and consequently, her worship and reverence are an empty religious activity. This kind of worship is not true worship of the true God, but hypocritical.

The previous verses (9-12) seem to attribute this rote worship of God to the people's inability to understand his word and work, and thus to know him (Jensen & Irwin 1990:246). The lack of true knowledge of God and of his word may well be the cause of their lapse into pagan-style worship of God. Thus the problem is not cultic piety as such, but, as Wildberger (2002:89) points out, a confession that is on the lips alone. This suggests that true worship of God depends on true knowledge of God springing from sincerity of heart.

The blame for lack of proper knowledge of God among God's people lay on the leadership, who had no vision and understanding of God (29:9-12; cf. Pr. 29:13). As a result of their failure in understanding God, they only transmitted to the people "rules taught by men" (29:13). The expression may be referring to ordinances regulating worship, describing how such activities were to take place. Initially developed to help to lead worshipers into a living experience with the living God, these ordinances had become rigid traditions that stifled true experience with God. Leaders were still carefully making sacrifices and offerings to God, but in their hearts they were unfaithful to God.

Personal and living relationship with God had thus become secondary. The people claimed to come close to God but in fact they merely went through the motions. In their hearts they were disobedient to God and to his word. They slipped into routine patterns of worship, reducing true worship of God to a set of "dos" and "don'ts". Routine worship replaced the worshipers' faith in God with the "man-made" rules. According to Oswalt, such an attitude towards the worship of God eventually comes to mean "that living with a mighty, dynamic and holy God does not demand one's whole attention" (1986:532).

True worship must involve the very seat of one's personality, the heart (cf. Ex. 35:5, De. 10:16, 1 Sa. 10:9, 1 Ch. 28:9, Ps. 66:18, Jl. 2:13). Worship that touches God's heart comes from a "broken and repentant heart" (Ps. 51:16-17). When sacrifices, which are to be an outward sign of worshipers' faith in God, lack the inward faith, they become empty rituals because true faith is non-existent.

### ***2.4.3 Implications for Christian nominalism***

First, the prophecy of Isaiah suggests that the fact that the people's hearts were far from God is indicated by their lack of obedience to his commands. The people of Israel claimed to be close to God by approaching him and even honouring him. They continued to offer the traditional sacrifices and offerings but they were still unfaithful to God in their hearts. Israel's religion had long become routine, an outward and empty religious activity. Their worship was only verbal because they were disobedient. Thus we see that outward signs of faith in God are meaningless if no faith exists inwardly. In this case, people worship God out of habit and conformity to "human commands" rather than out of a heartfelt love for and obedience to God. Consequently, Christian worship of God becomes, as Watts points out, something that can be taught and recited without involving the will (1985:386). The Israelites' hearts were not really in their worship services. Such worship was and still is hypocritical and formalistic.

Second, true worship is far more than outward religious ceremonies and rituals. These are empty unless they are performed with an attitude of love and obedience to God. Therefore, being "religious", that is, going to church, giving offerings and tithing, serving in a church ministry, etc., is no substitute for a living and vital relationship with God. It is possible to accomplish all these religious duties without true knowledge of God or genuine trust in him.

Third, an intellectual knowledge of God (through the catechism, for example) is different from personal knowledge of him growing from a true experience with

him. As Carter (1972:406) correctly points out, true knowledge of God is achieved only when he is known with the heart as well as with the mind, and when his word is part of the worshiper's life as well as of his lips. One cannot piously worship God when one continues to live a sinful life. True fear of God, which is the foundation of true worship, involves the heart and leads to genuine devotion.

## **2.5 Becoming children of God: John 1:12-13; 3:3-8**

### ***2.5.1 Context of the passage***

John 1:1-18 introduces some of the central themes of the entire gospel, such as "world", "life", "light", "truth", "witness". The prologue summarises how God sent his Son Jesus of Nazareth into the world in order to reveal God's glory and his salvation to humanity (Carson 1991:111). The narrative focuses on Jesus and his messianic mission, presenting the incarnation (the word made flesh) as the culmination of salvation history (v. 14). The third chapter of the gospel according to John brings a further focus on the necessity of new birth as the sole entry point into the family of God's children. The analysis of these two chapters of John aims to define what a true child of God is and what a nominal child of God is.

### ***2.5.2 What it means to believe in Jesus***

Receiving Jesus (Jn. 1:12) is synonymous with "believing in his name". It is, in Carson's terms, "allegiance to him, complete trust in him, acknowledging his claims and confessing him' (1991:125-6).

### **2.5.3 God's true children**

Verses 12-13 identify some features of true faith in Jesus and of no faith in him. Being a child of God is being "born of God". The Greek expression used both in John 1:13 and 3:3 is *gennethenai ek*, to be begotten of. Ringwald (1992:176-80) understands the expression to mean "an exchange of one's old nature against a new one" and having a similar meaning as *anagennao* or "born anew" in 1 Pt. 1:3, 23. For him, "being born again" expresses the same idea as "born of God" (1:13; cf. 1 Jn. 3:9) and "born from above" (Jn. 3:7).

The centrality of new birth for salvation is made clearer in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in John 3. He tells Nicodemus in a blunt statement that his real need is for new birth (Jn. 3:3). The expression "born of water and spirit" (Jn. 3:5-8) serves to further explain "being born again". As Carson points out, the use of one preposition that governs both phrases in 3:5 indicates that "born of spirit and water" becomes the equivalent of "born from above" (1991:192-193; cf. Ngewa 2006:1258).

Therefore, those who believe in Jesus receive the status of "children of God". They are integrated into God's family. As Carson (1991:126) points out, "they enjoy the privilege of becoming the covenant people of God". It is not different from Paul's "adoption as sons of God" (Ro. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Ga. 4:5). In the terms of John 8:42-47 those who are not "children of God" are "children of the Devil". True children of God are different from the children of the devil.

### **2.5.4 Who God's children are not**

Not all those who heard Jesus' message of salvation believed in him. Many in his audience deliberately chose to ignore and even decline his offer of salvation. Among these were his own people, Israel, God's own possession, who, as Morris (1995:96) points out, "ought to have known him" through his covenant relationship and had been waiting for the Messiah for centuries. They rejected

him, having failed to recognise in the Word their creator and the source of life. Worse, they also deliberately chose to decline his offer of the life-giving light. Therefore they are not God's children.

Those who are not God's children are referred to as born of natural descent, or of human decision or a husband's will" (v.13). The passage alludes to the natural processes of relationships. It means that salvation has nothing to do with race, nor with sexual behaviour, nor with any other human accomplishment or merit. Saving faith is not a humanly accomplishable task. It is a work of God appropriated by faith.

### ***2.5.5 Implications for Christian nominalism***

The above analysis brings forth certain issues of great significance for the present study's understanding of nominal Christian faith.

First, in light of the above scripture passage, a Christian can be defined as a person who has experienced God's work in his or her life, has turned away from his sins and has received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. He or she becomes a child of God, obedient to Jesus Christ and developing an authentic, personal, sin-forgiving and life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.

Second, based on the above definition, a nominal Christian can be defined, according to McClosky (2002: chap 10), as a person who claims the name Christian, but who has no authentic, personal, sin-forgiving and life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. His/her allegiance to Jesus is in name only, not in heart.

Third, there's only one way of becoming children of God just as there's only one name by which to be saved, namely Jesus Christ (Ac. 4:12). Consequently, any other way of becoming God's children or entering his family is a counterfeit. These fake ways include salvation by works, by the rituals of water baptism and

taking communion, by being born in a Christian family, etc. Anybody claiming to be a Christian on the basis of these is a nominal Christian.

Fourth, nominal Christians can be found even among those in the leadership of local churches. That Nicodemus with all his credentials as a teacher of law in Israel was not yet born again, should serve as a reminder to those who think they are Christians because they have been trained in bible school or theology, or because they preach and teach the word of God. Regularly coming to church services, singing in the church choir, being a registered church member in a local church and following its traditions, serving on a committee in the local church, etc., will never by itself make someone an authentic child of God. There are other ways, though, of differentiating true children of God from nominal ones.

## **2.6 Recognised by their fruit: Matthew 7:15-23**

### ***2.6.1 Context of the passage***

In this passage of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus warns against false claims of prophecy and the ways of detecting such claims in order to determine whether they are genuine or spurious. Matthew 7:15-23 is best studied as a single unified pericope, with verse 15 serving as an introduction, followed by a rule for testing spirits (16-20), a principle for entering the kingdom of heaven (21) and further development about false prophets (22-23). The pericope emphasises the danger of false prophets to the Christian community of disciples. Beyond the direct audience of Jesus' sermon, the passage challenges Christian leaders (Nolland 2005:336-7).



### **2.6.2 Warnings against false teachers**

By warning his disciples to “watch out for false prophets” (7:15) Jesus points to the reality of such people and the threat they pose to the community of God’s children. Paul (Ac. 20:29-31), Peter (2 Pt. 2:1-22), John (1 Jn. 4:1-3) and Jude (v. 3-4) all warn against false teachers of God’s word. The passage in 2 Peter clearly states that there have always been and there will always be false teachers among the people of God.

From the immediate context of Matthew 7, the essence of false prophets, as Hagner rightly points out, is “that they pretend to have and proclaim the truth while their lives evidence that they themselves do not follow the truth” (1993:183). In other words, they claim direct inspiration from God, but their practical lives show that they have very little, if any at all, understanding of God’s will (Nolland 2005:336).

False prophets are part of the visible Christian community. They have come to be regarded or accepted as genuine members of the community, which may explain their rise to the position as teachers in the community. But they come “in sheep’s clothing” (Mt. 7:15), meaning that though ‘wolves’ in reality they present themselves as true members of the people of God. Approaching true believers, they present themselves as harmless in order to gain acceptance of the congregation and access into the ministry of the church. They call Jesus “Lord”, perform miracles, prophesy and cast out demons in his name (Mt. 7:21-22). They thus give all external appearances of promoting authentic Christianity in word and work. All these things make them sound like “true Christians” (Allison 2004:112). By wearing “sheep’s clothing” these false prophets appear to be “Christians”.

But the reality is that “inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Mt. 7:15). Just as wolves are deadly enemies of the sheep, false prophets “are natural enemies of the truth and the true people of God” (Hagner 1993:183). They will seek their own profit at the expense of those of the flock they are supposed to nourish,

because their real objective is to deceive believers and lure weak members away from faith in Jesus Christ.

### ***2.6.3 Recognised by their fruit***

“By their fruit you will recognise them” in 7:16 emphasises the conduct and deeds of the false prophets as criteria for detecting whether their claims are true or spurious. Hagner suggests that the future tense in “you will know” does not refer to the time of the final judgment as it does in 7:21-23, but “is a timeless or gnomic future referring to Matthew’s readers then and there” (1993:183). It is a call to the Christian community to examine these teachers’ claims by evaluating their lives.

Just as a tree is consistent in the kind of fruit it produces, in the same way teachers of God’s word will exhibit behaviour and moral character consistent with their true nature. The passage underlines the absolute essentiality of holy living for those who belong to Jesus and follow him, as well as its impossibility for those who do not belong to and follow Jesus. Morris points out:

The most orthodox avowals of faith have no value in the eyes of God if they are not translated into concrete obedience to his will. One may with his lips loudly profess his faith in God, and even invoke Jesus as Lord, yet deny him by his thoughts, words, and acts (ibid. 181).

The fact that Jesus, at the final judgment, will deny them entry into the kingdom of God (Mt. 7:23) further proves they had never at any time belonged to him. Their argument with the Lord (Mt. 7:22) seems to indicate that they sincerely thought they were serving Jesus in prophesying, performing miracles and exorcising demons. But these actions prove to have been counterfeit, self-deception.

#### ***2.6.4 Implications for Christian nominalism***

First, Matthew 7:15-23 is a stern warning against hypocrisy among Christian leaders who are pretending to be what they are not in reality. France points out that “spiritual activities can be carried out by those who still lack the vital and personal relationship with Jesus” (2007:292-3). It is therefore possible that some people in leadership positions in the church may use their position to claim to follow Jesus and even exhibit good works without genuinely belonging to Jesus. This means that nominal faith may be found even among pastors and church leaders.

Second, just as a fruit tree is expected to bear fruit, true Christians should manifest by the way they live that they have genuinely turned from their sins to God. Beyond their words and religious rituals and activities, true Christians will see to it that their conduct backs up their words and actions. True Christians are those whose lifestyles manifest the fruit of the Spirit. God looks beyond “pious” words and religious rituals and activities for Christian conduct and behaviour in believers’ daily lifestyles.

Third, a person’s moral character and lifestyle will be consistent with his or her true nature, regardless of claims they may make. They may try to hide immoral behaviour, but within a true Christian fellowship it will soon be exposed.

Fourth, believers have the duty to use discernment in order to test claims or pretensions to serve God. They can do so by evaluating the claimers’ behaviour and lifestyle and so differentiate the true from the false. It is therefore of the utmost necessity for the church as a whole to put to the test all those claiming to be Christians, evaluate their claims or their pretension of serving God and judge whether they are true or spurious. More tests of true faith are provided for below in the analysis of the epistle of John.

## **2.7 Three tests of claims of being a Christian: 1 John**

### **2.7.1 Context of the passage**

Although the epistle provides no specific identification of its author, significant internal and external evidence favour the view that John, son of Zebedee and brother of James, is the author of the three letters (Akin 2001:22-27; Stott 1988:17-43). John writes as a pastor to Christian congregations facing serious challenges from false teachers. Calling his readers “dear children” or “dear friends” throughout the epistle, John’s primary concern is to protect them and establish them in their Christian faith and life (cf. 1 Jn. 1:4; 2:1, 26; 5:13). By using the expressions “we come to know” (*ginoskomen*, twenty-five times) and “we know as a fact” (*oidamen*, fifteen times), John contrasts the certainties of true Christian faith with false claims of being Christians (1:5-2:2) and presents tests by which to identify true Christians (2:3-5:12).

The relevance of the first epistle of John to the present study is that it provides “tests” by which to judge whether one has eternal life or not. The first test is theological, whether one believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jn. 2:23; 3:23; 5:5, 10, 13) and that he came “in the flesh” (1 Jn. 4:2). The second test is moral, whether one practises righteousness and keeps God’s commands (1 Jn. 2:3-6; 2:28-3:10). The third is social, whether one loves his or her neighbour as himself/herself (1 Jn. 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-12). The implications are that the three tests of faith, obedience and love put together can evidence the status of God’s children. Their absence can evidence the absence of genuine repentance and faith.

### **2.7.2 Belief in Jesus or the doctrinal test of a true Christian**

Faith in Jesus as the incarnated Son of God (1 Jn. 2:18-27; 4:1-6, 15) is the doctrinal test of a true claim to be a Christian. Whether one is a true Christian or

a nominal one can be tested by whether or not a person believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1 Jn. 2:22). It is clear from John's statement in this verse that a false teacher rejects the divinity of Jesus. Such a person, even though he or she may claim to know God and to have fellowship with him (cf. 1:5-6, 2:4-5; 5:1-2), is the liar par excellence. He or she is the enemy of Christ. The epistle makes it clear that such false teachers, though they were members of the Christian community to the extent that they became teachers of the community, demonstrated by their separation from the body of Christ that they were never true believers (1 Jn. 2:19).

That is why the Christian community is warned to constantly beware of alleged Christian teachers (1 Jn. 4:1-3). They are not to trust every teaching just because it is said to come from God's word. The fact that the prohibition "not to believe" and the command to "test" are in the present tense, indicates that such attitudes are to become the habit of the people of God in a world filled with people claiming to speak from God. Truth and falsehood do not belong together. The truth is that false teachers are popular among non-Christians because they tell them what they want to hear (1 Jn. 4:5). Whereas true Christian teachers, who faithfully proclaim the word of God, denouncing sin and advocating transformational behaviour, are unlikely to gain popularity among non-Christians (1 Jn. 4:6).

The doctrinal test is more than a mere recognition that the man Jesus was and indeed is the divine Son of God. True faith goes further to experience eternal life in and through him (1 Jn. 5:10-13). To "believe in the Son of God" (1 Jn. 5:10) and to "have the Son of God" (1 Jn. 5:12) is to establish a personal and constant relationship with him. Such commitment makes all the difference as to whether one is a true Christian or an unbeliever. The Christian's assurance of eternal life is based, not on his or her feelings, but on the facts that s/he believes God's truth (1 Jn. 5:13). One of the purposes of writing this epistle was to give assurance to those who had put their confidence in Jesus that they had

eternal life. Unbelievers do not have eternal life. Either one is a believer or is an unbeliever. There is no middle ground.

### ***2.7.3 Obedience or the moral test of true Christians***

The second test of true Christian faith John analyses is obedience (1 Jn. 2:3-6; 2:28-3:10; 5:2-3). It is the moral test of a true Christian. John states: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands" (1 Jn. 2:3). He continues, "The man who says, 'I know him', but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:4). These verses emphasise that genuine knowledge of God and obedience to God's commands belong together. "Knowing God" in this epistle is not simply being aware of his existence, but, as Smalley points out, "the proper aim of knowledge should be a right relationship with God" (1984:45). Knowing God in this epistle involves fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:4), "walking in his light" (1 Jn. 1:7) and being and living "in him" (1 Jn. 2:5-6). Therefore, any claim of intimate, personal and saving knowledge of God that does not show itself in loyalty to God's will and obedience to him is not only a lie, but also, as Ngewa puts it, "a sign of an absence of truth in the person's whole life" (2006:1530).

Obedience to God's word as a test of true knowledge of God is further seen in the exhibition of right behaviour (1 Jn. 2:28-3:10). The righteous conduct of believers is the proof, rather than the condition of their regeneration (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:10). True faith in Jesus should therefore result in righteous behaviour, which is the opposite of living a sinful life (1 Jn. 3:7-8). Righteous actions characterise the children of God just as sinful behaviours characterise the children of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10). Obedience to God implies that sin must not be a believer's way of life (1 Jn. 3:9) because, as Smalley points out, "we reproduce in our lives a 'family' likeness, depending upon our spiritual parentage" (1984:171).

The extent of one's moral obedience is, therefore, one simple test of his or her faith in and knowledge of God. The ideal character of a true child of God is to

avoid sin. Condoning sin or living a lifestyle of sin is an indicator of the lack of true Christian experience (Marshall 1978:182).

#### ***2.7.4 Love or the social test of a true Christian***

Love (1 Jn. 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-12, 16-21) is identified by the first epistle of John as a third test by which to judge whether one is a true Christian or not. John states: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light" (1 Jn. 2:9-10). It means that showing hatred towards fellow believers, while claiming to be in fellowship with God, is a contradiction. Believers whose attitude causes them to constantly despise fellow believers and, indeed, those outside the church, and treat them as enemies, exclude themselves from the light and love of God. According to this test, they show by their actions that they are not true believers. True believers are to love their fellow believers, irrespective of their gender, race, tribe or social ranks. Love for believers becomes, as Ngewa points out, "the lens through which one looks at all relationships" (2006:1531). Love and light belong together just as hatred and darkness belong together. Darkness in this epistle refers either to "sinful behaviour" as in 1 John 1:5 and 2:11 or to "the realm in which sinful behaviour predominates" (Kruse 2000:86). Hatred is the evidence of spiritual death (1 Jn. 3:14) just as love is the evidence of spiritual life (1 Jn. 3:14). But the essence of Christian love is self-sacrifice (1 Jn. 3:16), which involves not only the laying down of one's life, but also lesser opportunities to share material possessions with those in need (1 Jn. 3:17-18).

In 1 John 4:7-12 the apostle gives three foundations of Christian love towards one another. First, Christian love is grounded in the very nature of God. "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 Jn. 4:7-8). Christians love each other because God is love. Second, Christian love is grounded in the historical manifestation of God's love to humanity through the atoning death of Jesus for sinners. Christians love one another because God first loved them by

sending his Son to redeem them (1 Jn. 4:9-11). Third, Christian love is grounded in God's present and continuous activity of love (1 Jn. 4:12). It means that mutual love among believers evidences God's indwelling presence in them. Inversely, it means that hatred between God's people is a criterion of a nominal faith (1Jn. 4:20). Because love for God and love for brothers and sisters belong together as a single commandment (1 Jn. 4:21) the easiest proof of being Christians should be, as Stott points out, "love towards those continually before our eyes, with ample opportunity to serve them, rather than loving an invisible God" (Stott 1988:170).

### ***2.7.5 Implications for Christian nominalism***

First, a Christian, in the language of John, is someone who professes faith in the historic Jesus as the incarnated Son of God, evidenced by righteous living and love to God's people.

Second, in light of the above, a nominal Christian may be defined as someone who claims to know God and to have a relationship with him, but whose claims are negated by his or her unrighteous living and hatred for God's people and by their heterodoxy, especially with reference to the person of Jesus Christ.

Third, it is possible for believers to know for certain whether they have eternal life or not. The first epistle of John makes possible that assurance of eternal life and provides tests by which believers can check their assurance and also detect whether others' claims to be Christians are true or false.

Fourth, nominal Christians may be found even among church leaders. They may present themselves as true Christians and even gain access to the church's pulpit ministry. But once in this position of leadership, they work to deceive true believers and attempt to lead them astray, thus destroying their faith. Their commitment to the body of Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19), their lifestyle (1 Jn. 3:23-24), their teaching and the fruit of their ministry (1 Jn. 4:5-6) will clearly demonstrate whether or not they are liars.



Fifth, Christians have the responsibility to exercise spiritual discernment over all teaching of God's word to assess whether it is true or false. In the same way, the Christian church community has the duty to test claims of being Christians by its leaders and members. Only true faith in Christ is an essential condition for living as God's children.

## **2.8 Nominal Christian churches: Revelation 2-3**

### ***2.8.1 Context of the passage***

The seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor were spoken by the Lord to John, generally believed to be the apostle, to be given to seven churches in western Asia Minor toward the end of the first century of the Christian era. Against the various interpretative approaches to the book of Revelation (see Beale 1999:44-49), the present study follows Michaels' in stating that the letters to the seven churches are "real messages to actual first-century congregations" and should be "read as pastoral messages to first-century congregations with implications for other churches in many different times and places" (1997:24). This view is equally shared by Osborne who adds that "since each of the seven churches was a natural centre for the dissemination of information to other churches in the region, so the problems in the seven churches were also representative of the rest of the Asian churches" (Osborne 2002:105; cf. Smalley 2005:56).

They are selected for this study of nominalism because they are understood to be objective evaluations of the spiritual state of these churches by the head of the church, Jesus Christ. The analysis aims to draw implications for the study of nominalism. After a brief general introduction to the seven letters the study singles out two of the five churches that have received a special rebuke from the Lord. It analyses the reason for the failures of these churches and the

specific solutions offered for their restoration. The two are the church in Sardis and in Laodicea. The Lord's messages to them have implications for the present study's understanding of Christian nominalism.

### ***2.8.2 Christ's message to a lifeless church in Sardis (Re. 3:1-6)***

Sardis was an important commercial city located some fifty kilometres south of Thyatira, on an important trade route. Its industries including jewellery, dye and textiles had made the city wealthy (Walvoord 2000:938). But the spiritual state of the church in this city was pitiful as the Lord expresses it in these words: "You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (3:2).

The Sardian church was outwardly alive and had gained a good reputation among other Asian churches as a "living church". It had works (3:1) that earned it the reputation of being a living church. The church was probably busy organising and holding ceremonies, religious practices, church worship and church meetings. But the head of the church, Jesus, denounces the church's outward appearance of life in the strongest terms. By God's standards, the church in Sardis was a dead church. The hyperbole "alive ... but dead" is intended to emphasise the critical spiritual condition into which believers in Sardis had fallen (4:4). Their deeds as believers were evil and falling far short in God's eyes (3:2). They were far from meeting God's standards of a living church because their good works were not done out of faith in and love for God. Because of this, the church had lost the true essence of the Christian faith and was depending only on a form of religiosity. Walvoord expresses this by pointing out that "their outer appearance was a facade hiding their lack of life" (2000:938).

The fact that there were a "few names" who had not "soiled their clothes" (3:4) implies there were few genuine Christians in the church in Sardis. Their presence is a demonstration that it is possible to stand firm even when

everyone around is falling away. They remind believers that one does not necessarily need to follow the crowd; instead, one needs to follow God.

The Lord's severe condemnation of the church raises the question whether the majority of church members in Sardis were Christians at all. They had heard the gospel message and even received it (Re. 3:3), but they failed to obey it, except for a few among them (Re. 3:4). They still had an opportunity to repent (Re. 3:2-3). The Lord's exhortation demonstrates his love to the sinner, which does not desire his death, but rather calls him to hear the word of God, obey it and turn to God in repentance. The passage suggests that these were Christians in a very bad way. The only way back to true faith was to remember the word of God received and heard, obey it and repent (Re. 3:2-3, 5).

### ***2.8.3 Message to a lukewarm church in Laodicea (Re. 3:14-22)***

Laodicea, about forty-five miles southeast of Philadelphia, was the wealthiest city in Phrygia in Roman times, enriched by agricultural and commercial prosperity. The city was a marketing centre at the crossroads of three highways, adding to its reputation as a great commercial and administrative city, a banking centre, a large manufacturing center of clothing and carpets of native black wool and a famous school of medicine but lacking an adequate and convenient source for water (Mounce 1998:106-7; Ford 1975:419).

That the church is "neither hot nor cold" (Re. 3:15) indicates that spiritual lukewarmness was the church's permanent state. This is evidenced by their complacency with material wealth to the extent that they were unaware of their extreme spiritual poverty (Re. 3:17). The church was wealthy, as was the city of Laodicea, but it lacked a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. The worldly pleasures of material possessions and security blinded Laodicean believers to their real spiritual condition described as "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Re. 3:17). Charles correctly points out that the church in Laodicea

“dwelt with complacency on what they had achieved” but “were unconscious that they were wholly ... out of communion with Christ” (1920:95).

The church viewed itself as being in a good spiritual condition by saying: “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing” (Re. 3:17). Against this suggestion that the wealth of the church in Laodicea was spiritual (cf. Mounce 1998:107), it is best understood as material wealth because they boast of achieving it by their own efforts and of not being in want. Thus their economic prosperity seemed to have convinced them that they were in good spiritual condition. They saw no guilt in their present state and therefore felt no need for repentance. But, for the Lord, their condition was so repugnant and distasteful that Christ threatened to reject them as an unbelieving church (Re. 3:16).

While the apparently poor church in Smyrna was spiritually rich (Re. 2:9), the apparently rich church in Laodicea was spiritually poor (Re. 3:17). Some indications in the text may offer clues to the miserable spiritual condition of this church. First, the Lord wished they were either hot or cold, but they were neither hot nor cold. Second, they were totally indifferent to their real spiritual condition and need. They had become hardened and self-sufficient (Re. 3:17). Third, their acquired economic well-being proved to be their spiritual downfall, blinding church members to their worsening spiritual condition and hardening their hearts against the need to repent.

The fact that Jesus is asking church members in Laodicea to buy from him refined gold, white clothes and salve shows that their sin was spiritual poverty, nakedness and blindness (Re. 3:18). Jesus’ offer (Re. 3:20) and promise (Re. 3:21) suggest that they were a self-deceived “Christian” community. Barker (1981:458) correctly points out:

The deeper problem in the Laodicean church was not simply their indifference. It was their ignorance of their real condition...The spirit of the surrounding culture had crept into the congregation and had paralyzed their spiritual life...Yet the Laodiceans may have interpreted their material wealth as a blessing from God and thus have been self-deceived as to their true condition.

The Lord's offer to the church in Laodicea (Re. 3:19) suggests that their real need was repentance, of which they were unfortunately unaware. Beasley-Murray (1974:105) depicts the tragic state of the Laodicean church when he points out:

To have enough religion to disguise one's need of a living faith is to be in a worse condition than having no faith at all. An honest atheist is more acceptable to the Lord than a self-satisfied religious man, for such a man's religion has blunted his conscience and blinded him to his need for repentance.

For him, if these believers were unable to see their true spiritual condition, they were unable, too, to move back to the line of God's will for them. Therefore, he identifies them as non-Christians.

#### ***2.8.4 Implications for Christian nominalism***

These messages from the head of the church, Jesus Christ, to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, especially to the churches in Sardis and Laodicea, have the following significance and implications for the study of Christian nominalism:

First, not all churches are worthy of the name of Jesus Christ. Some so-called "churches of Christ" are Christian churches in name only. The important thing, as Ngundu (2006:1552) points out, "is not our acceptance by this world's society but that our eternal relationship to Christ is genuine". Many churches measure their effectiveness by the standards of this world rather than by the standards of the head of the church, Jesus Christ. They do everything in order to be seen and approved by men rather than by God.

Second, church membership is no substitute for a personal and dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. The outward aspect of the church can be misleading and self-deceiving. Like the church in Laodicea, church members

may feel very “comfortable” with their church’s outward service but be unaware of their true spiritual condition.

Third, it is a tragedy that churches sometimes feel they have done nothing wrong and therefore see no need to repent. In such situations, nominal Christianity is bound to spread.

## **2.9 Summary**

The analysis of selective passages in seven different books from both the Old and the New Testaments aimed to give biblical insights into the problem of nominal Christian faith. The selected biblical passages, though not always directly related to Christian nominalism, have helped to draw out the practical significance and implications in relation to the study of Christian nominalism in church membership, which is the concern of the present study.

From the Old Testament, the experience of Israel in the golden calf episode in the desert has indicated that unbelief was a major indicator of their lack of trust in God. It explained their obstinate rebellion against God and the hardening of their hearts despite having witnessed God’s wondrous deliverance of them from Egypt and his miraculous interventions on their behalf from Egypt to the desert wanderings. Not all members of the Israelite community, called by God’s name, were truly his people. Many merely conformed to the practices of their fellow Israelites and adhered to their traditions.

Israel’s experience in Canaan after the death of Joshua and all his generation raises the issue of the second and subsequent generations of adherents to the faith today. The emergence of a faithless generation teaches us that Christian parents do not give birth to Christian children. The new generation has to hear for itself and believe personally in God.

The formalistic and legalistic worship of God as depicted in Isaiah and other Old Testament prophets should remind churches today that religious rituals and

activities may be empty exercises unless they come from a heart full of love for God and his people. Empty worship may be an indication of faithlessness.

From the New Testament, the study of the gospel of John, especially its first and third chapters, helps define the essence of being a Christian as an authentic, personal, sin-forgiving and life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. By way of implication, a nominal Christian is someone who claims the name Christian, but who has no authentic, personal, sin-forgiving and life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Racial inheritance, law-abiding, good works and head knowledge of scriptures do not qualify someone to become an authentic child of God.

Jesus' warning in Matthew 7 reminds us that there are nominal Christian leaders as well. Therefore, the church has to exercise discernment and detect them by their fruit.

The first epistle of John provides the church community with tests by which claims of being Christians can be verified whether true or spurious. The epistle also provides for a definition of a true Christian. He or she is "someone who professes faith in Jesus as the incarnated Son of God, evidenced by righteous living and love to God's people". A nominal Christian, then, is "someone who claims to know God and to have fellowship with him, but the claims are negated by unrighteous living and hatred for God's people, and doctrinal heterodoxy.

Jesus' letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation tell us that, just as there are nominal Christians in the church, there are nominal Christian churches as well. The letters to the church in Sardis and that in Laodicea may serve as warnings. One may plant a local church, organise religious activities, and this local church may appear in the eyes of society as a remarkable "Christian" church, but if it lacks a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, it is not the church as Jesus intended it.

Therefore, an authentic Christian has been born again and his or her daily lifestyle exemplifies his or her new status. One is not a true Christian just

because one says one is. Being a local church member does not automatically qualify a person as a genuine Christian. He or she must have repented from sins and believed in Jesus, be willing to serve and honour him as Lord. A nominal Christian is not a Christian in any real sense, only in name. He or she is only pretending to be what he or she really is not.

To sum up, this exegetical analysis gives a Bible-based interpretation of the Christian faith that will provide the “preferred scenario” of the LIM model the study has adapted. It means that the analysis of Christian nominalism in Bunia churches, which will be the subject of chapter 3, and the interpretation of the research findings in chapter 4 will be carried out in the light of this biblical perspective on nominal Christian faith.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM IN BUNIA CHURCHES: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Chapter 2 has discussed biblical insights into Christian nominalism. It has analysed selected biblical passages both in the Old and in the New Testaments. Each passage analysed has highlighted an aspect of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism. Implications drawn from these analyses broaden the present study's understanding of a nominal Christian faith.

In the third chapter the study seeks to know the extent to and the ways in which Bunia churches recognise the existence of nominal Christian faith within their respective memberships. It does this by asking church leaders, church members and Christian university students about their assurance of salvation, their understanding of a Christian and how to recognise him or her. It asks them whether there are people in their churches who are not true Christians. It further explores how churches understand church membership, disciple-making and spiritual growth.

#### **3.1 Research approach**

##### ***3.1.1 Data collection techniques***

Quantitatively (cf. Smith 2008:226), the study administered questionnaires to pastors and church members in the town of Bunia seeking to gather data

regarding their definitions of a Christian and a nominal Christian. Respondents were asked to define a Christian. They were asked whether or not there were church members who were not true Christians, and how they would recognise true Christians and differentiate them from nominal ones. The study also asked respondents whether they had the assurance of being saved and how they knew it.

Qualitatively, the study used interviews, focus groups and personal observations to probe answers to the above questions. The research team listened to pastors, church elders and church members as they answered interview questions (cf. Smith 2008:247).

This research is descriptive in that it aims to describe the phenomenon of Christian nominalism in Bunia churches membership, identifying the problem and its possible causes in order to determine to what extent the churches investigated in the town of Bunia are aware of the challenges of Christian nominalism and how they are addressing these challenges in their ministries.

### ***3.1.2 Population sample***

Selection criteria for local churches included the following: existence in the location for at least five years, an average membership of fifty, and belonging to a mainline church denomination (ECC) or Congo Revival Church (RERC). In each local church selected, the research team interviewed at least three and at most five in the pastoral leadership, including women where applicable. It also interviewed ten church members, male and female, old and young and whether literate or not (Vyhmeister 2008:161-62).

In total, 110 church leaders from twenty-two local churches were researched. They were either personally interviewed or filled in questionnaires. Of this total 81.8%<sup>9</sup> were male and 18.1% female. In relation to their age, 15.4% were aged

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<sup>9</sup> With percentages in this section, I have opted to round to just one decimal point down to whole numbers.

between 26 and 35; 32.7% were between 36 and 45; 29% between 46 and 55; 18.1% between 56 and 65 and 4.5% aged more than 65. As for their level of education, 13.6% had primary school level only, 54.5% had secondary school level and 31.8% had university degrees.

The research targeted church leaders because they are the persons responsible for the pastoral care of the flock. As such, they are supposed to oversee the spiritual health of their respective local churches. Church leaders were interviewed in their respective local churches at agreed upon time schedules. Each person was interviewed twice during the research. A second interview followed the initial one two months later. It aimed to check the accuracy of the answers to the first interview and clarify some issues left open. Interviews normally lasted 30 to 45 minutes per interviewee. The study sought to ascertain their notions of a Christian, to what extent they are aware of the presence of nominal Christians among their church membership and how they would recognise such members of the flock.

The second group researched was made up of church members in the twenty-two local churches selected. In total 220 church members were interviewed, half of them male and half female. Interviewees aged between 15 and 24 represented 27.7%; 27.2% were aged between 25 and 34, 22.2% between 35 and 44, 15.9% between 45 and 54, 4.5% between 55 and 64 and 2.2% were aged 65 and above. As with the church leaders, church members were interviewed in their respective local churches to find out whether they have the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ and how they are assured of this salvation.

The third group researched was made up of 104 Christian students in a Christian university (not theology students) who were taking a course on spiritual development during the semester. Of these students, 57.7% were female and 42.3% male. While 59.7% of the students originated from outside Bunia, 40.3% belonged to the churches being researched in the town of Bunia. They answered questionnaires after taking a thirty credit-hour course on

spiritual development. The research asked those who believed they were Christians to fill in the questionnaires. Out of 115 students in that class, 104 filled and handed in their questionnaires. The study sought to find out their assurance of salvation and the reason they believed they were Christians. Apart from data collected through questionnaires and interviews, the research also built on personal observations in the churches being researched in the town of Bunia and the researcher's pastoral experience in Bunia as well as outside Bunia<sup>10</sup> that assisted in checking the accuracy of the findings from interviews and questionnaires. The combination of these data collection techniques proved useful in establishing findings and in correcting the researcher's own perceptions.

### ***3.1.3 Questionnaire and interview questions***

The study developed questionnaires and interview questions in order to collect data. It constructed a questionnaire of ten principal questions, some amplified with sub-questions for pastors and church elders and students. Church members and students were specially asked whether or not they had assurance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The main questions, whether in questionnaires or interviews questions, were: "Are you a Christian?" "Why do you say this?" "In your opinion, are there people in local church membership who are not Christians in any real sense?" "How would you differentiate true Christians from nominal ones?"

### ***3.1.4 Data analysis and interpretation***

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<sup>10</sup> I personally organised a seminar held in December 2010 in the Aru district of CECA 20, which over 250 church leaders from 36 local churches attended. A second seminar was held in Zemio and Obo districts of the Central African Republic in August and September 2011, which a total of 272 church leaders from twelve local churches attended. At the end of a lesson on spiritual formation, the majority of participants in each of the seminars acknowledged the presence of registered church members who were Christians in name only.

To analyse data from questionnaires, the study uses cluster analysis, which groups data objects based only on information found in the data that describes the objects and their relationships. It consists in grouping answers into clusters that address the same issue and developing total scores across an item cluster (cf. Smith 2008:241). It means that data from interviews are divided into three groups, namely church leaders, church members and students. They are analysed and interpreted accordingly. Then the results in each group are compared with those from other groups. In order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, the study conceals their real names.

The data collected are organised and presented around each question in the order it appears in the questionnaire. The treatment of data begins with questions regarding general information on the number of respondents, their gender and age, their educational level and their church denominations. Then the definitions of a Christian as provided by the different groups investigated are followed by their criteria for recognising a true Christian. The study then analyses church leaders' answers to the issue of the existence of nominal Christians and their criteria for recognising them. It then probes church members' answers to whether or not they are Christians, with their reasons why or why not. After that the study examines leaders' answers to whether their respective church members are growing spiritually or not. This is followed by church members' evaluation of their own spiritual growth and the catalysts or obstacles to their growth.

### **3.2 Understanding of a nominal Christianity in Bunia churches**

In the search to knowing how far nominal Christianity is a problem in Bunia churches, the study asked the following question to respondents among church leaders, members and students. The first question, "In your opinion, who is a Christian" was intended to probe respondents' understanding of the biblical

teaching about who a Christian is and who he/she is not. It was asked of all respondents in all three groups.

### ***3.2.1 Understanding of a Christian according to Bunia churches***

The analysis of answers from those who were interviewed and from those who filled in questionnaires indicates that 89% of church leaders researched, 88.6% of church members and 90.3% of university students defined a Christian as someone “who has received Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord”. This definition was expressed in many different terms. One senior pastor interviewed answered that a Christian is “someone who has received Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord and is born again”. Another senior pastor defined a Christian as someone “who has believed that Jesus Christ died for his sins and rose from death and has received Him as personal Saviour”. A third senior pastor defined a Christian as a “disciple of Jesus Christ, imitating Him in everything”.

Other respondents, though defining a Christian as one who believes in Jesus Christ, added that he or she must be baptised and take communion. For these respondents who were to be found among pastors, church members and students, water baptism and taking communion were, besides belief in Jesus, indicators of genuine faith in Christ. For them therefore, a Christian was someone “who has received Jesus as Saviour and Lord, has been baptised and is regularly taking communion”. Water baptism and Holy Communion were part of the definition of a true Christian for 35.4% of pastors, 38.6% of church members and 57.6% of students researched. One church elder added to this definition the need to witness Christ by sharing the Good News around.

### ***3.2.2 Bunia churches’ criteria for recognising true Christians***

The second question concerned the criteria by which to recognise true Christians in church memberships. Table 4 below shows the answers of church leaders (L), church members (M) and university students (S) researched.

<b>Frequency of answers</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>One answer:</b> Baptism	<b>8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>20.5</b>
<b>Two answers:</b> 1. Baptism	<b>37</b> 17	<b>80</b> 48	<b>12</b> 8	<b>129</b> 73	<b>29.8</b> 16.9
2. Church involvement	-	32	-	32	7.3
3. Transformation	20	-	-	20	4.7
4. God knows	-	-	4	4	1
<b>Three answers:</b> 1. Baptism	<b>45</b> 15	<b>75</b> 30	<b>25</b> 10	<b>145</b> 55	<b>33.4</b> 12.7
2. Church involvement	13	25	8	46	10.6
3. Transformation	17	-	-	17	4
4. God knows	-	20	7	27	6.2
<b>Four answers:</b> 1. Baptism	<b>20</b> 4	<b>40</b> 14	<b>11</b> 4	<b>71</b> 22	<b>16.3</b> 5.0
2. Church involvement	5	10	3	18	4.1
3. Transformation	4	6	2	12	2.8
4. Only God knows	7	10	2	19	4.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 4: Frequency of answers for criteria for true Christians by church leaders (L), church members (M) and university students (S) researched in Bunia churches.*

The figures in table 4 above are organised into four groups according to the numbers of answers to the question how to recognise true Christians. The first group, representing 20.5% of the respondents, is made of those who provided one answer to the question. It includes eight church leaders, 25 church

members and 56 students. They cited baptism alone as the criterion for recognising true Christians. For them, true Christians are those who have undergone the ceremony of water baptism.

The second group includes those who provided two answers to the question. The group is made of 37 church leaders, eighty church members and twelve students, representing 29.8% of respondents. The two criteria are baptism and transformation for church leaders, baptism and church involvement for church members and baptism and “only God knows” for students. By “transformation” respondents meant a changed life after conversion as an indicator of true Christian faith. Those who cited “church involvement” meant participation in church activities and in the life of the Christian community as an indicator of true Christian faith. Baptism is cited by 17 leaders, 48 members and eight students. Church involvement is cited by 32 members, transformation by 20 leaders, while four students said only God knows who true Christians are.

In the third group, 45 church leaders, 75 church members and 25 students provided three answers to the question how to recognise true Christians. They represent 33.4% of respondents. Church leaders cited baptism, church involvement and transformation as criteria for recognising true Christians; church members and students cited baptism, church involvement and God knows. Baptism as a criterion of true Christians is provided by 15 church leaders, 30 church members and ten students in this group. Those who cited involvement in church as a criterion for true Christians were 13 leaders, 25 members and eight student; 17 leaders cited transformation, while 20 members and seven students said “God knows”. Church leaders only cited “transformation” while “God knows” was mentioned only by church members and students.

The fourth group is made of those who provided four answers to the question. Four leaders, 14 members and four students cited baptism; church involvement was cited by five leaders, ten members and three students; four leaders, six members and two students cited transformation as criterion, while seven



leaders, ten members and two students said “God knows”. This group represents 16.3% of those researched.

Table 4 above classifies Bunia churches’ criteria to recognise true Christians. They are analysed below as baptism, church involvement, transformation and “God knows”.

### *3.2.2.1 Baptism (confirmation) as evidence of true faith in Christ*

Eight church leaders cited baptism alone as a criterion for recognising true Christians; 17 mentioned it among two criteria, the second being transformation in lifestyle; 15 leaders cited baptism among three criteria, the others being church involvement and transformation, mentioned by 13 and 17 leaders respectively. Four leaders cited baptism among four other criteria. The other three were church involvement, transformation and “God knows”, mentioned by five, four and seven leaders respectively. In total, 44 church leaders cited baptism as the indicator that a person is a true Christian. They represent 40% of respondents among church leaders.

The table shows that 25 church members mentioned baptism alone as a criterion for true Christian faith, while 48 mention it alongside church involvement, which is cited by 32 members. Baptism is mentioned by 30 church members alongside church involvement and “God knows”. The latter two are cited by 25 and 20 members respectively. Among those who provided four criteria, 14 church members cited baptism, ten said church involvement, and six cited transformation and seven said “God knows”. In total, a hundred and seventeen church members, representing 53.1% of respondents among church members, cited baptism as an indicator of true Christian faith.

Table 4 also shows that 56 students cited baptism alone as a criterion for true Christian faith; eight mentioned it alongside God knows, cited by four students; ten cited baptism alongside church involvement and God knows, cited by eight and seven students respectively. Where students provided four answers, four

cited baptism, three mentioned church involvement while two cited transformation and two said God knows. In total, 75% of respondents among students cited baptism as a criterion for recognising true Christians.

Overall, table 4 shows that baptism alone is cited as a criterion for true Christians by 20.5% of the total respondents; it is also cited as one of two criteria by 16.8% of the respondents, one of three criteria by 12.6% and one of four criteria by 5.0% of the total respondents. The table indicates that in total, baptism is mentioned as a criterion for true Christians by 239 respondents, representing 55% of the total research population. Individually, baptism is cited by 75% of students, 53.1% of church members and 40% of church leaders as a criterion for recognising true Christians among church members.

#### *3.2.2.2 Church involvement as evidence of true Christian faith*

The second indicator of a true Christian faith as shown in table 4 above is church involvement. It is also described as commitment to local churches' services and activities or participation in church worship services and other church activities. The table shows that church involvement is cited by 32 church members alongside baptism. Among those who provided three answers, church involvement is cited by 13 church leaders, 25 church members and eight students. Where four answers were provided, church involvement was cited by five church leaders, ten church members and three students. In total, church involvement is cited as a criterion for recognising true Christians by 18 church leaders, 67 church members and 11 students. They represent 22.1% of the total research population.

#### *3.2.2.3 Transformation in lifestyle and behaviour as evidence of true faith*

The third criterion or evidence of true Christian faith in Bunia churches, as shown in table 4 above, is transformation in lifestyle and behaviour. The table shows that this criterion is cited by 20 church leaders alongside baptism; 17

leaders mention it alongside baptism and church involvement. Where respondents provided four answers, four leaders, six members and two students cited transformation as a criterion for recognising true Christians. In total, transformation in lifestyle and behaviour is mentioned by 49 respondents, representing 11.2% of the research population. The table shows that 41 church leaders, six church members and two students cited transformation as a criterion for true Christians. For these respondents, a genuine faith is evidenced by a changed lifestyle after conversion.

#### 3.2.2.4 “God knows”

A group of respondents did not provide criteria to recognise true Christians. Instead, they said that only God knows who among their church members true Christians are. Among these respondents, 20 church members and seven students, while saying that only God knows, cited baptism and church involvement as criteria. Where respondents provided four answers, seven church leaders, ten church members and two students said only God knows true Christians. In total, this answer was given by seven leaders, 30 members and 13 students, representing 11.5% of the total research population.

All in all, apart from those who said God only determines true Christians, the criteria for recognising genuine Christians, as understood by Bunia churches, are baptism, church involvement and transformation<sup>11</sup>. In section four, the study will attempt to understand these criteria in the light of the biblical perspective on Christian nominalism described in section two. Meanwhile, this section now explores other areas of possible pathways to Christian nominalism in Bunia churches.

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<sup>11</sup> For this question, some church leaders and church members both filled in written questionnaires and answered personal interview questions. There was no case of a respondent where the answer to an interview question differed from the answer to the same question in a written questionnaire. So the same answers to the question in both written questionnaires and interview questions were assimilated as being one answer. All the students, however, filled in written questionnaires.

### 3.3 The understanding of church membership in Bunia churches

Understanding Bunia churches' processes for admitting new members may shed light on their understanding of a Christian and of Christian nominalism. To further probe churches' notions of a Christian, the study asked church leaders, church members and students the following sub-question: "How does one become a member of your local church?" The study sought to establish whether church membership might be a possible entry point for nominal Christians. Their answers are given in table 5 below. Though the answers of the leaders, who administer the process of admission, are likely to be more accurate than those of the members and students, the study sought the latter's opinion, too. Though candidates for church membership are examined chiefly by church elders, church members have their say in the final stage of the process by either approving or refusing to welcome new members.

<b>Frequency of answers</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Catechism class	25	145	50	220	50.7
Altar call	45	35	26	106	24.4
Transfer	20	15	20	55	12.7
Personal evangelism	20	25	8	53	12.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 5: Frequency of answers indicating the means by which people are admitted to Bunia churches' membership by church leaders (L), church members (M) and university students (S).*

Table 5 above indicates that church leaders, church members and students identified four ways of taking people onto the membership rolls, namely altar

calls, catechism class (baptism class), personal evangelism and transfer from sister churches, as presented in the analysis below. The table indicates that 25 church leaders, 145 church members and 50 students cited catechism class as an entry point into church membership. They represent 50.7% of the total research population.

According to the table, 45 church leaders, 35 church members and 26 students cited altar call after sermons as a way of recruiting people into church membership. They represent 24.4% of the total respondents.

The table also indicates that 20 church leaders, 15 church members and 20 students cited transfer from sister churches as another way of gaining entry into church membership. They represent 12.7% of the total respondents.

Personal evangelism is cited as another way of recruiting adherents into church membership by 20 church leaders, 25 church members and eight students, representing 12.2% of the total respondents. The study analyses below what churches said about each of the four processes.

### ***3.3.1 Catechism classes as ways of recruiting church members***

Catechism classes or baptism classes as ways of recruiting new members in the local churches were cited by 25 church leaders, 145 church members and 50 students. Individually, they represent 22.7% of leaders, 65.9% of members and 48% of students. It means that 220 respondents, representing the majority of those researched (50.7%), cited this.

All the church members and students in this group said they started the process of church membership by enrolling in the catechism class. Among church leaders, 15 said that they either put an announcement on the church's notice board or give an announcement in the course of Sunday worship to invite those who desire to testify to their faith in Christ by water baptism to enrol in the baptism class. For these leaders, people's response to the announcement is

considered a profession of faith in Jesus. For them, the catechism class is intended to deepen adherents' understanding of basic Bible doctrines such as the triune God (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit), the creation, sin, man, salvation, the church, final judgment, angels, the Bible, prayer, and so forth. According to these respondents, the catechism class is intended to help new believers understand what they believe before being baptised and thereafter integrated into the fellowship of believers.

Catechism class, according to these church leaders, is taught in one of the following two ways. The first way, cited by ten church leaders, 97 church members and 40 students, consists in helping catechumens to memorise questions and their answers in the order in which they appear in the catechism booklet. The second way, mentioned by 15 church leaders, 48 members and ten students, is to teach the content of the booklet systematically. Pastors in this group prepare their lesson, using a blackboard when applicable or asking recruits to take notes in their exercise books. Some even give homework and quizzes as frequently as possible.

At the end of the baptism class, 18 church leaders, 120 church members and 40 students said that catechumens were submitted to oral interrogation in order to assess their knowledge of the doctrine learned. Those who pass this examination are judged fit for baptism and ready to become registered church members. Successful candidates are presented before the congregation on at least three consecutive Sundays before baptism. For church leaders in this group, the trial period allows registered church members to monitor neophytes. If a member of the congregation has a concern over any candidate for baptism due to their dubious testimony, he or she has the duty to inform the pastor or one of the elders. The church elders sit to examine the case. If the elders' court finds the accusations justified, baptism is withheld for the candidate until after further confession and repentance. In some cases, the candidate is asked to repeat the catechism class. Those candidates who fail the exams are requested to restart catechism class until they successfully pass the examination.

But for seven church leaders, 25 church members and ten students among respondents, rather than submitting candidates to oral exams, they are presented before the entire congregation of registered members who are to say if a candidate is worthy of being baptised or not. The approval or rejection of a candidate is based on his testimony in the community where he lives. Those approved by the congregation are baptised. Those not approved by the congregation are asked to repeat the baptism class. The rationale for this practice is that church members can help the pastoral team in assessing whether candidates demonstrate genuine repentance before being baptised.

In one of the church denominations researched, however, the announcement to enrol in the catechism class is made only two weeks before the actual baptism ceremony. In this case, the senior pastor or his associate pastor talks to each of the neophytes. He uses two booklets printed by Campus Crusade, namely “the four spiritual laws” and “life filled by the Holy Spirit”. Church leaders in this group praised this method because, they said, it helps the pastor assess whether those making the claim have understood what it means to become a Christian. During this short period of instruction, candidates are introduced to the basics of the Christian faith in order for them to understand what it means to be saved. They are then introduced to the community of believers who are to see that there’s no impediment to them being baptised.

### ***3.3.2 Altar call as a way of recruiting new church members***

Altar calls as one way of recruiting new believers into the fellowship of the body of Christ is mentioned by 40.9% of church leaders, 15.9% of church members and 25% of students. In total, they represent 24.4% of the total respondents in Bunia churches. Church leaders described an “altar call” as an invitation to profess faith immediately after a Sunday sermon or after an evangelistic message during open-air evangelism crusade. They said altar calls after evangelistic sermons offer opportunity for those who desire to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord either to come forward or just lift their hands up.

Some sermon hearers, they said, come forward immediately after the altar call. Others find the pastor after the church service or during the week. Among respondents, 35 church members and 26 students said they came to saving faith in Jesus through altar calls. Six church leaders from three of the local churches said those responding to the call are baptised that very day or a few days later. These three local churches don't submit new converts to catechism class. They baptise them immediately after conversion.

### ***3.3.3 Transfer of members from sister churches as a way of getting more church members***

Apart from recruiting members through altar calls and announcements in the course of Sunday worship, 20 church leaders, 15 church members and 20 students mentioned transfer of members from other churches as a way of adding people to the church's number rolls. They represent 18.1% of leaders, 6.8% of members and 19.2% of students. In total, they represent 12.6% of all respondents.

For these respondents, transfer of members is a process by which a local church member moves from his initial local church to a different local church within a denomination, or from one denomination to another. Among respondents citing this, 15 church members and 20 students became members of their current local churches through such transfer, while 12 church leaders said their local church eldership examines such cases to check the authenticity of the claimers' Christian faith before accepting him or her into the membership. Eight leaders said they interview the newcomer to make sure he or she knows that he or she has committed his or her life to Christ, has been baptised and is partaking of Holy Communion. In most cases, churches request an official recommendation letter from the candidate's previous church denomination. The Constitution of CECA 20, for example, supports the transfer of Christians when it states: "Christians transferred or recommended in writing and sent by other



church denominations that CECA 20 recognises are equally members of CECA 20” (2008:3, art 8, English translation mine).

#### ***3.3.4 Personal evangelism as a way of recruiting church members***

Personal evangelism as another way of recruiting new believers was cited by 20 church leaders, 25 church members and eight students. They represent 18.1% of leaders, 11.3% of members and 7.6% of students. It means that 12.2% of the total respondents cited this way.

Church members and students in this group said they committed themselves to their current local churches through pastors’ personal evangelism. Among church leaders researched, 15 in this group said they did door-to-door evangelism, while five others said they welcomed people in their offices for counselling and used the opportunity to bring them to commit their lives to Christ. They said that personal evangelism was the choice method of reaching out to business people, government officers, doctors and Muslims. Two church leaders, however, said that personal evangelism was not confined to pastors and church leaders alone. Rather, they said, their church members are encouraged to do personal evangelism. Overall, table 5 indicates that 50.7% of churches recruit new members through catechism class, 24.4% through altar call after sermons, 12.7% through transfer of church members from sister churches and 12.2% through personal evangelism respectively.

How those who carried out the various procedures would be able to tell how genuine a person’s response was? Those local churches baptising converts immediately after profession of faith rely on the persons’ declarations. They have no time to check whether the profession of faith is genuine or spurious. From respondents’ description of the other procedures, pastors and church members have time to screen those enrolling into the catechism classes as well as those Christians transferred from sister churches. As for personal evangelism, it is up to the evangelists to determine whether the profession of

believing in Jesus is genuine or not when talking individually to converts. it is when the persons join the catechism class that church leaders have time to “check” the reality of the profession of faith. Section 4 analyses these procedures in depth and section 5 provides for a strategy to screen candidates before baptism.

### 3.4 Bunia churches’ cognisance of nominal Christianity

The study next asked church leaders, church members and students whether churches in Bunia had members who are not true Christians. Table 6 below shows their answers.

<b>Presence of nominal Christians</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	75	145	60	280	64.5
No	25	45	24	94	21.7
God knows	10	30	20	60	13.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 6: Frequency of answers regarding the presence of nominal Christians in church membership as provided by church leaders (L), church members (M) and university students (S) in Bunia*

The answers are classified into three groups, namely those respondents who acknowledged the presence of nominal Christians in their church memberships, those who denied it and those who said “God alone knows”.

#### 3.4.1 Existence of nominal Christians in church memberships

In table 6 above, 75 church leaders, 145 church members and 60 students answered positively to the question whether there are nominal Christians in their church memberships. They represented respectively 68.1% of leaders, 65.9% of members and 57.6% of students. In total, they represented 64.5% of respondents. The table indicates that the majority of respondents acknowledged the presence of nominal Christians among their church members.

#### ***3.4.2 Absence of nominal Christians in church memberships***

Table 6 also indicates that 25 church leaders, 45 church members and 24 students denied the presence of nominal Christians among their church members. They represented 22.7% of leaders, 20.4% of members and 23% of students. In total, 94 respondents, representing 21.6% of all respondents, denied that there were nominal Christians in church memberships. Two of these church leaders said that all their church members were true Christians. They said that all those who attend church services are Christians because “non-Christians do not come to church”.

#### ***3.4.3 Only God knows***

A third group, made up of ten church leaders, 30 church members and 20 students, said that only God knows those who are not Christians among their church members. They represented respectively 9% of leaders, 13.6% of members and 19.2% of students or 13.9% of all respondents. Five of the church leaders said they could not know for sure if their church members were true Christians or false ones.

### **3.5 Criteria for recognising nominal Christians**

Those who said there were nominal Christians in their church memberships identified the following criteria for recognise them as shown in table 7 below.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Sinful behaviour	25	75	10	110	39.2
Not taking communion	20	35	25	80	28.6
Non-active church members	25	20	15	60	21.4
Irregular churchgoer	5	15	10	30	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 7: Criteria for recognising nominal Christians in church membership by church leaders (L), church members (M) and university students (S) in Bunia churches*

In table 7 above, 75 church leaders, 145 church members and 60 students identified the presence of nominal Christians among Bunia church members according to four criteria, which are analysed below.

### **3.5.1 Sinful lifestyle as evidence of nominal faith**

Twenty-five church leaders, seventy-five church members and ten students said that a nominal Christian among church members can be recognised by his or her sinful behaviour. By sinful behaviour respondents meant church members who live in sins people know about such as sexual immorality. Respondents in this group represent 33.3% of leaders, 51.8% of members and 16.7% of students. In total, 110 respondents, representing 39.2% of all respondents, mentioned sinful behaviour as a way of recognising nominal Christians in church memberships. They said that church leaders or members living in sin such as sexual immorality falsified their claims of being Christians because their

lifestyle no longer substantiated their profession of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. This, respondents said, is true even for a person who has been baptised and is partaking of Holy Communion.

As sinful behaviour respondents mentioned, for example, practicing sexual immorality, murder, consulting witchdoctors or diviners, stealing. People practicing these things, respondents said, are hypocrites, even though they are on the church's member rolls. They said that though such people among their church memberships are regular participants in church worship, their behaviour outside the walls of the church was scandalising those who would like to join the church community. Five pastors among the respondents cited cases of hatred and bitterness among church members as an indicator of nominal Christian faith. They alleged that church members who had participated in the killings during the ethnic conflict in Ituri, committing beastly atrocities against church members from ethnic groups other than theirs, contradicted the message of love in the fellowship of believers. For them, it was difficult to believe that such members were truly born again Christians.

Among church leaders, 15 who cited sinful lifestyle as evidence of nominal Christian faith said that nominal Christians among their church members were those who were involved in pagan practices such as using fetishes to protect themselves and their families against misfortune and the evil eye. Others, they said, went to the witchdoctor when sick instead of going to hospitals. Some church members, respondents said, are slaves of sin to the extent that they fall repeatedly into the same sin, even after repenting from it with tears. Such people among church members, they said, only masquerade as Christians and are Christians in name only. They alleged that people living sinful lives included church leaders as well as church members.

### ***3.5.2 Not taking communion as evidence of nominal faith***

The second criterion for nominal Christian faith is that, though the person has been baptised, he or she is no longer taking communion. It was mentioned by respectively 20 church leaders, 35 church members and 25 students, representing 28.6% of the total researched.

For these respondents, church members who have been baptised but are no longer taking communion, though they come to church services regularly, indicate that they are not genuine Christians. For these respondents, such church members show evidence that they were, at the outset, only nominal Christians.

### ***3.5.3 Non-active church members as evidence of nominal faith***

The third criterion of nominal Christian faith is cited as lack of active engagement in church life. It is mentioned by 25 church leaders, 20 church members and 15 students, representing 21.4% of the total respondents. They said that nominal Christians are those church members not involved actively in church life and ministries. For this group of respondents, an active involvement in the local church includes regular and faithful supporting of the church's activities through the offering and tithes and taking responsibility in the local church such as being a member of the local church choir, teaching in Sunday school, leading prayer sessions, leading bible study or being a member of any of the local church ministries.

According to these respondents, those members who come to the Sunday morning service but do not pay their annual contribution to the church budget are regarded as nominal Christians. For them, this category is made up mostly, but not exclusively, of the baptised children. The issue in most of the local churches is that the church's annual budget is often established according to the number of baptised church members, whether they are adults or children. The situation in most churches is that most of the baptised members are children and students who depend on their parents for financial support. A

senior pastor, for example, said that among his 1500 members, only some 650 participated in supporting the local church. From the total amount of offering every Sunday, it was clear to him and his church elders that very few members really gave cheerfully and contributed to the running of the local church. A large number of church members were more spectators than actors, he said, because they did not take an active part in the life of their local church.

#### ***3.5.4 Irregular churchgoing as evidence of nominal faith***

The fourth criterion for nominal Christian faith that Bunia churches cited was irregular attendance at church worship and church services. It was mentioned by respectively five church leaders, 15 members and ten students. They represent 10.8% of the total researched. For this group of respondents, sustained absence from church worship implied a nominal Christian faith. For example, they cited people whose names appeared on the local church's member rolls but who came to church only for special events such as weddings, funerals or on special days such as Christmas. For the remainder of the year they never went to church. For these respondents, such people on their church membership rolls were Christians in name only.

A number of participants in the research study offered the following testimonies as confirmation of the presence of nominal Christians within church memberships.

### **3.6 Testimonies of nominal Christians in Bunia churches**

Among those investigated in the course of the present research, the following willingly shared their testimonies indicating that they were nominal Christians before becoming aware of their status. Pseudonyms are given in order to conceal the identity of respondents.

### **3.6.1 Lydia**

I am a Christian in the CECA 20 church. I was baptised when ten years old. I enrolled in the baptism class because I wanted to follow my age group members. After our baptism, we were regularly taking communion. But one day I fought with a fellow church choir member over her boyfriend and the two of us were excommunicated from the Holy Communion. Ten years later, I realised that I had not personally received Jesus in my life, but only followed my friends in the baptism class. Today I have been restored to the communion of the local church.

### **3.6.2 Pascal**

I was born in a Christian family. My parents always taught me that stealing, insulting, and the like are evil in God's eyes. We had family devotions every evening where my dad read bible verses and sometimes told us Bible stories. My parents encouraged us to go regularly to the Sunday school class and sing in a church choir. I have been singing in the church choir to this day. As I grew up, the influence of bad friends led me to join a gang that terrorised the village through robbery. Sometimes my parents would learn of my bad behaviour and even beat me, only for me to return to the same habit. Despite this bad habit, my friends and I were regular church goers and singers in the church choir. Many years later, I left the village to attend university. There, during an open-air evangelistic message, I realised I was still a lost sinner despite all I have been doing in the church. I decided to give my life to Jesus and to be baptised.

### **3.6.3 Diana**

I was born in a Roman Catholic family and baptised at an early age. But a real encounter with Jesus Christ came when I was 17. I was radically transformed by this encounter and asked to be baptised anew in a protestant church denomination. Though my parents have remained practicing Roman Catholics, they respected my decision to be baptised anew.



#### **3.6.4 Esther**

Since my early childhood I have been going to church as everybody did in the village. I grew up thinking that I was a Christian. As a consequence, every time the pastor invited people to believe in Jesus after the sermon, I did not feel that the invitation concerned me. It was for others, not me. All this time, I just believed I was a Christian. My parents, too, considered me a Christian. But when I was fifteen, I heard a sermon on John 3:1-6. I was suddenly touched by the message. I was ashamed to go straight to the altar as the pastor was calling people touched by the message to come forward. Instead I ran home and there in my bedroom, knelt down to give my life to Jesus. The day I was baptised some of my friends in the local church choir also repented and received Jesus in their lives.

#### **3.6.5 Justin**

I was born in a Christian family. My parents were members of the CECA 20 church. They did their best to show us the way of God early in our childhood. Every day they would encourage us to go to the Sunday school. In 1997, my Uncle who was a pastor of CECA 20 told me to enrol in the catechism class. He said at my age it was not good to stay without being baptised. As I owed obedience to him, I accepted and got baptised. But there was little difference in my daily behaviour from those who were not yet baptised. I tried to hide my evil behaviour from my parents and the church leadership, but one day I was exposed. A lady in the church choir became pregnant and named me as the author of her pregnancy. My excommunication from Holy Communion brought me back to myself and I realised the need of personally acknowledging Jesus as my saviour and Lord. Today I am a faithful member of the local church where my uncle is the senior pastor.

#### **3.6.6 Jules**

I have been a Christian since my baptism in 1999 at the CECA 20 church. I was a regular churchgoer and a leader of the local church choir. But in February 2012 during an evening family devotion, I realised that I had not yet received Jesus as my Saviour and Lord and gave my life to Christ. Since then, I have noticed changes in my behaviour and lifestyle. I often read the Bible and pray at least once every day. But I still need a mentor to grow spiritually.

### **3.6.7 *Martin***

I was born and grew up in a Christian family. My dad is a minister in the Anglican Communion. He always put at our disposal bibles, commentaries and Christian books. I was leading a bible study group in our local church. However, I was deceiving myself by thinking that as a son of the senior pastor and a youth leader, I was accepted before God. I was convinced that I was a Christian until one day, as we were studying John 3 it became clear to me that I had not yet believed in Jesus. I did not commit my life to him immediately. Five years later, the Holy Spirit convicted me of guilt and I committed my life to Christ.

### **3.6.8 *Rosina***

I am the last born of my Christian parents. I was baptised in 2001 in the Emmanuel church. But at that time I had not yet received Jesus as my Saviour and Lord. I went to church regularly and took communion. But my heart was hardened to believe in Jesus. I lived in sexual immorality. One day in 2009, a Sunday sermon in our local church struck me. I could not get peace the whole day, until I cried for help. A fellow student, who was a genuine Christian, came to my rescue and led me to receive Jesus in my life. Today I am an active member of my local church.

### **3.6.9 *Jack***

I was baptised in 2002 in the Emmanuel church after one year of catechism class and various teachings in the word of God. I regularly attended church worship and various activities organised by the local church. I was also taking communion regularly. But three years after the baptism, I came to realise for the first time that I had not yet invited Jesus into my life. All I had been doing in the church appeared to me as deceit. I decided to commit my life to Christ from that day onward. I thank God for using genuine Christians among my fellow students to lead me to Christ.

### **3.6.10 *Mary***

I was born in a Christian family. My father is a senior pastor in the CECCA 16 church. We had the privilege of listening to the word of God every day at home and in church services. Every Sunday we went to church to worship, though I did not understand the meaning of such practices. I considered myself a Christian because of belonging to a Christian family. I did not know that the encounter with Jesus is personal and not hereditary. When I left my parents to pursue a higher degree, the church in the town was offering bible courses and seminars to its members. It was through these bible studies that I came to realise my need of Jesus Christ. I understood for the first time that it was not my parents' faith, but my own personal faith in Jesus, which could save me. It is six years since I gave my life to Jesus.

### **3.6.11 Aristotle**

When I reached twelve years of age, I started singing in the church choir, not because I was already saved, but because all my age group members were already choir members. When I reached eighteen, I was elected as leader of the choir in this CECA 20 local church. I was responsible for composing songs. My choir group went out on many occasions to evangelise in the neighbourhood and even sing on important occasions such as baptism ceremony, weddings and even the local church's annual conference. But in practice, I was living in sin, especially fornication. With my male colleagues in the choir, we impregnated most of the female choir members. We went as far as provoking abortion secretly. When I was twenty-six, I got married to a Christian member of the church choir. We wed in the church, but I was just a hypocrite and I knew it very well. It is my wife who challenged my secret life in sin by confronting me on one occasion. I was deeply moved by her reproach. That was the first step towards true faith in Jesus. When I was baptised that year, many could not believe. Today, three years later, I am a student in a theological seminary, preparing to join the pastoral care of a local church by God's grace.

### **3.6.12 Alfred**

I was sent by my Assemblies of God church to pursue training in theology. I was regarded by the local church leadership and church members as a fervent Christian. I had been baptised when I was ten years old. But I knew very well that I was living in sin. Though I accepted the church's call to get bible training, I had no personal

conviction that I had committed my life to Jesus. While in studies some three hundred kilometres away from my home church, I was sent to a CECA 20 local church as a pastoral intern. I was given opportunities to preach on Sundays. It was there that I realised my need of personally committing my life to Jesus. There I discovered the joy of believing in Jesus for the first time in thirty years. I have since been re-baptised and am looking forward, after completing my studies in theology, to returning to my sending church to commit myself to the pastoral care of a local church.

### **3.6.13 Georgina**

I am happy because I have come to know God in my life and have had Christian parents. My parents were active members of a local church in CECA 20. They talked to us about Jesus Christ. They gathered us daily in the evening for prayer. Sometimes we children lead these family devotions. Because of this, I thought I knew God. I was certain that I was naturally a child of God. Besides, I was baptised when I was ten and sang in a church choir. One day, however, an evangelist by the name of John Akudri came in our school during an evangelistic campaign. It is during his preaching that week that I understood for the first time that I was indeed a sinner, living a life outside God's will. I understood that I was baptised under the influence of my age mates, without personal conviction. I understood that all I was doing, whether in the family or in the local church, was only to gain acceptance by others. It is during this evangelistic campaign that I gave my life to Jesus, asked for his forgiveness for all my sins. From there onward, God took over the direction of my life.

The above testimonies shed light on the presence of nominal Christians among church members. They suggest that many more in current church memberships, including in those Bunia churches not included in this research, may not be aware that they are Christians in name only. The next section examines the crucial question of assurance of salvation.

### **3.7 Bunia churches' understanding of salvation**

The above testimonies from former nominal Christians further highlight the importance of understanding church members' assurance of salvation in Bunia churches. That is why the study also asked them whether they have the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. To that question, 15.9% of respondents answered negatively, whereas 84.1% of the total respondents were sure of their salvation in Jesus Christ. The majority of these respondents said they were sure of being saved because they had believed in Jesus. But there were those who were sure of salvation because of having been baptised and being regular partakers of the Lord's Table. Two of the respondents were assured of their salvation because they were registered church members.

Only 15.9% of those researched were not sure of their salvation. Among them, one respondent, for instance, said that she was not sure of salvation because she had not yet been baptised. Another respondent in this group said he was unsure of salvation because he had fallen into sin and had not yet repented from it and was still under the local church's discipline.

For some of the respondents, the assurance of salvation or lack of it seems to be based on whether or not one has been baptised and is partaking of the Lord's Table. Another reason given for uncertainty regarding salvation is the fact of being under the church's discipline. These answers regarding assurance of salvation further question some church members' understanding of salvation and of conversion. They raise the issue of the quality of the Christian faith in the churches researched.

### **3.8 Bunia churches' understanding of healthy spiritual growth**

This question on the spiritual growth of church members was intended to further probe Bunia churches' awareness of nominal Christianity. It sought to learn

from them what they understood as spiritual growth in church members. It asked church leaders and members whether or not believers were growing spiritually. Respondents were asked to identify evidences for spiritual growth. Table 8 below identifies six indicators of spiritual growth in the churches according to these respondents.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Leaders</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total scores</b>	<b>%</b>
Participation in church services	13	17.3	26	21.7	39	20
Increase in offertory	14	18.7	23	19.1	37	18.9
Use of spiritual gifts	14	18.7	23	19.1	37	18.9
Daily devotional habits	12	16	22	18.3	34	17.4
Good testimony in society	13	17.3	26	21.7	39	20
Call to pastoral care	9	12	—	—	9	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 8: Indicators of spiritual growth by church leaders and members researched in Bunia churches*

### ***3.8.1 Regular participation in church services as evidence of spiritual growth***

The first indicator of spiritual growth that 17.3% of church leaders and 21.7% of church members cited was the fact that church members attended church worship and other church services regularly. Overall this indicator was mentioned by 20% of those researched. They said that regular and faithful

participation in church worship and other spiritual services of the local church was an evidence of spiritual growth. They claimed that regular participation in church worship indicated members' obedience to the Lord and evidenced their spiritual growth.

### ***3.8.2 Believers' liberality as evidence of their spiritual growth***

The second indicator of the spiritual growth of church members was cited as financial support of the local church through the offertory and tithes. It was mentioned by 18.9% of those researched, representing 18.6% of church leaders and 19.1% of church members. They said that an increase in the offering of the local church was an evidence of members' spiritual growth. According to these respondents, believers' liberality in supporting the various works and ministries of the local church could be an indicator of their spiritual growth. It demonstrated their obedience to God and to his word, they said. Believers' liberality was seen in their sacrificial giving towards the various ministries and projects of the local churches, respondents said.

A local church pastor, for example, said that in his membership averaging four hundred in weekly Sunday worship over the last three years, the offering had greatly improved. Very often when an urgent need of assistance was placed before church members, the solution would come not long after the appeal for help. He said that his church members were giving freely and that their giving increased weekly. As the result of members growing spiritually, his deacons could now see dollar notes in the offering baskets almost every Sunday, he claimed.

### ***3.8.3 Use of one's spiritual gifts as evidence of his or her spiritual growth***

The third indicator of spiritual growth was cited as members' willingness to use their spiritual gifts in the local church. It was mentioned by 17.9% of all

informants, representing 18.6% of church leaders and 19.1% of church members researched. Church leaders and church members who mentioned this indicator said that when a believer grows spiritually he learns to make use of his spiritual gifts willingly. As the result of believers' awareness of spiritual gifts, some church members sang in the church choir, others served as deacons or deaconesses, others taught in the Sunday school or led bible study groups, informants said. They claimed that church members' involvement in such ministries of the local church demonstrated the level of their spiritual maturity.

Among church members who mentioned this indicator, some considered the fact of moving from being a simple church member to being a ministry leader as an indicator of spiritual growth. Others saw their different roles in the local church as church choir members and deacons, for example, as indicating that they had grown spiritually to serve in that capacity.

#### ***3.8.4 Daily devotional habits of believers as evidence of spiritual growth***

The fourth indicator of spiritual maturity recorded by 17.4% of the informants was that church members read the Bible and prayed regularly, individually or as families. Respondents comprised 16% of church leaders and 18.3% of church members, citing faithful participation in corporate prayer and intercessory prayers as a part of members' personal devotional habits. In some local churches researched, the study discovered that believers followed a daily scripture reading plan provided by the church leadership. In some churches, every Sunday, the pastoral team prepared a devotional calendar for the entire week, with passages to read and questions to answer for every day of the week. Other local churches encouraged their members to subscribe to the Scripture Union's daily guide, a calendar for daily devotion. According to these informants, members' love for the word of God, both in sermons and in personal reading, demonstrated their growth in spiritual maturity.



### ***3.8.5 Good testimony in the local society as evidence of spiritual growth***

The fifth indicator of church members' growth into spiritual maturity that respondents cited was their good testimony in their neighbourhood. It was recorded by 17.3% of respondents among church leaders and 21.6% among church members. Overall, 20% of the informants mentioned this indicator as evidence of members' spiritual growth. They claimed that transformation in members' lifestyle was a sign of their spiritual growth. For them, the spiritual growth of believers was seen in the way their faith affected their daily conduct and behaviour.

Pastors who cited this indicator said that love among believers in their respective local churches was a sign of the spiritual maturity of church members. For these church leaders, a good testimony was seen in the way believers showed concern for community members in need notwithstanding their ethnic background. In so doing, leaders said, Christians echo their Lord who said "the world will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn. 13:35). Good testimony was also seen in the way church members visited the sick in hospitals, took food to prisoners, and assisted widows and orphans, etc. These actions, leaders said, demonstrated love in action.

Respondents among church members, too, said that love among believers and towards other members of the community was an indicator of spiritual maturity. Some of the respondents mentioned the fact that during the ethnic conflict in Ituri, some Christians from warring tribes harboured families from rival ethnic groups, risking their own lives and the lives of their family members.

### ***3.8.6 A calling for pastoral care of the church as evidence of spiritual growth***

The sixth indicator of the spiritual growth of church members is mentioned by 12% of respondents among church leaders, representing 4.8% of the total

informants. Pastors and church elders understood that church members becoming pastors was an indicator of their spiritual growth to maturity. This indicator, however, is mentioned by church leaders alone and has their lowest rate of response. Though the low rate indicates that very few take on the pastoral care of the local church, for those who do it is a powerful testimony to their spiritual growth. Respondents alleged that the call to nurture the congregation indicates the level of the called ones' commitment to the Lord and their obedience to his word. As a case in point, a senior pastor said he had been called to shepherd his current local church while still a member of that church. He said that after hearing the Lord calling him, he went to a bible school for training and after graduating from the bible school he was appointed as assistant pastor. Today he is the senior pastor.

However, evidences of the spiritual growth of church members do not mean that all Bunia church congregations consist of spiritually mature Christians. Respondents also acknowledged failings in spiritual growth and identified some causes of lack of spiritual growth as described below.

### **3.9 Bunia churches' understanding of spiritual stagnation**

Not all respondents acknowledged spiritual growth among church members. Some acknowledged that church members in their respective local churches were not growing spiritually. They included 35 church leaders and 100 church members, representing respectively 31.9% and 45.4% of the leaders and members investigated. Table 9 below shows that church leaders and members identified as causes of spiritual stagnation or lack of spiritual growth the following: misconduct of church leaders and church members, lack of teaching, failure in church discipline, illiteracy, unbelief, influence of false teachings, the church as a way of making money, influence of traditional beliefs and practices and conflicts and divisions in the church.

<b>Causes</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total scores</b>	<b>%</b>
Misconduct of church leaders and members	5	14.2	14	14	19	14.0
Lack of teaching	4	11.4	12	12	16	11.8
Failure in church discipline	4	11.4	12	12	16	11.8
Illiteracy	4	11.4	12	12	16	11.8
Unbelief	5	14.2	10	10	15	11.1
Influence of false teachings	4	11.4	11	11	15	11.1
Church as a way of making money	3	8.6	11	11	14	10.3
Influence of traditional beliefs and practices	3	8.6	10	10	13	9.7
Divisions and conflicts	3	8.6	8	8	11	8.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>

*Table 9 Obstacles to spiritual growth as mentioned by church leaders (L) and members (M) researched.*

### ***3.9.1 Misconduct of church leaders and church members alike as a cause of their spiritual stagnation***

The first cause for the lack of spiritual growth of church members mentioned by 14.2% of church leaders and 14% of church members was the misconduct of church leaders and church members. Both church leaders and members mentioned this as a major stumbling block to members' growth to spiritual maturity. According to the respondents, when some in leadership positions fell into sin and did not repent from it, this hindered church members from growing spiritually. Other church leaders and members who had fallen into sin had even given up their commitment to follow Christ. Not only did their spiritual condition hurt believers, but also some in the church membership would imitate their bad examples as a normal way of life for God's children. The respondents also observed that in the same way, when it was known to the church community that some church leaders and members lived in sin, it caused other church members to stumble in their spiritual growth.

By identifying the misconduct of church leaders and members as a major cause of spiritual stagnation or lack of spiritual growth, respondents cited the following. First, they alleged that power struggles within the leadership team were causing other leaders and member to stumble in their faith. For example, said a respondent, when the assistant pastor in his local church made an announcement, the senior pastor would stand up soon after to contradict that person in front of the congregation. Church members found this difficult to accept. Another respondent said her church leaders always criticised each other in church meetings and this hurt church members. A senior pastor said that wrangling among church leaders over church money or embezzlement of church funds was discouraging church leaders and members alike in their desire to grow spiritually. He said that some elders and members moved to other local churches because of repeated disputes among church leaders in his current local church.

Second, respondents cited the immoral life of some church leaders and church members as a stumbling block to the spiritual growth of Christians. Church members referring to this obstacle said that some of their church leaders, including senior pastors, lived a disorderly marital life. Some had children born out of wedlock. Others lived with more than one wife and tried to hide their status from church members. Respondents even mentioned the case of one senior pastor imprisoned three times for defiling little girls in the neighbourhood. They said that some pastors, who had fallen in sin, were resistant to rebukes from the church discipline committee and church members alike. Some church leaders, they said, waited to be caught in sin before recognising their fault. They felt that they were a stumbling block to church leaders and members' spiritual growth.

### ***3.9.2 Lack of teaching as the cause of spiritual stagnation***

The second major cause for the lack of spiritual growth, mentioned by 11.4% of church leaders and 12% of church members, was a lack of strong teaching of the word of God in the local churches. Respondents from among church leaders and church members alleged that the lack of teaching was a major cause why church members did not grow towards spiritual maturity. On the one hand, respondents among church members said that most of their pastors spoke to the congregation only in Sunday sermons, and many Sunday sermons lacked relevance to real life issues that congregants were facing. Others said that their pastors lacked biblical preaching when addressing children and young people. In some of the local churches researched, Sunday sermons seldom addressed the needs of the children and young people who form the majority of participants. Respondents said that the teachings of the local churches do not relevantly challenge them to grow spiritually. Some of these local churches, they claimed, have no Sunday school classes. In these churches, church leaders expect children to accompany their parents to the main Sunday service. Yet the message is seldom prepared with children in mind. In some of the local

churches where Sunday school classes do exist, respondents said, children from all ages are taught together without taking into account their different age groups.

Respondents attributed this lack of biblical preaching and teaching in the churches to the inexperience of pastors, their low level of education, lack of time and their meagre salaries. The inexperience of senior pastors was mentioned by 22.2% of church leaders and 33.3% of church members researched. According to these respondents, some senior pastors had been appointed to the post without the necessary gifts for the pastoral care of the local church. Others, they said, were coming straight from colleges and bible schools without prior experience in the pastoral care of the church. They even recorded that some pastors were new converts.

A second probable cause of the lack of good teaching in the local church, according to 17.7 % of church leaders and 22.2 % of church members investigated, was the low level of education of some senior pastors. The analysis of data collected indicates that 18.1 % of senior pastors of the local churches did not complete primary school prior to joining a bible school. Another group, made up of 45.4 % of the senior pastors, had only secondary school level of education. Two of these senior pastors had not studied in a bible school. The last group of senior pastors, representing 36.3 %, had a university degree in theology.

A third cause of lack of teaching in the churches, cited by 33.3 % of church leaders and 33.3 % of church members, was that pastors had little time to concentrate on preparing sermons. They were torn between attending committee meetings and unnecessary administrative tasks as well as caring for their respective families.

A fourth cause of lack of teaching was identified by 26.7 % of church leaders and 11.1 % of church members was the meagre salary of pastors. Church members said the salary of many senior pastors was not helping them to fulfil

all their duties. Church leaders said that even when the elders raised the pastors' monthly salaries, the money collected from the Sunday offerings would hardly allow them to pay pastors a decent salary. Church members said that some senior pastors were employed full-time in a non-government organisation and came to church only on Sundays and for important church events.

As a result of this lack of good teaching in the churches, respondents cited the wandering of Christians from one local church to another within ECC church denominations, or from ECC churches to RERC churches. Believers seemed to be unstable in their original local church denominations, constantly switching membership from one denomination to another. In the ECC churches researched, some of their church members were in their respective local churches only on Sundays, but during the week they were "members" of the RERC churches where they attended "healing and deliverance" sessions and various seminars on prayer, prosperity, etc. Other members had decamped from their church denominations and switched instead to the "revival" churches. There were cases, too, of church members leaving "revival" churches for ECC churches.

Among the "wanderers" included in the study, those who switched to RERC churches said that preaching and teaching in these revival churches were more relevant to the deep needs of their congregations than in the mainline ECC churches. They alleged that these "revival churches" addressed the various needs of their church members through prayer sessions for healing and deliverance and showing care for the needy both individually and corporately, dimensions of pastoral care they did not find in their previous ECC church denominations. However, those who switched from revival churches back to ECC churches claimed that revival churches exploited their church members financially to the extent of coercing people to give to support church activities. Some of these church leaders, they alleged, were conmen who robbed church members in very subtle ways to support their personal interests rather than for the progress of the Gospel.

For most of the respondents, church members and, to some extent, church leaders wandering from ECC church denominations to RERC churches have not experienced genuine faith in Christ. They may be nominal Christians from the outset; otherwise they would not have left their original local churches. Other respondents, though, acknowledge that the wandering is due fundamentally to lack of biblical preaching and teaching in many ECC churches. For this group of respondents, lack of biblical preaching and teaching may be the cause of nominal faith in some of their church members. The pastoral leadership was to blame for nominal and superficial faith in church membership, they alleged.

### **3.9.3 Failure in church discipline as a cause of lack of spiritual growth**

Weak or poor church discipline was cited by 11.4 % of church leaders and 12 % of church members as being the third major cause of lack of spiritual growth. The failure in church discipline was cited by a lesser percentage of respondents among church leaders than among church members. It is nonetheless an important issue in the spiritual growth in Bunia churches. Respondents said that the sins of some church leaders and church members were not dealt with quickly in their respective local churches. Sins of some leaders and members, they said, were not dealt with at all, leaving the impression that some local churches tolerated some kinds of sins and that some people in the church were immune from church discipline. Such a state of impunity, respondents said, became a snare for many church members. Some were tempted to imitate the behaviours of these “immune” church leaders and members and, as a result, led a disorderly Christian life within the Christian community. Others just left the church community and no longer came to church services.

Some church members, respondents said, when rebuked for bad behaviour, instead of taking the blame, were stiff-necked and cited leaders doing the same things but not being reprimanded by the church discipline committee. In so doing, they not only opposed the exercise of church discipline, but also



contributed to the weakening of the local church's discipline. Pastors would no longer exercise discipline effectively because they had failed to do it earlier. Respondents among church leaders mentioned the case of a pastor whom the elders' court dismissed for embezzlement of church money, but who simply refused to step down up to the time of this research. Other respondents among church members said some church members left the church because a pastor caught defiling a little girl refused to leave his post. Instead, he dismissed the entire discipline committee. The church has since split into two, with some leaving to start a new church and others following the erring minister. Respondents also mentioned the case of church members under church discipline from a local church, who moved to a sister church where they were welcomed and even given leadership positions.

Respondents identified the following as some causes of weak church discipline in Bunia churches. First, 44.4 % of these church leaders and members attributed the failure in church discipline to church leaders' fear of losing their flock. These leaders, they said, feared that by exercising discipline the church would be emptied of its members. Second, respondents said that some church members who fell into sin threatened church leaders who attempted to take action against them. Fear of threats caused the church discipline committee to withhold sanctions, thus weakening the church's discipline. As the third cause of failure in church discipline in Bunia churches, 22.2 % of church leaders and 27.7 % of church members identified partiality in exercising church discipline. They said that in some of their local churches, the discipline committee lacked justice in dealing with sins. In some cases, they said, sanctions for the same kind of sin differed from one church member to another. Often, it depended on the relationship of the "sinner" with the church's discipline committee members. It was seen, respondents alleged, as if the sins of some members of the church tended to be overlooked in judgment while those of other members were dealt with "brutally", without love.

A fourth cause of the failure in church discipline, as recorded by 33.3 % of church leaders and 27.7 % of church members, was that some church leaders would not admit their sins unless they were caught in the act. Other church leaders, respondents said, refused to accept the judgment from the discipline committee and, instead, rejected it and opposed the discipline committee. When this happened, respondents said, it weakened the church discipline and greatly affected church members' spiritual growth. People in the church membership might assume that sin has no consequences and be tempted to imitate sinful behaviours. It could also be a reason for the nominal Christian faith of some church members, they said. Those who had come to church membership without genuine faith might be deceived into thinking that they are genuine Christians, just because others in church membership do not see the need for repenting of their sins.

#### ***3.9.4 Illiteracy as a cause of spiritual stagnation***

Illiteracy was cited by 11.4 % of respondents among church leaders and 12 % among church members as the fourth major cause of the lack of spiritual growth in church members. Respondents said that where the majority of church members were literate the minority who were illiterate tended to be neglected as they could not understand as quickly as the educated members. They said that illiterate church members often felt marginalised because very little was done in the church to help them with a proper understanding of the Bible.

Respondents recording this said that some of the local churches' programmes for the Sunday worship service were printed and distributed to everyone coming to church. Some of these churches, they said, used a projector to show the verses for the sermon and important parts of the sermon. These churches, they said, encouraged their members to read the Bible daily, yet some of their members could not read. Apart from delivering Sunday sermons in local trade languages (Swahili and Lingala, two of the four national languages in DR

Congo), many churches did little to help illiterate church members to benefit from the word of God.

As far as the present research is concerned, it was found that 5.4 % of church members researched were illiterate. The proportion may indeed be higher in the churches researched as the present data concerned only those church members the research team came into contact with. They are among those who raised this issue as a possible cause of spiritual stagnation of church members. However, they acknowledged the possibility for illiterate Christians to grow spiritually healthy if pastors could bring the truths of God's word alive for illiterate people by using appropriate communication styles. Churches should encourage illiterate hearers to translate into practice God's word by doing what it says and making it a guide for their daily lifestyle. For those desiring to learn to read, respondents said, churches should organise literacy classes for adults.

### ***3.9.5 Unbelief as a cause of a lack of spiritual growth***

The fifth cause of a lack of spiritual growth was cited by 14.2 % of church leaders and 10 % of church members as unbelief. These respondents said that some registered church members had not experienced true conversion to Christ. Though these people claim to be Christians, respondents said, their deeds did not substantiate their claims. Respondents said that unbelief was a major cause of church members' lack of growth into spiritual maturity. Some senior pastors said that some of their church members had just gone through water baptism and, because of that, were partakers of Holy Communion. They came to church, not because they wanted to grow spiritually, but because anybody not going to church was considered not a Christian, leaders said. They said that only unbelief could explain some of their church members' heart-hardness when it comes to acknowledging their sins and asking for forgiveness. As a result, respondents in this group said that though such people might be regular churchgoers, they showed no sign of growing spiritually. Though they appeared to other church members as truly alive spiritually, they only looked

good outwardly. Because the inner attitudes of belief, love and obedience to God were lacking, the outer appearance was not genuine. They only appeared or pretended to be Christians, respondents said. They had no real spiritual life in themselves and therefore would not grow spiritually.

### ***3.9.6 Influence of false teachings as a cause of spiritual stagnation***

The sixth major cause of lack of spiritual growth of church members was cited by 11.4 % of church leaders and 11 % of church members as being the influence of false teachings. Some of the false teachings, respondents said, came from within ECC church denominations. In some of these church denominations, there were misinterpretations of the Scriptures, leading people astray. False teachings, respondents said, might also come from outside. Respondents cited RERC churches as possible sources of false teachings from outside. They said many pastors in these churches were clever in telling lies in order to extort money from hearers.

Among false teachings affecting the spiritual growth of members in Bunia churches, respondents in six of the local churches mentioned baptism as a means of salvation. This is the Roman Catholic doctrine that baptism saves. Those who followed this teaching believed that once baptised, they had secured entry to heaven. This teaching, respondents said, might be the basis for many coming to the church to seek water baptism, especially among children and the youth. Everybody wanted to be baptised, even children under the age of ten were going to baptism classes in large numbers, they said. The belief that salvation was possible through water baptism alone implied that salvation could be secured by works and not by faith only. Church members tended to rely on their personal effort to secure baptism. Following catechetical instructions and succeeding in the oral exams were seen as more important than living by the word being taught. The rationale for this false teaching was that even though the person did not exhibit fruit of genuine repentance, if he or she had followed catechism class and succeeded in the final exam, he or she was fit for baptism.

Instead of building their faith on Jesus Christ, church members counted on their good works in the church community.

A second false teaching widespread in Congo revival churches, as recorded by respondents in five of the local churches researched, was that all evils are caused by demons. Sickness, misfortune, road accident, failure in exams, childlessness, poverty, for example, can all be imputed the forces of darkness. This teaching was mostly imputed to Congo revival churches, where the most important part of the Sunday worship liturgy is the time consecrated to healing from sickness and deliverance from demonic possession. Church leaders in these local churches, respondents alleged, spent the majority of their time driving out demons, exorcising evil spirits from church members, etc. Any unusual situation was attributed to demons and had to be dealt with through spiritual warfare. A demon was responsible for barrenness in a family. Another demon was to blame for poverty in another family. Christians took no time to meditate on the scriptures. Instead, they spent time driving out demons “in Jesus’ name”. In relation to healing and deliverance, respondents said that some people went only to churches where healing and deliverance are offered. They were not interested in other parts of the worship service, only in prayers for healing and deliverance.

A third false teaching is the prosperity gospel. It is mentioned by respondents in seven of the local churches researched. These churches, respondents said, teach that God wants his children to live abundant lives, have good health and wealth. In one such local church in Bunia, all barren married women, the poor who want prosperity, women wanting to get married, the sick, those being attacked by witches, those in search of jobs, those who have failed exams, etc., were lured to “Jesus” for the blessings or benefits to claim from him. As a result, respondents said, many church members ran after these “easy” blessings. True teachings on the need to repent from sins were no longer heard in many local churches, respondents said. Therefore, churches preached prosperity without suffering. They preached salvation without repentance from

sins. In this way, churches helped to deceive people into believing that they were saved when in fact they had no genuine repentance from their sins and no saving faith in Jesus.

### ***3.9.7 The local church as a way of making money, as a cause of spiritual stagnation***

The seventh cause cited for lack of church members' growth into spiritual maturity is that some pastors viewed their church members more as a means of personal enrichment than people to bring to spiritual maturity. This was mentioned by 8.5 % of church leaders and 11 % of church members. Respondents to this answer came from four of the local churches researched. They said that some of their pastors used their local congregations to make money for themselves and their families. They said that church members hardly saw where their offerings went and what they accomplished in the local church. While church members struggled for the survival of their own offspring, they alleged, the pastor's family in these churches got wealthier.

Church leaders among these respondents said that in these "business churches" the focus of church worship and other church activities seemed to be more on material gains for the pastor and his family rather than the spiritual growth of individual church members. With many promises of blessings in return, church members were being coerced to give towards the church's budget and support the pastor. Very often all the outcome of the church's giving ended up in the hands of the "founding" members of the church, respondents said. Some of these "preachers" belittled the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection because they were more interested in making money than in teaching biblical truths for believers to grow spiritually. In so doing, they deceived people by giving them the impression that they were destined for eternal life if they gave more and more to God. Using the local church as an income generating powerhouse for the benefit of the founding members had

been witnessed in some of the churches researched and constituted a blockage to the spiritual growth of church members.

### ***3.9.8 Influence of traditional beliefs and practices on believers as a cause of their spiritual stagnation***

Some 8.5 % of respondents among church leaders and 10 % among church members mentioned the influence of traditional beliefs and practices on believers as the eighth major cause of lack of their spiritual growth. Respondents alleged that some pastors and church leaders teach that traditional beliefs and practices are God-given blessings to Africans and can be used for the wellbeing of Christians in times of crisis. According to this teaching, going to the witchdoctor in order to cure some diseases is not bad as long as it heals the sick person. Christians consult diviners in order to help them identify the cause of suffering in the family, whether barrenness, recurrent sickness or any misfortune. This syncretism influences those who come into contact with these teachings.

A number of church members, respondents said, revert to traditional practices in times of trouble because they see other church members doing them openly as church rites. They said that some church members revert to traditional beliefs and practices in times of crisis, and gave as examples incurable illness in the family, barrenness of married couples, repeated death in the family, misfortune such as loss of job, failure in exams and road accidents, calamities such as drought, or flood, to mention but a few. These situations could drive Christians away from faith to seek solutions at the hands of traditional healers, witchdoctors, sorcerers and diviners. Respondents said that even some church leaders had been caught consulting diviners and witchdoctors, setting a bad example for church members.

In two of these local churches, respondents claimed that some Christians openly consult traditional healers and witchdoctors while others do this

privately, hiding it from the church leadership for fear of excommunication. They said that many church members lived in fear of witchcraft. When things seemed to work against these church members, they suspected witchcraft and would seek appropriate action in line with traditional practices in the matter. Suspicions and accusations of witchcraft were frequent in many of the churches being researched, the study was told. Very often misfortunes of church members were blamed on witchcraft. Some categories of people, especially children and the elderly, were branded as witches. Although it was mentioned by very few respondents, their status as church leaders and church members made the problem a significant one in relation to the spiritual growth of church members.

Another influence of African traditional beliefs was that in some families of the local churches researched only women and children were drawn to the church, not men. The belief was that men, as heads of families, are guardians of family traditions and as such must assure the transmission of these traditions to subsequent generations. Traditional African family heads seemed to resist joining church membership for fear of reprisal from ancestors. This study found out that the majority of church members in the local churches in the town of Bunia were at the time of the study women and children. In a local church where particular attention was given to the gender issue, it was found that among sixty-four married women making up 70% of church membership, only eighteen were church members together with their husbands, while eighteen others' husbands went to a different church (mostly Roman Catholic) and twenty-eight had unconverted husbands.

In some cases family heads who had converted to Christ were forced to go back on their decision to believe in Christ because of the fear of reprisal, especially from the ancestors. Respondents mentioned the case of a church leader who consulted several witchdoctors to identify the cause of his son's incurable sickness. Upon the recommendation of a witchdoctor, the minister offered a sacrifice to the demons tormenting his son. He has since abandoned



church membership. Respondents believed he may never have truly believed in Jesus.

#### ***3.9.9 Divisions and conflicts in the church as the cause of spiritual stagnation***

The ninth major cause of lack of spiritual growth was identified by 8.5 % of church leaders and 8 % of church members as frequent division and conflicts in the church. Respondents said that division in the churches arose most often over power struggles, church money and the ethnic identity of the senior pastor.

Respondents from one of the local churches researched said that their local church had recently split from another local church and that a group in the new church was now in the process of seceding. The group alleged that they were being overlooked in the administration of the local church because of their ethnic background. Respondents from another local church said that their local church was made up mostly of one ethnic group because church members from other ethnic groups were being marginalised in this church. A senior pastor from a third local church said that one of his church elders left because his wife, who had been chairing the finance committee, was dismissed for embezzlement of funds. Her husband, however, alleged that she was dismissed because she did not belong to the “ruling” ethnic group. The couple has since started a new Congo revival church in a different part of the town, the pastor said. Ethnic identity, greed and the love of money by the pastoral leadership are among the causes of conflict and divisions in the Bunia churches being researched.

Where there were conflicts and divisions within the church community, respondents said, many church members got hurt in their faith. Weak Christians in church membership slipped back to immoral lifestyle. Others just left the church community, wandering from one church denomination to another in search of peace and unity.

### **3.10 Summary of the research findings**

Chapter 3 of the present study focused on understanding the extent of Bunia churches' awareness of the problem of nominal Christianity.

In total, 110 church leaders and 220 church members from twenty-two local churches and 104 students participated in the research as respondents. Church leaders, of whom 81.8% were male and 18.1% female, were aged between 26 and 75 years. Their level of education included primary school leavers, secondary school leavers and those with university degrees. Half of the church members investigated were male and half female. They were aged between 15 and 68. In addition, the research also investigated 104 students at Shalom University who were taking a course on spiritual development during the first semester, of whom 57.6% were female and 42.3% male. While 59.6% came from outside Bunia, 40.3% belonged to the researched Bunia churches. The following is a summary of the overall findings.

#### ***3.10.1 Notions of a Christian***

The majority of church leaders and members researched in Bunia churches understood that a Christian is “a person who has received Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord”. He or she substantiates his or her claim by water baptism (confirmation) and partaking of the Lord's Table and by an appropriate lifestyle. It can be deduced from these definitions that the major indicators of a true Christian faith are the fact of being baptised and partaking of Holy Communion, active participation in church worship and church activities and living differently from the secular world.

### ***3.10.2 Test of a true Christian***

While a few respondents said that God alone knows true Christians among their church members, the majority of them identified criteria to recognise true Christians and differentiate them from false or nominal Christians. These criteria were baptism and communion, commitment to the local church's life and a Christian lifestyle within and outside the church community.

### ***3.10.3 Church membership as true Christian identity***

The church leaders and members who participated in the research seemed to believe that being a registered church member was in itself an evidence of true Christian faith. The general procedure was that pastors and preachers at Sunday worship service made altar calls, inviting those who desired to commit their lives to Jesus to come forward after Sunday sermons. Some pastors invited those desiring to be baptised to enrol in the catechism class. Others got new converts through personal evangelism. Those professing faith in Jesus, whether through altar calls or through personal evangelism were encouraged to enrol in the baptism class or catechism class, after which qualified candidates were baptised and registered as church members. The process of registering people as church members, however, was not followed with much care. Many local churches did not screen candidates for baptism seriously enough to help them to register only genuine believers, thus leaving the doors of church membership open to unconverted members.

### ***3.10.4 Presence of nominal Christians***

A small number of respondents denied that there were nominal Christians in their church membership, but the vast majority admitted that there were those who gained church membership without a true encounter with Jesus Christ. According to these respondents in Bunia churches, nominal Christians were

those church members who had not truly converted to Christ. They could be recognised by their sinful lifestyle, irregular attendance at church worship, and inactive participation in church life, among other criteria mentioned. The testimonies of former nominal church members corroborated the respondents' views, shedding light on the reality of the existence of nominalism in the church memberships researched in Bunia.

#### ***3.10.5 Assurance of salvation***

The research findings indicate that the majority of the respondents claimed that they had the assurance of being saved. Among reasons for this assurance of salvation, respondents referred to the fact that they had been baptised and were regular partakers of Holy Communion, and were actively involved in their local churches' life. Some of those who were not sure of being saved justified their answers by the fact that they were not yet baptised. Others said this was because they were still under the church's discipline. Others, however, said only God knew whether they were saved or not. This approach to assurance of salvation is fraught with confusion. It will be critically examined in the next section.

#### ***3.10.6 Indicators of spiritual growth***

The research findings show that the majority of those researched among church leaders and church members believed that Bunia church members were growing spiritually. Among church leaders and church members who said that members were growing spiritually, 51 gave as evidence that members were growing spiritually the fact that they attended church worship and other church activities regularly and 43 mentioned the increase in their church offertory as evidence of church members' spiritual growth. The use of spiritual gifts as an indicator of the spiritual growth of church members was cited by 36 respondents, while 30 respondents mentioned that members' daily devotional

habits were indicators of their spiritual growth. Members' good testimony both within and outside the church community as an indicator of their spiritual growth was cited by 26 respondents, while nine church leaders, for their part, cited the fact that some of their church members were being called to the pastoral ministry as the evidence of their spiritual growth.

### ***3.10.7 Causes of spiritual stagnation and of lack of spiritual growth***

Despite acknowledging that some church members were growing spiritually, 135 respondents said that some church leaders and church members were not growing spiritually. They cited nine causes for this lack of growth, namely the misconduct of some church leaders and church members, lack of good teaching in the church, failure in church discipline, illiteracy, unbelief, the influence of false teachings, using the church as a business, the influence of African traditional beliefs and practices, and divisions in the church. The analysis and interpretation of these findings in light of the biblical perspective on Christian nominalism will be the subject of chapter 4 below.

### ***3.10.8 Bunia churches' cognisance of the problem of nominal Christianity in church memberships***

The findings in this chapter seem to indicate that Bunia churches are aware of the presence of nominal Christians within their respective church memberships. This can be seen in the majority of respondents acknowledging the presence of people in their church memberships who are not truly converted to Christ. Some of their criteria for recognising nominal Christians pointed to a degree of knowledge of the problem of nominalism. Though some respondents denied the presence of nominal Christians in Bunia church memberships, the reasons provided for the denial appear weak and confused. Some of the criteria for recognising true Christians and nominal Christians are not clear, since some of the criteria for nominal Christians could be applied to true Christians as well.

This will be more explicit in the following chapter 4, which focuses on analysing and interpreting the research findings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **BUNIA CHURCHES' UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM WITHIN THEIR MEMBERSHIPS: INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The findings in chapter 3 have shown that there is a certain but not total awareness of the problem of nominal Christianity in Bunia church memberships. The findings suggest that the awareness of church leaders and members is limited due to confusion over criteria for identifying nominalism.

Now in chapter 4 the study focuses on a critical analysis and interpretation of the research findings. The section aims to determine whether Bunia churches' understanding of the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships is sufficient to enable them respond to the problem or deficient. In the LIM model that has been adapted to the present study, section four continues the discussion started in section three that seeks to "interpret the world as it is". The extent to which Bunia churches understand Christian nominalism within their memberships could lay a foundation for practical actions (cf. Smith 2008:208), which will form the subject of the last section of the present study.

#### **4.1 Bunia churches' understanding of a Christian**

The analysis and interpretation of the findings of this research focus, among other things, on Bunia churches' understanding of a Christian and a nominal

Christian, their criteria for recognising true Christians and nominal ones, their processes for church membership and their model of disciple-making, their understanding of the assurance of salvation, and indicators of healthy spiritual growth or lack of it.

The lead question to all participants in the research study, whether church leaders, church members or students, was: “In your opinion, what is a Christian?” Putting together all the different answers, a true Christian could be defined, according to the majority of those researched in Bunia churches, as “a person who has received Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord”. He or she substantiated this claim by desiring to be baptised (confirmed), regularly partaking of the Lord’s Table, regularly participating in the Sunday worship service and any other spiritual activity of the local church, being actively involved in the life of the local church and living differently from the world around.

This definition is only the sum of their answers. It does not mean that any one person or any single local church actually holds to this composite definition. It highlights the churches’ understanding of the biblical Gospel and their communication of its content as will be discussed in section 5. The Bunia churches’ definitions showed that for them, belief in Jesus is the foundation of true Christian identity. Among evidences of genuine faith in Christ Bunia churches cited regular participation in the church’s sacraments and its spiritual activities and a lifestyle different from the world as evidences. Differences within local church denominations regarding the implications of believing in Jesus are discussed under the criteria for recognising true Christians below.

## **4.2 Bunia churches’ criteria for recognising true Christians**

Apart from those respondents who said only God knows who does or does not belong to him, the Bunia churches cited participation in the sacraments of



baptism and Holy Communion, involvement in local churches' activities and transformation in lifestyle as evidencing genuine Christian faith. The criteria, ranked according to their cumulative scores, are analysed below.

#### ***4.2.1 Baptism and Holy Communion as evidence of true faith in Jesus***

The first criterion for recognising true Christians and thus differentiating them from nominal ones was cited by most of the respondents as being baptised and partaking of the Lord's Table. Participation in the two sacraments of water baptism and Holy Communion was mentioned by 44 church leaders (40%), 117 church members (53.1%) and 78 students (75%). The general view of those researched was that all those who had been baptised, were on the local churches' membership rolls and who were regularly partaking of the Lord's Table were true Christians. Thus baptism and participation in the Lord's Table evidenced a genuine Christian faith. The issue here is not about the importance of the ordinances for Christians. Jesus' command to his disciples (cf. Mt. 26:26-29; 28:19) and the numerous passages in the New Testament indubitably underline their significance for believers both individually and corporately. In-depth discussion of these sacraments in the light of the New Testament teaching include, among many others, Flemington (1948), Beasley-Murray (1962) and Kuen (1995) for the sacrament of baptism, Grudem (1994:966-88), Vander Zee (2004), and Gerhard (2014) for both sacraments.

Rather, the question the present study raises is whether these sacraments "magically" qualify a person as true Christian. Do they constitute in themselves valid criteria to differentiate true Christians from nominal ones? In other words, are all those baptised church members and communicant Christians true Christians just because they have been baptised and are regularly partaking of the Lord's Table?

In light of the above questions, the New Testament leaves no doubt that repentance and faith in Jesus must precede water baptism. Whether it is the

experience of baptism at Pentecost (Ac. 2:38-41), the experience of the Samaritans (Ac. 8:12-13), Paul's experience of baptism (Ac. 9:18; 22:16), the baptism of the household of Cornelius (Ac. 10:24, 43-44, 47-48), Lydia (Ac. 16:14-15), the jailer in Philippi (Ac. 16:29-34), Crispus the synagogue ruler in Corinth (Ac. 18:8) and that of the twelve disciples in Ephesus (Ac. 19:1-7), repentance and belief come first and baptism follows.

The problem, which Beasley-Murray refers to as "a perpetual pastoral problem", is that churches' understanding of the biblical doctrine of baptism is not sufficient to give, as he points out, "satisfactory expression of the outward and inward elements, alike of baptism and of the church" (1993:64). It can be deduced from the New Testament teaching on baptism that only those who have genuinely repented from their sins and believed in Jesus, "those who have given reasonable evidence of believing in Christ" or "those who have *in fact* begun the Christian life" (Grudem 1994:969-70, italics his), should be baptised and integrated in the body of Christ. The need is to reconcile the practices of the Bunia churches with the biblical meaning of baptism (cf. Beasley-Murray 1993:60-66; Grudem 1994:953-54; Wood 2005:81-82; Taylor 2006:390-96).

As for the Lord's Table, its importance for individual believers and the corporate church is not the concern in this study. Rather, the point is whether Holy Communion constitutes evidence of continuing, living Christian faith? It was found that while some church members took communion sincerely, others participated in the sacrament just as a church routine for those who had been baptised. In some cases, church members continued to partake of the Lord's Table even when they had fallen into sin and had not confessed it. Some of these church members knew well that they should not participate in the sacrament, and to some degree, the churches knew it, but did nothing to confront individuals concerned. Rather than repenting from their sins and abandoning them, these church members went on to partake of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner.

The point of this discussion on the sacraments, thus, is that participation in baptism and the Lord's Table does not in itself automatically qualify a person as a true Christian. Those who have been baptised without genuine conversion to Christ will remain non-Christians even if they consider themselves or are regarded by others as true Christians. Baptised church members who partake of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner cannot be considered as genuinely converted to Christ.

#### ***4.2.2 Church attendance and involvement in church activities as evidence of true Christian faith***

A second criterion that Bunia churches cited for true Christian faith was regular participation in church services and various church activities. For respondents giving this criterion, active involvement in church life meant that one participated in the local church's Sunday worship service and the church's other spiritual activities during the week. He or she gave to the church and used his or her spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church community. This person, they said, evidenced true Christian faith.

Being active in the fellowship of believers can be a significant evidence of genuine faith in Jesus. But Christian fellowship is not limited to coming to the Sunday morning service, giving, and listening to the word of God. Biblical fellowship involves an environment where believers have access to the teaching of the word of God, to prayer for one another, to worship, to the exercise of church discipline, to the discovering and use of their spiritual gifts, to fellowship, and to evangelism and personal ministry to others whether in the church community or outside it.

From a biblical perspective, being an active church member means more than just attending church services and the other spiritual activities of the local churches. It means, as Dever points out, to "link arms with other Christians...so that non-Christians will hear and see the Gospel, so that weak Christians will be

cared for, so that strong Christians will channel their energies in a good way, so that church leaders will be encouraged and helped, so that God will be glorified” (2005:164). For many in the Bunia churches, fellowship was limited to Sunday worship services and to some meetings during the week where believers could come together. These are churches’ routine activities. The dimensions of biblical fellowship that need to be rediscovered in Bunia churches include the loving service of believers to God and to each other as God’s people, witness to unbelievers within the walls of the church and outside, care for the needy among them and for those in charge of the pastoral leadership, and the carrying of each other’s burdens (cf. Ac. 2:42-47; Ga. 6:1-5; Ep. 4:25-32). True fellowship ought to be the joyful life of the Christian community and an act of worship to God.

In light of the above description of what biblical fellowship and church membership entails, it seems that Bunia church members have yet to understand their role and place in the believing community. The majority are “Sunday Christians” who come to church, listen to the word of God, give offerings and do not return until the following Sunday. During the week they are “absent” from the life of their local churches.

The problem, though, seems to be not in the substance of fellowship as experienced in Bunia churches, but rather in an inadequate understanding of biblical fellowship. When church members come to understand the above definition as the meaning of fellowship, it can change their attitudes towards church membership as well. Inadequate understanding of Christian fellowship in these churches can be blamed on churches’ inadequate understanding of the biblical Gospel (cf. Banks 1994:57).

#### ***4.2.3 Change in lifestyle as evidence of genuine conversion to Christ***

The third criterion by which to recognise true Christians is transformation in lifestyle after conversion. It is cited by a higher percentage of church leaders

(37.2%) than church members (2.7%) and students (1.9%). Respondents claimed that transformation in a believer's lifestyle evidenced true Christian faith. What it meant to live differently from the world, however, seemed to vary from one church denomination to another. For example, some of the local churches researched did not admit a polygamous man to baptism on the grounds that he should not have more than one wife. In these churches, if, after his baptism a man took a second wife, he was excommunicated from the fellowship of believers. But in some other local churches, they saw no problem in polygamous people being baptised and taking Holy Communion. A church member excommunicated from his local church membership for taking a second wife after his baptism would be welcomed with all his wives in another local church and even appointed as a church elder. In other words, the person's sinful behaviour, disapproved of in his or her former local church, was instead accepted by his new local church. This and many other examples show that the church denominations researched varied greatly in their ways of defining what a "Christian lifestyle" is and entails.

This discussion further points towards the need for deeper understanding of biblical transformation. The bible gives examples of conversion, such as that of Paul (Act. 9), Cornelius (Act. 10) and Lydia (Act. 16) and believers in the church of the Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:2-10). In the first instance, immediately after his encounter with the risen Lord, the former persecutor of Christians was suddenly transformed into one of the greatest preachers and one who would suffer the most for the very Gospel he wanted to destroy (Ac. 9:19-27). In the case of the Thessalonians, they abandoned the worship of idols and instead embraced the worship of the true and living God (cf. 1 Th. 1:6-9).

There is not a single "model" of biblical transformation after conversion that can apply to every new convert today. What happens to new converts today will vary depending on the nature and circumstances of the conversion event and according to what they were before conversion. Not everybody will experience conversion in the same way. Peterson's reflection can be understood as being

in support of this view. He states, “No conversion...establishes a pattern that is to be followed by later believers or is appealed to in preaching” (2009:311). Nevertheless, true conversion as the inner work of God will necessarily manifest itself in a changed identity, which is understood with McKnight as “a person shifting from the self to God as the center of gravity in one’s life, shifting from love of self to love of God and others” (2007:73).

The concept of Christian transformation found in Bunia churches is more about following the rules and regulations of their respective church denominations than about the inner work of God in those who truly believe in Jesus. What churches want to see is often only external signs of transformation such as stopping drunkenness and smoking or, in the case of a polygamous man, sending away all his wives except the first. This way of understanding biblical transformation may be contributing to lifestyle changes that are made only in order to gain access into church membership, and may be one cause of the existence of nominal Christians within church memberships. These kinds of changes cannot be expected to last long. The person will soon reveal his or her true identity. Genuine transformation will, however, affect the person’s entire way of life.

#### ***4.2.4 Only God knows***

Apart from those who mentioned three criteria for recognising true Christians, seven church leaders, thirty church members and thirteen students in the study did not identify any criteria. Instead they said that only God knows who among church members true Christians are. They represent 6.3 % of church leaders researched, 13.6 % of church members and 12.5 % of students and 11.5 % of all those researched.

Church leaders who gave this response were making the point that the identification of a true Christian is a divine prerogative. Their responsibility as shepherds of God’s flock was to preach the gospel and build up those who

came to church and those who committed their lives to Christ. For them, judging the reality of a person's profession of faith was beyond their competence as pastors of God's flock. They argued that it is up to the Lord of the church to determine whether a person's claim to be a Christian was genuine or spurious.

In a sense they are correct that it is God's prerogative to determine who his genuine children are and who are not. Scriptures, however, assure believers that they may know whether or not they have eternal life (cf. 1 Jn. 5:11-13). Jesus said about false teachers and prophets that people would recognise whether they were true teachers and prophets "by their fruit" (Mat. 7:16). This seems to give the Christian community some degree of responsibility to check the claims of those professing faith in Jesus by examining their deeds.

As far as attitudes towards Christian nominalism are concerned, Bunia churches' criteria of a true profession of faith in Jesus were not exhaustive. The study only considered the issues raised by the churches themselves. At this stage of the study, the research compared the chosen measures of Christian nominalism with the biblical criteria for true Christians or nominal ones. A living relationship with Jesus should remain central to the definition of a true Christian. But it needs to be taught with the necessary clarity both in the content of the initial believing in Jesus and what it entails to live the Christian life.

All the above discussions of Bunia churches' criteria for recognising true Christians may indicate a deficient understanding of a Christian as far as a biblical perspective is concerned. It points towards the need for a deeper understanding of the Christian faith and its implications for daily Christian living.

### **4.3 Church membership as a criterion for true Christians in Bunia churches**

The question on how people become church members in Bunia churches was intended to determine whether, in the mind of church leaders and members, being a church member alone qualified a person as a true Christian.

Church leaders' answers to the question of how a person becomes a church member in their respective local churches showed that there were many ways of gaining local church membership. One of them was responding to an altar call after an evangelistic sermon. Usually those responding were encouraged to join catechism classes in order to be baptised before becoming church a member. Whether the person heard a Sunday worship sermon or believed through personal evangelism, the ultimate goal was to be baptised in order to join the fellowship of believers.

This approach raises the question whether any person who responds to an altar call and enters a catechism class and is baptised is indeed a true Christian. On the one hand, in the understanding of the Bunia churches, everybody who went through the above process evidenced true Christian faith. On the other hand, respondents also acknowledged that a person could follow all the processes for church membership without experiencing a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

Church membership can be an evidence of genuine profession of faith in Jesus, but it is not sufficient on its own as a criterion for a true Christian profession of faith. The acknowledgement of nominal Christians in church membership in section 2 of this study can indicate that some people gain access to church membership without genuine faith. Biblical church membership needs to be taught and believers need to understand what it means and what it entails to be members of the body of Christ.



## **4.4 Understanding of nominal Christianity in Bunia churches**

According to two-thirds of the participants in this research, the presence of nominal Christians within their church membership was evident. Nominal Christians were understood by Bunia churches as those who had not truly converted to Christ. According to the respondents, some of the registered church members no longer partook of the Holy Communion. Others, they said, were not actively involved in church life, while others' lifestyles were no different from those of unbelievers. For these respondents, such people in church membership were Christians in name only. What each element in this definition entails is developed below.

### ***4.4.1 Bunia churches' definition of a nominal Christian***

On the basis of the Bunia churches' criteria for differentiating nominal Christians from authentic ones a nominal Christian can be defined as "a person who claims to be a Christian but has never truly believed in Jesus and has not been baptised or, if baptised, is no longer a partaker of the Lord's Table and who is not an active member of any local church".

Bunia churches defined nominal Christians as those who had never truly converted to Christ or who had never truly received Jesus as Saviour and Lord, but who were church members just because they had undergone catechism class and had been baptised. It remains to establish a relationship between this definition and the churches' criteria for recognising nominal Christians.

### ***4.4.2 Sinful behaviour as evidence of a nominal faith in Jesus***

Sinful behaviour of those who claimed to be Christians was given as evidence of nominal Christian faith. Church leaders, as well as church members, who live sinful lives, demonstrate that they are not true Christians, but only nominal

ones. Bunia churches' respondents alleged that some church members, even some church leaders, lived in sexual immorality. Some of them had more than one wife but attempted to hide the situation from church leaders for fear of church discipline. Others, respondents alleged, had children outside wedlock. Some "Christian" youths, they said, were members of gangs terrorising innocent people through robbery and theft. Since the war that swept Ituri district, some Christians had developed hatred towards other ethnic groups, respondents alleged. They said that many church members practiced fetishism and sorcery, consulting witchdoctors and diviners to detect the cause of their misfortunes. Many of them did this secretly for fear of church discipline.

There are Scripture verses that point to the fact that persistent sin is an evidence of a nominal faith in Jesus. John writes, "No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9). This Scripture verse, however, is variously interpreted in Bunia churches. Some churches infer from this passage that any believer who falls into sin demonstrates that he or she has never truly converted to Christ. For these churches, even if such believers repent from their sins and ask for forgiveness, they are not true Christians. The present study takes the view that Stott expresses, that "the sin a Christian 'does not' and 'cannot' do is habitual and persistent sin" (1982:137). His interpretation holds that, though believers may sometimes fall in sin, "opposition to sin is the ruling principle" of true believers' lives. Basically, he concludes, "to continue in sin is to supply clear evidence" that one has never believed in Jesus. As far as the attitude towards Christian nominalism is concerned, the point of the above passage is that those who claim to be Christians but live in sin or resist church discipline when reproached are providing evidence that they are Christians in name only. It means that a continued lifestyle of sin can evidence Christian nominalism.

While the discussion of the findings in chapter 3 showed that some church members and even some church leaders live in sin and that to some extent,

their church communities know it, those among them who are grieved by their sins, repent from them and ask for forgiveness may not fall in the category of nominal Christians.

#### ***4.4.3 Not taking communion as evidence of nominal Christian faith***

The second evidence Bunia churches gave for recognising nominal Christians relates to the partaking of Holy Communion. The understanding of the churches researched is that, although some people came regularly to church services, gave their offerings and even took part in other spiritual activities organised by the local churches, they were not true Christians because they were not partaking of the Lord's Table. Such people, although baptised, demonstrated they had not truly encountered Jesus Christ, respondents said. Others were not taking communion because they were undergoing church discipline. Church discipline is intended to help people to repent and return to the fellowship of believers, but although pastoral teams might have multiplied visits to draw them back, some church members resisted such approaches. Such people proved that they were not, at the outset, genuinely converted to Christ. They had only undergone the local church's membership process.

The above discussion suggests that there were many more cases than what the research revealed of church members and, to some degree, church leaders who were no longer participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion. It remains to find out why church members who have fallen into sin are unwilling to repent and even less to reintegrate into the local church's fellowship. A close examination of the cases of church members who no longer partook of the Lord's Table revealed that in most of the churches, there was no follow up of those under church discipline. Instead, it seemed that churches abandoned them. In some cases, churches were unwilling to welcome back to the fellowship some of these members who had fallen into sin. An example of such people, Jerome, took a second wife after his baptism because he had only daughters with his first wife. He had since had two sons with the second wife

and was unwilling to abandon her as the church was requesting. The local church's discipline committee insisted that the condition of integration into the Lord's Table was that Jerome sent away his second wife. Though Jerome had repented of his sin and had asked for the church's forgiveness, because he could not think of letting his second wife go, he had remained outside the Lord's Table. Another example was that of Esther, who used to be a deaconess in her local church. When rumours that she was involved in witchcraft reached the elders' court, she was summoned before the council and excommunicated. She had repeatedly told anybody visiting her that she was not involved in witchcraft. Every time she asked to be reintegrated into the Lord's Table, her request was rejected because her accusers threatened to leave the local church if she was admitted. These examples may not be the rule, but they highlight some of the weaknesses of the pastoral leadership to win back to fellowship those who have fallen in sin. In these cases, rather than brandishing these church members as nominal Christians, churches should first take the blame for their failure in the pastoral care of God's flock.

It can also be said from the cases in the study, that the instances of baptised children and young people dropping out of Holy Communion exceeded those of adult members abandoning Holy Communion. This may be sounding the alarm that ministry to children and young people needs critical refocusing. In many of the local churches researched, there is no specific ministry to children apart from the routine Sunday schools. Churches will need to understand that children can come to saving faith and commit to follow Jesus if adequately taught and monitored. The study has revealed that some parents or guardians pushed their children forward to enrol in the catechism class simply in order for them to be baptised.

Participation in the Lord's Table can evidence a true relationship with Christ, whose death partakers are remembering at the Table. In this case, sustained voluntary absence from it will indicate the absence of a serious personal relationship with Christ. Yet, in the light of the examples above, some of those

not taking communion may be true Christians but are victims of their church's traditionally held practices. Thus it can be argued that partaking of the Lord's Table may or may not evidence true faith.

#### ***4.4.4 Non-participation in church activities as evidence of Christian nominalism***

The third evidence of nominalism cited by 13.6 % of respondents is non-participation in the local church's activities. Participation in Christian activities does not necessarily prove the presence of true Christian faith. Some people come to church and take part in some spiritual activities without genuine faith in Jesus. Some may be simply following their family members' example. Some may be participating in the church's spiritual activities to avoid being regarded as non-Christians.

However, the absence of participation in the church's life may very likely indicate a nominal faith. If professed believers do not care about the body of Christ and desire somehow to serve their fellow believers or be served by them, if they do not have fellowship with them and are unwilling to join in with God's own family, it suggests they are not serious about their profession of faith in Jesus. Either they are ignorant of the teaching of the New Testament about church membership (cf. 1 Co. 12:13) or they have not genuinely converted to Christ.

Church members may not be actively participating in their local churches' life and activities for various reasons. Some of those researched were full-time employees who had very little time left to concentrate on church activities. This could be the case of Christian workers in hospitals, those working in non-governmental organisations, Christian businessmen and businesswomen, those working in the security services, etc. They might be regular in Sunday worship services, but likely to miss other spiritual activities during the week. Caution is needed in assessing all of them as nominal Christians. The point, however, is

that a nominal Christian will be unwilling to be with and serve God's people. He or she may profess Christian faith but without a willingness to participate in church activities the reality is absent. The New Testament describes such people as "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Ti. 3:5). For such a person, a lack of participation in any church activities, however appropriate they might be, suggests an insincere profession of faith, hence a nominal and in practice a non-existent faith. Therefore, churches should focus on bringing these nominal Christians into a living faith in Jesus, as it is only after conversion that their involvement in church activities can have a meaning and draw them into real fellowship.

#### ***4.4.5 Irregular churchgoers as nominal Christians***

The fourth criterion for recognising nominal Christians, mentioned by 9 % of church respondents, was irregular church attendance. In this category respondents mentioned church members who never came to church and church members who attended church services irregularly. For these respondents, such members showed they were not true Christians, but nominal ones.

It is questionable whether irregular or non-church attendance is adequate as a criterion for Christian nominalism. There may be some valid reasons why church members do not come to Sunday worship regularly. Some church members are dissatisfied with their respective local churches. Some of them have realised that Sunday sermons in their local churches are not relevant to their felt needs. Instead, they go to other churches in search for relevant sermons.

The issue of church attendance is discussed at length under church membership below. The point being made here is that a nominal Christian will not necessarily get help by coming regularly to church services. There must be willingness from the pastoral leadership to first of all evangelise such people in

their church memberships. Pastors can do this by reaching out to such people rather than waiting for them to come to church services.

#### **4.5 Understanding of assurance of salvation in Bunia churches**

As part of the anatomy of nominalism, the research also sought to know from all respondents whether they had assurance of being saved. All church leaders (100 %) claimed they were sure of being saved. But among church members, 85.9 % claimed to have assurance of salvation, while 14.1 % said that only God knew if they were truly saved or not. Ninety-three students, representing 89.4% of students researched, answered that they had assurance of salvation, while eleven (10.5%) were not sure of being saved. In total, 90.3 % said they were assured of salvation.

To the question why they were so sure of their salvation, three overall answers emerged: belief in Jesus, participation in the sacraments and church membership. Those who said they based their assurance of salvation on their personal encounter with Jesus represented all the leaders researched (100%), 120 church members (63.4%) and 50 students (53.7%). Others based their assurance of salvation on having been baptised and being regular partakers of the Lord's Table. They represent 40 church members (21.1%) and 35 students (37.6%). The third group was made of those who said they were sure of salvation because they were registered church members in their respective local church denominations. They represented 29 church members researched (15.3%) and eight students (8.6%).

The above foundations for one's assurance of salvation are a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the scriptures. Repentance from sins and belief in Jesus are underlined throughout the scriptures as the condition for salvation. As developed in the second section of this study while discussing nominalism from a biblical perspective, it is to those who believe in Jesus, who receive him as

Saviour and Lord that God gives the power of becoming his sons and daughters (cf. Jn. 1:12). Water baptism, it has been said, is presented in the Scriptures as an outward sign of God's invisible work inward the believer. Church membership and participation in the church's sacraments alone are by no means the conditions for salvation according to the Scriptures and do not by themselves constitute irrefutable proofs of salvation. Moreover, if people base assurance on their acts of religious observance or their inclusion in a local church's membership, it indicates a deficient understanding of the nature of Christian faith itself. It may indicate deficiency in the teaching and preaching of the churches in these aspects mentioned or a deficient understanding by church members. Biblical faith in Jesus is much more than participation in church services and the church's sacraments, as it will be discussed in the last section of this study.

## **4.6 Understanding of disciple-making in Bunia churches**

The question of disciple-making – or the lack of it – may also be related to the prevalence of nominalism in the Bunia churches. That is why the research sought to understand how local churches make disciples of believers.

### ***4.6.1 Catechism classes as disciple-making***

In twelve local churches (50%), the research found that church leaders considered the catechism class as disciple-making. In these twelve local churches, when new converts received catechetical instruction for six months or one year, they were considered ready not only for baptism but also to grow as disciples of Christ. Some of these pastors and church elders believed that once one has followed catechetical instruction and been baptised, spiritual growth is automatic if only baptised members keep faithfully coming to church on Sundays and to any spiritual activity of the local churches.



Catechism booklets found in the churches had been drafted with the aim that catechumens would memorise the material. In the case of one church denomination, the booklet was drafted into a series of questions and answers around biblical doctrines such as God, creation, the fall, Satan, salvation, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Christian lifestyle, the church, the word of God, worship and judgment in the last days. Short answers were provided for each question with supporting scripture verses.

In general, churches consider that catechism is for those desiring water baptism. But the above content suggested that catechism should be intended to give general instruction to believers, whether newly converted or long-time church members. As such, catechism class could be a good and sincere effort by church leaders committed to Christ to give systematic instruction to members, but it does not contain all that believers need to know in order to grow spiritually healthy.

However, catechism classes alone are not sufficient as an effective way of making disciples. First, the catechism booklets, if following the model described above, need amplification. Answers are short because primarily intended for memorisation. But they fail to present hearers with all the richness of the biblical teaching on each topic. The result is that people are limited in their understanding of important concepts such as sin, salvation, repentance, faith in Jesus, new birth, to name but few. Failure to understand the biblical truth about these important concepts can contribute to the laying of shaky or shallow foundations for the understanding of the Christian faith and its implications for daily Christian life. Second, catechism class in these churches is short. Some churches conduct this instruction for at most a month, while the majority hold the classes for six months. Neither period of instruction is sufficient to prepare disciples who are balanced in scriptural truth. Because for most of the churches, the goal of catechetical instruction is baptism, more attention should be given to teaching on sin, salvation, new birth, etc., in order to clarify the gospel for unbelievers. It is understood that some people come to catechism class without

genuine faith in Jesus. Good teaching of the gospel is needed for them to understand their spiritual condition.

Third, the research suggested that the teaching in most of the catechism classes is superficial. It seems that some teachers only make students memorise the questions with their answers. Catechism class, however, offers the opportunity for serious instruction of believers. A typical catechism class should therefore focus on just one question per session. In some cases, a question can be answered properly in more than one session, depending on the level of understanding of the students. In the case of CECA 20 mentioned earlier, the catechism booklet is made of 94 questions. If a local church teaches catechism once a week, the minimum required to cover the booklet would be 94 weeks or one year and eight months.

Fourth, catechism classes should be more than about being baptised. Catechumens should first thoroughly understand the meaning of repenting from sin and believing in Jesus and the implications for their daily life as followers of Christ. The goal of catechism should not be preparing candidates for baptism but rather growing believers into disciples of Christ. Churches should therefore not rush to baptise catechumens in order to increase their memberships. They should wait to baptise only those giving a saving response to the gospel and showing proofs of transformation that comes with repentance from sin and trust in Jesus.

#### ***4.6.2 “School of ministry” as disciple-making***

In one fourth of the local churches researched, a “school of ministry” or a “school of mission” was organised. In the case of the “school of ministry”, one local church held a one hour-course in the morning and in the evening. Two of these local churches said by organising “a school of ministry” they prepared believers for evangelism, prayer and mission. They taught various topics including an overview of each Bible book in the Old and New Testaments, major

Bible doctrines, evangelism and follow-up, homiletics, counselling, disciple making among others. Classes lasted ten months and ended with a graduation ceremony. Any church member desiring to deepen his or her understanding of the word of God in order to serve Him better was welcome to enrol. In one of these local churches, the average participation was a hundred and fifty, whether it was the morning class or the evening class. In the other, the average participation was between sixty and eighty. The pastoral team taught most of the courses but also called in some seminary lecturers. The programme was designed for ten months and ended with final exams and a graduation ceremony. Those who graduated from these schools could serve the local church as deacons or as any church ministry leader. Others even went out as missionaries.

The question these “schools” raise is how these topics are organised to give a balanced package of biblical disciple-making. And what happens to the vast majority who are not enrolled and how are they to become disciples of Christ? Additionally, such classes are often crowded and hardly allow for following each individual personally. If spiritual maturity is the goal of biblical disciple-making, local churches will need to rethink the way they conduct these “schools” and will need to follow better ways of disciple-making. This issue is addressed in the last section of this study.

#### ***4.6.3 Bible study and bible seminars as disciple-making***

For those churches organising seminars and bible studies as a way of making disciples, the research noted that these “seminars” or “bible studies” were not organized on a weekly basis. Throughout the five months of the duration of this research, such seminars were held four times in two of the six local churches organising bible study classes. A third local church in this group started bible studies but stopped after barely one month.

As far as disciple-making is concerned, studying the Bible systematically has its merit when churches are intentional in using them as a means of growing believers into disciples. Effective disciple-making is, as Uzodinma points out, “one which produces in the lives of those subjected to it, a progressive change or transformation toward increasing Christlikeness, thereby making them his true disciples” (2001:56-58).

To bring about such a transformation in the lives of believers, bible studies in these churches should aim to be as comprehensive as possible and let the biblical truth to speak, rather than imposing their own view or the view of their church denominations. First, studying the Bible comprehensively allows believers to benefit from the “whole counsel of God” and to seek in depth to understand the mind of God as revealed in the Bible. Comprehensive bible studies differ from occasional studies and haphazard selection of scripture passages. Believers will never grow spiritually healthy as long as pastors lead bible studies sporadically, selecting only their favourite passages. Stott points out the weakness of such bible study classes: “Such selective knowledge and use of scripture plays into the devil’s hands. Every heresy is due to an overemphasis upon some truth, without allowing other truths to qualify and balance it” (1982:182-3). The second advantage of serious bible study is that such knowledge of God’s word can lead to applying the words in one’s life (cf. Jo. 1:8-9; Ps. 1:1-3; Jn. 5:39-40; Ja. 1:22-25), especially where God is allowed to speak to students through the scripture passages, when the truth is not distorted by the church’s traditions, and when students are willing to face up the challenges raised in the study of the word of God.

#### ***4.6.4 Sunday sermons as disciple-making***

In four of the local churches researched (18.1%), there was no pre-baptism class. New converts were baptised immediately after their profession of faith. These churches seemed to take Jesus’ command to teach believers as

following baptism instead of preceding it. For them, the instruction of believers came in the form of Sunday sermons and seminars throughout the week.

Sunday sermons can be effective ways of growing believers into disciples of Christ if they are organised and carried out with this goal of disciple-making. In his course “Disciple-making in the African church”, for example, Olander (2011:18) suggests that a local church with disciple-making in mind could preach a series of biblical messages about the characteristics of a true disciple or a series on balanced Christian life or a series on biblical characters like Joseph, Moses, Naomi, David, Barnabas, Paul, etc. A local church could also organise Bible classes for adults on Sunday morning just like the Sunday school, he says. These classes can offer studies in a variety of books of the Bible or training on practical topics such as how to effectively witness one’s faith to others.

As far as the study of Christian nominalism is concerned, any preaching or teaching should have both evangelism and disciple-making in mind. Uzodinma (2001:58) underlines the importance for local churches to learn how to make disciple-making programmes that are biblically balanced in their content. For him, any activity having as ultimate goal spiritual maturity in Christ will need to be well thought-out, and carefully planned, the content carefully selected and organised in order to achieve spiritual maturity in those subjected to it. It must be deliberately designed to enable believers attain Christlikeness as a consistent lifestyle.

It is possible to preach a series of messages in Sunday morning services, messages specifically designed to make believers grow in spiritual maturity in Christ, if the overall objectives are clearly defined, based on a good understanding of what the present situation is. Sunday sermons can offer opportunities to clarify the gospel for unbelievers and nominal Christians within church membership. However, there is a need to underline the importance of an intentional follow up of those listening to sermons. The research revealed that for most of these churches, pastoral relationship was often limited to the

Sunday morning services and accountability was not well established in ways that would encourage healthy spiritual growth to maturity. Though it is the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of sermon audiences, pastors and preachers need to be seeker-sensitive to the needs of the flock. They need to develop a fathers' heart toward those listening to their sermons. They need to intentionally follow up participants in the Sunday services, going outside the walls of their respective local churches, and they need to pray for or with those who are touched by the message.

#### **4.7 Bunia churches' understanding of spiritual growth**

Having described the Bunia churches' definition of a true Christian and a nominal one, their process of admission to church membership and of disciple making, the study further explored their understanding of healthy spiritual growth for possible clues to their knowledge of the problem of Christian nominalism.

To the question, "Are your church members growing spiritually?" 75 church leaders (68.1%) and 120 church members (54.5%) claimed church members were growing spiritually, against 35 leaders (31.8%) and 100 church members (45.4%) who said church members were not growing spiritually. The result shows that the majority of those researched (59.0% against 40.9%) believed that Bunia church members were growing spiritually. It is far from being a large majority, though. The answers of those who said there was no spiritual growth among their church members were analysed within the category of causes of spiritual stagnation. But those who acknowledged spiritual growth within their respective local churches identified the following criteria.

#### ***4.7.1 Faithful attendance of church services as indicator of spiritual growth***

The first indicator of spiritual growth was mentioned by 17.5 % of church leaders and 21.6 % of church members. They alleged that members in their respective local churches were growing spiritually because they were more eager to come to church than before. The manner in which members rushed to take their seats, in some of these churches even well before the services started, indicated their hunger for God's word, respondents said. As a result of church members' delight in church services, respondents said, the number of participants in Sunday worship services and other weekly spiritual activities in most of their local churches had increased. Those regularly coming to church also attracted more people to church services and those who were irregular churchgoers had now become regular participants in church services. Such an increase in attendance evidenced growth into spiritual maturity.

The real question, therefore, is whether regular participation in church services is a valid indicator of spiritual growth. Local churches should establish why people like to come to their respective church services. Do all who attend church services regularly grow into spiritual maturity? And are all church activities designed to nurture spiritual growth?

The research suggested that church attendance and involvement could certainly be an indication of real Christian faith. There were people in the churches studied who came to church with a genuine desire for spiritual growth toward maturity in Christ. It seems that there are churches and church leaders who direct their efforts towards preaching and teaching passionately in order to help members to grow spiritually. But participation in church services appears to be inadequate as the sole criterion for healthy spiritual growth. It may not be enough for establishing that Christian faith is real. It is the combination of teaching and strong pastoral care that will bring believers into healthy spiritual growth. The evidence in the churches researched was that not all who came to

church regularly grew spiritually. The research indicated that some longstanding churchgoers had failed to experience spiritual growth. Reasons for such failings may either be a failure in pastoral care or that, though such people regularly come to church, they have never truly converted to Christ. It seems that some participants in church services come, for example, solely for the good music and dancing. It has been noted that in some churches' Sunday services, a large percentage of the children leave soon after the music stops and just before the sermons start. Some people come to church as a family tradition or for prestige rather than from a desire to worship God. Some will only go where there are many people in attendance.

#### ***4.7.2 Christian witness as an indicator of spiritual growth***

As the second indicator of spiritual growth in the researched Bunia churches, 17.3 % of leaders and 21.6 % of members mentioned testimonies of changed lives as indicators of spiritual growth. For these respondents, the good testimonies of church leaders and members both within and outside the church community evidenced their spiritual growth. Such testimonies indicated that church members were permeating the society around as salt and light with the aim of bringing transformation to their local community.

There are undoubtedly testimonies of church members impacting the world around them with their Christian lifestyle. It is a major biblical theme that God calls his people to be radically different from the surrounding culture in order to permeate the latter and transform it. The scriptures say of believers, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). By using the metaphor of salt and light (cf. Mat. 5:13-16), Jesus was teaching his followers to infiltrate and permeate the non-Christian society in order to positively influence and change it, as Stott (2007:78) has pointed out:



Just as seasoning gives good flavour to food and prevents it from decaying, in the same way God calls his true children to influence the non-Christian society and prevent it from the decay of social injustice, ethnic violence and conflicts, corruption, sexual promiscuity, criminality and others. Where is the salt and light of Christians and the Christian church when society is decaying and rotting?

The researched churches would, however, be hard-pressed to provide answers to these questions. They still have fresh memories of the ethnic bloodshed that engulfed the Ituri district from 1997 to 2003. It can be said that lives are not being transformed because there have been serious social and ethnic problems in Bunia and beyond. The real need is for Christians to “make every effort to permeate the world around them in order to affect others positively, just as seasoning brings out the best flavour in food and prevents decay in food, just as light drives away darkness but shows the right direction to people” (Stott, 2007:81).

Again, effective transformation in lifestyle is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have repented from their sins and turned to trust in Jesus. Caution is needed not to take every sign of transformation as a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. The study has shown that some of the so-called transformations were motivated only by the desire to gain access to the ceremony of baptism. In the specific cases, the change was short lived. But genuine transformation will last and impact all aspects of the individual’s life as well as the life of the community.

#### ***4.7.3 Increase in church offertory as indicator of church members’ spiritual growth***

Increase in the offertory during the Sunday worship services was cited as the third evidence of the spiritual growth of church members by 18.6 % of leaders and 19.1 % of members. For them, increase in members’ liberality was an indicator of their spiritual growth.

Jesus exhorted his disciples to practise almsgiving in Matthew 6:1-4. But the motives for giving to God and to others should be pure, out of compassion rather than giving with the intention of attracting praise from people or with thought of reward. Generous giving can be a natural response of a believer's love for Christ and a proof of that love. Believers should give out of compassion, not for anything they can get out of their giving. Christian generosity should reflect believers' devotion to Christ. This is probably what is meant in Paul's call to generosity from the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Christian liberality should be God-centred rather than self-centred, not done to make the giver look good before the congregation of believers. Christian generosity should be shown especially when fellow Christians are in need. As Tasker points out, "it is the Holy Spirit who inspires Christians not only to give spontaneously, and even more generously than their means would appear to warrant, but to give to people they have never seen, solely because they recognise that all believers are one in Christ" (1968:111).

It can be deduced from the example of the Macedonians that true liberality is an expression of the divine grace that a believer has received. In 2 Corinthians (2 Co. 8 and 9) we find the supreme motive for Christian giving, the example of Christ, and believers' gratitude to Christ for his redemptive sacrifice by giving and even impoverishing himself on behalf of sinners (2 Co. 8:9). God's grace to believers demonstrates that Christian giving is much more than just a display of the virtues of compassion and of a readiness to help those in need (cf. Martin, 1986:256). In 2 Corinthians (2 Co. 8 and 9) Paul is encouraging the Christians to give, not under pressure, but by pointing out how their Christian testimony should express itself in generosity. Christians should not give reluctantly or under compulsion (cf. 2 Co. 9:7). The example of the Macedonian Christians is, as Hughes (1962:288) points out, "a practical proof that true generosity is not the prerogative of those who enjoy an adequacy of means". This, he continues, means that "the source of true generosity is not Christians' purse, but their hearts" (Ibid, 329). The following important lesson can be drawn from the Macedonians:

The amount we give is not as important as why and how we give. God does not want us to give grudgingly. Instead, he wants us to give as these churches did-out of dedication to Christ, love for fellow believers, the joy of helping those in need, as well as the fact that it was simply the good right thing to do (*Life Application Study Bible*, 1996:1842, note on 2 Co.8:2-5).

In some of the researched churches, however, Christians were generally not giving. It suggests that a large numbers of participants who come to the Sunday worship service do not give regularly. Some do not give at all. If an increase in giving is not taking place, many needs are not being met because of insufficient funds. Those who come to church services but do not give offerings fail in this area either because they have nothing to offer or just out of ignorance. Some are disillusioned by manipulations from church leaders to force participants to give more money.

Care should be taken not to deceive church members that their giving evidences spiritual growth. Some of those who come to church give in order to be considered as true Christians. Therefore, increased giving does not necessarily evidence spiritual growth. Moreover, not all those who give offerings and tithes do so as a result of their inward spiritual growth. Some give as a church tradition. Others give out of coercion from church leaders. Still others give in order to make themselves a name in the Christian community or to please men. All these are not evidences of spiritual growth. Some of these acts of giving may just evidence pride and the selfish interests of the givers.

#### ***4.7.4 Use of spiritual gifts by some church members as indicator of spiritual growth***

The fourth indicator of spiritual growth that 18.6 % of church leaders and 19.1 % of church members mentioned was the use of spiritual gifts by church members. Those giving this indicator said that the fact that their church members used their spiritual gifts in various capacities in their respective local churches was an evidence of their spiritual maturity. They cited church members teaching in the

Sunday school classes, leading Sunday worship services, preaching, evangelising, singing in the church choir, being on the committee of a given ministry in the local church, to mention only these few. For them, it showed that members had come to understand their role as members of the body of Christ.

As with the previous criteria, there was a misunderstanding of the spiritual gifts in the churches researched. The scriptures say that “to each one the manifestation of the spirit is given for the common good” (1 Co. 12:7) and “each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others” (1 Pe. 4:10). The reality in the churches is that only few members were actually using their spiritual gifts to serve others. Many registered church members were “spectators” in these local churches as if the Spirit gave them no gift at all. If all who had believed in Jesus had indeed received a spiritual gift but only a few were using theirs, then the latter had either not truly believed in Jesus and therefore had no spiritual gifts or they had not yet discovered their spiritual gifts or the local churches did not help them use their gifts for the common good.

The discovery and use of spiritual gifts can be a valid criterion for spiritual growth. God intends that each member of the body of Christ brings its contribution to edify the body. But it seems that this criterion is not generally used. There is a need to combat two extreme views regarding spiritual gifts. The first is to think that some believers have nothing to contribute apart from regularly coming to church, singing the hymns, listening to sermons and contributing to the offerings. The second is being proud of one’s abilities, thinking that one’s gifts are more important than others, therefore overlooking others’ gifts as unimportant. Those in church membership holding any of the two views have misunderstood biblical truth regarding spiritual gifts. How can one say that believers are growing spiritually if the majority are not using their gifts? The need is first to help believers discover their spiritual gifts and second, to provide them with opportunities to use them to edify the body of Christ (cf. Ep. 4:11-16; 1 Co. 12-14; 1 Pe. 4:10-11).

#### ***4.7.5 Devotional habits of some church members as evidence of their spiritual growth***

The fifth indicator, mentioned by 16 % of church leaders and 18.3 % of church members, is the devotional habits of church members. They alleged that some church members were reading their Bibles daily and praying in their homes. This hunger for the word of God and family devotion, respondents alleged, evidenced growth in spiritual maturity.

It is surely true that a Christian with a vital faith will be seeking communion with God through prayer and Bible study. Numerous passages in the scriptures underline this truth that prosperity and success in God's eyes come from constant reading and studying of the word of God and obeying it (cf. Jo. 1:6-8; Ez. 7:10; Ps. 1:1-3; Co. 3:16). The first Psalm underlines the values of spending time reading and thinking about the word of God. It presents knowing the word of God and thinking about it as the first step. The next step is the application of the word of God in everyday life in a way that transforms lifestyle.

It is certainly the case that where there are no such habits there will be no spiritual growth. But it can be assumed that few church members have such devotional habits. One reason why Christians may not spend time reading and meditating on the word of God may be because many are illiterate. Or it may be that they have not understood the importance of the word of God for their spiritual growth and daily lifestyle. This suggests that there is a need to analyse the impact of such devotional habits on members' lifestyle as Christians and on society at large.

#### ***4.7.6 A call to pastoral ministry as an indicator of spiritual growth***

The sixth and last indicator of church members' spiritual growth was cited by 12 % of church leaders who said the fact that some of their church members were being called to the pastoral ministry evidenced that they had experienced

spiritual growth. For these leaders, new vocations for the pastoral ministry indicated spiritual growth. That God has always called and continues to call people to care for his flock is undeniable. Pastors with the divine anointing are greatly needed for the pastoral care of the churches.

Some church denominations researched, however, insisted on training in a Bible school as the criterion for recruiting pastors for the local churches. Others saw no need for training prior to the pastoral care of the church. The true question, in the face of the many challenges churches face daily, is whether all those actually involved in the pastoral care of local churches have been genuinely called by God. The research identified some who are in the pastoral ministry without this calling. Some have been elected to the pastoral care of the church. Others have been nominated by a committee. Some of the pastors researched are not able to teach. Others are in the pastoral ministry because they have been trained in Bible schools or have academic qualifications, albeit without a calling. Such pastors may demand respect and submission from church members but have little or no time to attend to the spiritual needs of church members. In such cases it is unlikely that they have been genuinely called by God to the pastoral care of the church.

In view of this discussion, it is difficult to say that one's position in the pastoral leadership of the church truly evidences one's spiritual growth. Clearly only a few are called to pastoral ministry. Therefore the call to pastoral ministry may be a criterion of spiritual growth but only for some. Church members may not be growing spiritually because many in the pastoral leadership have not been called by God to be pastors. Thus both leaders and members may be lacking in spiritual growth, and in terms of this criterion may be considered nominal Christians.

#### ***4.7.7 Personal assessment of Bunia churches' criteria for spiritual growth***

In all the six indicators of spiritual growth that Bunia churches cited, it appeared that only a small portion of church members practiced them. The research indicated that few in the churches were growing spiritually. Additionally, regular participation in church services, contributing to the offertory, the exercise of spiritual gifts by some church members, the devotional habits of some in the church, the Christian testimonies of some, or a call to pastoral ministry were seen not necessarily to provide evidence of spiritual maturity. It could therefore be argued that even if some or all of the Bunia churches' criteria were combined genuine spiritual growth might not be experienced.

Churches would gain more insight into the understanding of healthy spiritual growth by studying the life of the first Christian community in the book of Acts and in the epistles to learn more inducers of spiritual growth. Based on the study of the book of Acts, Stott (2007:19-31) contends that a healthy church according to God's vision is a learning church, a caring church, a worshipping church and an evangelising church. In other words, it is only when the local church seeks to learn God's word, to care for the needy among them, to worship the true God in Spirit and in truth and to take the gospel to the lost within the church membership and outside its geographical and cultural boundaries that believers experience true spiritual growth to maturity.

#### **4.8 Bunia churches' understanding of spiritual stagnation**

Not all respondents among the church leaders acknowledged spiritual growth in their church. Thirty-five church leaders (31.8%) and a hundred church members researched (45.4%) claimed that their church members were not growing spiritually. They represent 40.9% of the total research participants. This very

significant minority identified the following nine major causes of spiritual stagnation of believers in their respective local churches.

#### ***4.8.1 Failure in church discipline as a cause of the spiritual stagnation of church members***

The first cause, mentioned by 14.2 % of leaders and 14 % of members, was the church's failure to respond to sin with appropriate discipline and pastoral care. They mentioned the misconduct of leaders and members alike as a sign of spiritual decay in the church. Moreover, they said that the failure by the church leadership to deal appropriately with sins in the lives of church leaders and members was causing many church members not to grow spiritually.

It seems clear that the bad examples of some people in the local church membership can cause new believers to stumble in their faith or lead them into sin. Jesus emphasises the seriousness of causing others to stumble when he says:

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!" (Mt. 18:7).

This passage points to the need for church members to be morally upright, good role models for new believers. If sin is not dealt with swiftly, people in the church living sinful lives become a stumbling block on the road to spiritual growth for other leaders and members. The church is seen as condoning sins instead of combating them through appropriate discipline and effective pastoral care. Lack of discipline suggests that sin does not matter, and so encourages sin in others (cf. 1 Co. 5:6). In the following verse Paul exhorts the church at Corinth to remove the problem.



Local churches can do this through the practice of biblical church discipline. When a church leader makes a habit of encouraging sin and his sin is not confronted, the sin will continue to grow and can harm the church. The critical need is for the churches to remove from the fellowship of believers those who cause others to stumble in the faith and lead them to sin. It means also to remove any program or teaching that threatens the spiritual growth of believers and for individual believers, to stop any relationship, practice or activity that leads to sin (cf. *Life Application Study Bible*, 1996:1445, note on Mt. 18:7-9).

The evil ways of other church members and even church leaders should serve as a warning to true believers not imitate their evil ways (cf. 3 Jn. 11). True believers are to avoid spending time with those in the church membership who are susceptible to lead them to a fall. Instead, they are to build and develop accountability relationships with people who can support their spiritual renewal and growth. The best way to avoid being deceived and led astray is for true believers to anchor their faith in God's word and seek his will through diligent study of his word and through prayer (cf. 2 Ti. 2:15, 22). True believers will not follow the bad examples of other church members and even church leaders (cf. Jn. 10:5, 8). Rather, the responsibility of true believers in the face of the evil ways of some in the church membership should be to confront them in love, at the same time avoiding being influenced and led astray by their evil ways. Bad behaviours should remind true believers that the world has infiltrated the church and should call them to stand firm in the faith. True believers are manifested when evil behaviours tarnish the testimony of the body of Christ. Jesus' prayer for his disciples in John 17 is a powerful source of comfort for true believers facing the challenge of evil ways of some in the church membership.

#### ***4.8.2 Lack of biblical preaching and teaching as a cause of spiritual stagnation of church members***

The second cause, lack of teaching in the church, was mentioned by four church leaders (11.4%) and twelve church members (12%) among those who

said church members were not growing spiritually. They claimed that church members did not grow spiritually because they lacked biblical teaching that could challenge them to grow spiritually.

That lack of biblical preaching is a cause of the lack of spiritual growth in believers is evident in many aspects of churches' lives. It is significant that this percentage of pastors, the very people who should provide the needed preaching and teaching, acknowledged the lack of it.

Feeding God's people is underlined in the New Testament as the primary task of the pastoral care of the church. Pastors feed the flock by committing themselves fully to the ministry of the word (cf. Jn. 21:15-18; Ac. 6:2-4; 20:28-30). The problem Bunia churches were raising was not so much lack of sermons but their poor quality and irrelevance to the context of the audiences. One reason why sermons are poor may be that many preachers are not gifted. This in turn shows that training in bible school or in theology is not enough to qualify a person as a preacher of the word of God. A second reason may be that preachers are not diligent in their study of the scriptures. The sermon can be poor if the preacher's knowledge of the scripture is very poor (cf. Tit. 1:9). They do not show care or make much effort in preparing their messages. Some of the church pastors, especially from RERC churches, believe that sermon preparation is not necessary because it is done by the Holy Spirit. But careful preparation of sermons cannot be overemphasized today. The third cause of poor sermons in these churches can be the preacher's lack of spiritual maturity. In general, the quality of sermons depends to a large measure on the pastors' personal spiritual growth and spiritual maturity.

When church members are not being fed with rich spiritual food, they will not grow spiritually healthy. When members are left to fend for themselves, there is a danger that they will fall prey to false teachers and be led astray. Their faith will lack solid foundations. The real question is why those entrusted with the task of feeding the congregation with the word of God fail to provide substantial biblical preaching and teaching for their hearers. There is a need for those

entrusted with leading the congregations to be serious about the pastoral care of the church. Also, believers should not depend only on what is taught. Personal spiritual practices, such as prayer and reflection on God's word, can catalyse believers' spiritual growth. Because meditating and reflecting on God's word on a daily basis is critical to spiritual growth, Hawkins & Parkinson (2011:117-19) contend that pastors need to teach the personal spiritual practices as a necessity, insist on it, follow up and challenge believers to develop these habits. Rather than just depending on the Sunday sermons, believers should learn to personally read the scriptures and reflect on the passage as well as develop their relationship with Christ through frequent and intimate prayer. Pastors' models in the spiritual growth habits will teach more than their sermons.

#### ***4.8.3 Ungodly leaders as a cause of spiritual stagnation of church members***

The third cause of spiritual stagnation of church members is the presence of ungodly leaders in the local churches. This was recorded by 11.4 % of church leaders and 12 % of church members. They acknowledged the presence of people in the leadership of their local churches who were bad examples for believers to follow because they exhibited bad characters and ungodly behaviour.

God requires those leading the church to be above reproach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2) because their responsibility is to model godliness for others. They are to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). They are to be "examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). Godly leaders lead first and foremost by their examples. The local church will only think of godliness the way their leaders model it. This is also what Dever & Alexander attest. They point out that leaders can model godliness in their church members through their "holiness in lifestyle, gentleness in speech, selflessness in

relationships, soundness in doctrine, and a loving concern for other members of the congregation” (2005:150).

It is undeniable that church leaders with questionable lifestyles will shape a negative idea of spiritual maturity among church members. Their bad examples may cause other church members to stumble in their faith or lead them to sin.

Leaders can significantly help or hinder the spiritual growth of believers, as Dever & Alexander also point out:

immature leaders who are less than able to teach will model behaviour that may not be above reproach and will teach doctrine that may not conform to godliness, both of which will likely put a low cap on the maturity level of the members, because they're not hearing sound doctrine or seeing it lived out by their leaders (2005:143).

But it is also in the face of the evil ways of church leaders that true spiritual maturity comes to evidence. True believers do not simply depend on what leaders say and do. They will not imitate the evil ways of their leaders but rather denounce their ways as ungodly and avoid them.

#### ***4.8.4 Failure in disciple-making as a cause of believers' spiritual stagnation***

Failure in the disciple-making of church members is cited as the fourth cause of lack of spiritual growth by the same scores as the previous two causes, that is, 11.4 % and 12 % respectively. For those respondents who claimed that there was spiritual stagnation, their churches had failed to turn converts into disciples, thus hindering the spiritual growth of many who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. Many of those local churches had no programme designed to grow believers into disciples of Christ. Where some of them had started organising discipleship classes, the numerical growth in their church membership complicated some of their initiatives in disciple making. Discipleship was therefore the critical missing dimension in the pastoral care of many of the Bunia churches.

The importance of disciple-making cannot be overemphasised as a cause of no spiritual growth in believers. Local church pastors have the responsibility of making disciples of believers. Formal training, though, does not necessarily make church leaders good disciple makers. They need to have been discipled themselves before going to Bible schools. It is unlikely that pastors who have not been discipled themselves will make disciples of other believers. And Bible schools that tend only to give lectures will not help in this matter unless they disciple their students.

#### ***4.8.5 Unbelief as a cause of lack of spiritual growth***

Unbelief was identified as a major cause of lack of spiritual growth by 14.2 % of church leaders and 10 % of church members. They claimed that their church members were not growing spiritually because some church members did not have true faith. For them, those who became members without experiencing a personal encounter with Jesus Christ would not grow spiritually, no matter how much preaching they were exposed to.

Unbelief understood in this study as the absence of trust in Christ. Such a lack of faith is a serious evidence of no faith at all. In the golden calf episode analysed in chapter 2 of this study, Israel obstinately rejected God despite all his mighty deeds on their behalf (Ex. 32-34; cf. Nu. 14:11). Israel's persistent unbelief is stressed throughout the scriptures as deliberate rebellion against God. In Judges 2 analysed in section 2, the unbelief of the new generation of the Israelites could be the people's deliberate decision to turn away from the way of the previous generation. They chose to worship and serve Baal instead of the God their fathers had worshiped (Ju. 2:11-13).

Unbelief can be the result of ignorance. As Gibbs points out, the gospel may not have been clearly exposed in a way that personally challenges hearers to consider and respond to Christ's claims upon their lives (2000:89). In this case, it underlines the responsibility of pastors to faithfully preach and teach the word

of God. Unbelief here has more to do with the quality and relevance of the local churches' preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Therefore the responsibility of those preaching and teaching the word of God is to diligently and prayerfully study the scriptures and deliver Spirit-filled messages that challenge hearers to repent and believe in Jesus. Only the power of God's word can emancipate people from hardheartedness. Only his word can sever the roots of unbelief that ensnare people who are in church membership, including anxiety, pride, shame, impatience, covetousness, bitterness, despondency, and lust (cf. He. 4:12). Second, to such people who refuse to believe, Satan blinds their minds to the truth of the gospel (2 Co. 4:3-4). The process of admitting people into the church does little to help church leaders to detect these people at the early stage of their enrolment.

Unbelief is therefore a valid cause of lack of spiritual life in some in the church membership. It calls for the renewal of evangelism within the walls of local churches.

#### ***4.8.6 Influence of false teachings and wrong ideas in the church as a cause of spiritual stagnation of believers***

The influence of false teachings was cited by 11.4 % of leaders and 11 % of members as the sixth cause of spiritual stagnation of church members. Respondents said that church members did not grow spiritually because they followed false teachings from within their respective local churches or from surrounding churches.

Among false teachings and wrong ideas they mentioned the practice of "doing something" to earn salvation. The belief was that members had to follow certain practices and give up others in order to be good Christians. So salvation is obtained by what a person does or gives up, rather than by what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ. The danger of false teaching is that it leads people to put their trust in the wrong place. For example, practices that could be

the consequences of salvation are seen as the condition of salvation. Church members will tend to put their assurance of being saved in the fact that they are regular participants to church services and spiritual activities, that they give regularly to God, that they contribute to cover the cost of church programs and activities or that they are not drinking alcohol or smoking tobacco, to mention but few. Consequently, even if a person does not demonstrate the power of God in his or her daily life, if he or she is doing some of the 'good' things mentioned above and not refraining from doing what are generally considered harmful things, he or she considers himself or herself as a true Christian, thus deceiving self.

When pastors are entrusted with tending a flock they need to take care to protect them from false teachers and false teachings. Paul stressed this truth to the Ephesian church elders in these terms: "I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following" (Ac. 20:29-30, New Living Translation). The danger of false teachers and false teachings is that they can greatly damage spiritual growth. It takes serious discernment to uncover such people in church leadership and take disciplinary actions against those who resist reproach.

#### ***4.8.7 Church as a way of making money as a cause of the spiritual stagnation of believers***

The seventh cause of spiritual stagnation in Bunia churches, mentioned by 8.5 % of leaders and 11 % of members, referred to the pastor using his position in the leadership of the local church to make money for himself and his family. Some pastors allegedly used the congregation to generate personal income for the pastor's family or for some influential church members. This was particularly said of some churches from the RERC churches but was also claimed to be true of some ECC church denominations.

The use of the local church offerings for the personal enrichment of the pastor can be evident in some of the churches from both ECC and RERC denominations. In churches where this happens, the practice causes church members to stumble, blocking their spiritual growth.

People who only take leadership positions in the church for commercial reasons rather than out of love for God's flock can be seen as "hired hands". They are "wolves in sheep's clothing". They are not particular to Bunia churches, though. They were common in the Old Testament times and are just as common in today's churches. It can be said of some pastors and preachers that they are more motivated by money, fame and power than by a pastoral concern for the body of Christ.

#### ***4.8.8 The Influence of animist beliefs on believers as a cause of their spiritual stagnation***

As the eighth cause of spiritual stagnation in Bunia churches, 8.5 % of leaders and 10 % of members mentioned the influence of African traditional beliefs and practices. They said that a number of church members reverted to traditional practices every time they faced troubles such as chronic sickness, death caused by road accident, barrenness in the family, suspicion of witchcraft, poisoning, loss of job, failure in passing school exams, etc. Some of these church members and church leaders, respondents said, carried fetishes with them, believing that these objects protected them from the evil eye and people they suspected of evil intent. Some church members and to some degree even church leaders, took their sick family members to the witchdoctor secretly. Others went to a diviner to find out the cause of enduring illness or of frequent deaths in the family.

The point in this discussion of the influence of traditional beliefs and practices on Christians can be explained by Jenkins' statement that "in much of Africa and Asia, the ready attribution of evil to powerful spiritual forces reflects the



continuing influence of pagan and animist beliefs” (2006:101). He holds that because “most African Christians are second or third-generation members of the faith...a lively animist presence is always in evidence”. This discussion takes us back to question the genuineness of the initial profession of faith in Jesus by many church members. Have the persons constantly going back to their old ways genuinely converted to Christ? If a church leader can live a double standard, that is, following God when things are stable but turning to other sources of power, particularly to African traditional beliefs and practices when troubles strike, there is reason to doubt of the genuineness of his or her conversion to Christ.

This study suggests, as Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou (1999:162-65) also point out, that churches teach biblical principles that can guide believers’ response to life’s crises. Such teachings will need to include that God is as actively involved in human history today as in Bible times. Hiebert, Shaw & Tiénou (1999:162-74) underline some biblical, theological and ministry principles that can direct Christians’ response to traditional beliefs and practices. Theologically, the authors say, believers “must root their response to well-being and crisis in a Trinitarian view of God” (1999:162). They mean that those who put their trust in Christ must constantly affirm that it is God who “directs the overall course of human history according to his purposes”. It means, they say, that those who understand their identity in Christ will strive to experience the presence of Christ in all their situations (cf. Ro. 8:19-23). Biblically, the authors say, Christians need to understand the biblical perspective on well-being and misfortune if they are to develop a balanced view of life’s crises (1999:164). Third, they say, biblical principles should guide those who minister to people in crisis situations (1999:165). What they mean is that a theology of suffering will inform believers that sickness and other bodily sufferings are part of the consequences of sin and of living in a fallen world. Christians can also experience suffering as persecution because of their faith (1 Co. 4:10-13; 1 Ti. 3:12; 1 Pe. 4:12-18). Often suffering leads to spiritual maturity (cf. Jb. 42:5-6).

#### ***4.8.9 Conflicts and divisions in the church on the basis of ethnic identity as a cause of spiritual stagnation of believers***

The ninth and last major cause of the spiritual stagnation of Bunia church members is divisions and/or conflicts in the church. It was cited by 8.5 % of leaders and 8 % of members as hindering the spiritual growth of church members. Divisions among believers, even within the same ethnic group, greatly hurt spiritual growth, respondents said.

The scriptures seem to assume the possibility of some differences of opinion and even doctrinal differences within the church community. This can be deduced from Paul's injunction to the Corinthians, "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval" (1 Co. 11:18-19). Banks (1994:61-66) and O'Donovan (1996:166) contend that different opinions on church government, the method of water baptism and of the celebration of the Lord's Table, divergent lifestyles (cf. 1 Co. 10:23-31), etc., are bound to exist where people from different denominational backgrounds come together as a church. Banks points this out in the following statement:

when something at the heart of the gospel is affected, such as insistence on an additional requirement for salvation (Gal 1:9), the infiltration of idolatrous ideas (1 Cor 10:14-22), or the exhibition of flagrantly immoral behavior (5:1-7), the controversy created by such actions must lead the church to disassociate itself from the persons involved (1994:65).

Conflicts and divisions in the church based on ethnic identity are a real challenge facing not only the researched Bunia churches but the church in the DR Congo as a whole. In the Ituri district, of which Bunia is the headquarters, the ethnic bloodshed that swept the area during the five-year war from 1999 did not spare Christian churches. Testimonies are alive among the survivors of this ethnic purge. Though there are many testimonies of Christians and pastors who

showed love to members of warring tribes, many other Christians, even some pastors and church elders, personally took an active part in the killings. Unhealthy and destructive conflicts should be for true believers an indicator that those promoting them are under the devil's bondage (cf. Ep. 6:12; 1 Jn. 4:5-6). True believers will use conflicts as opportunities to be aware of antagonists in church memberships (Ro. 16:17; 2 Co. 11:13-14), and warn and admonish them (Ti. 3:10-11). They will avoid unhealthy conflicts (2 Ti. 2:16-17). Therefore, if conflicts and divisions simply lead people to abandon their faith, then those people have either a weak or a nominal faith.

#### ***4.8.10 Personal assessment of Bunia churches' criteria for spiritual stagnation***

These nine factors presented as major causes for the lack of spiritual growth in Bunia churches reveal some of the perceptions of leaders and members. On the one hand, churches are biblical in their evaluation of some of the causes of spiritual stagnation. Criteria such as the misconduct of church leaders and members, lack of good teaching, failure in church discipline, unbelief, and false teachings are real obstacles to spiritual growth. Their identification by Bunia churches suggests a degree of spiritual maturity and spiritual growth in the churches. On the other hand, some criteria may not be valid reasons for the spiritual stagnation of church members. This is the case of illiteracy. Believers who cannot read can listen to the messages being preached because sermons are transmitted orally. Preachers often use story-telling and illustrations in their sermons. Other criteria, such as church as a way of making money and the influence of traditional beliefs depend for their influence on the degree of believers' spiritual maturity. Growing Christians will not be necessarily stopped in their spiritual maturity by these hindrances. Instead, such situations become opportunities for them to confront the shortcomings and seek for other ways to strengthen their faith.

There are other causes of spiritual stagnation that Bunia churches have either ignored or overlooked. Regarding the pastoral leadership, churches are more program-driven than people-driven. Church meetings are often more concerned about church facilities and structures than about the gospel and the great commission. The image some church members have of the pastoral ministry makes demands on the pastors that they are not often able to meet. Unhealthy pastoral leadership can be considered as a major cause of spiritual stagnation in church members. Therefore serious pastoral care of the congregation is considered in the last section of this study as a means of confronting Christian nominalism in church membership. The theology of the church, its structures, its message as well as its life can all either catalyse or hinder the spiritual growth of its members. Lack of biblical disciple-making can be a major cause of the spiritual stagnation of those who have already believed.

## **4.9 Summary**

Chapter four has focused on interpreting the research findings regarding Bunia churches' understanding of Christian nominalism. It sought to answer the question "to what extent is the Bunia churches' understanding of the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships sufficient or deficient?" The following can be drawn from the study's understanding of the findings.

### ***4.9.1 Bunia churches' cognisance of the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships***

There are elements in Bunia churches' definitions that point to a certain degree of enlightenment regarding the understanding of nominal Christianity in their church memberships. This is arrived at by analysing the criteria churches provide for recognising true Christians, namely, having been baptised and regularly partaking of the Lord's Table, actively participating in the local

churches' spiritual activities, and experiencing transformation in lifestyle as the result of conversion and church membership. The testimonies of former nominal Christians indicate a degree of spiritual awareness on the part of the Bunia churches.

#### ***4.9.2 Deficiency in Bunia churches' understanding of nominal Christianity in their church memberships***

There are elements in Bunia churches' discussion of nominal Christianity that point to a deficient understanding of the problem. First, repentance from sin and a life lived under the active, personal lordship of Christ are absent from the Bunia churches' definition of a Christian. Second, the criteria for recognising nominal Christians suggest that Bunia churches see them more as believers who are not growing than those who have never truly converted to Christ. Third, there are other factors worth considering as evidences of belonging to God, such as trusting Christ alone for one's salvation (1 Jn. 5:12-13; cf. He. 6:11-12), the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ro. 8:9-11) bearing fruit in believers (Ga. 5:22-23) and testifying that they are God's children (Ro. 8:14-16; Ga. 4:6), obedience to God's word (Jn. 14:15) and a pattern of spiritual growth can evidence genuine salvation. Fourth, the absence of intentional disciple-making in many local churches indicates misunderstanding of the goal of the church as Jesus intended it. Fifth, there is a need for church leaders to understand from the Bible what is "church" as God intended it to be. There seems to be a general deficiency in understanding the biblical theology of the church, its structure, its message and its life. For most of the researched churches, the influence of their denominations' tradition or constitution often overshadows the biblical understanding of church membership, stifling churches' initiatives towards applying God's word.

This study suggests that genuine repentance, victory over sin, spiritual discernment, intimate communion with and dependence on Christ and love and

service to God and to his people should be added as evidences of healthy spiritual growth.

As with spiritual growth, inadequate criteria for spiritual stagnation revealed churches' inadequate understanding of what it means to grow in grace into the likeness of Christ, perhaps due to ignorance of Bible teaching, or to the failure of the pastoral leadership in the ministry of the word. Whereas Bunia churches had a certain degree of spiritual enlightenment on the problem of nominal Christianity, the findings indicated that the general understanding of the Christian faith was often deficient in certain ways. The next main section of this dissertation, chapter 5, will seek to find ways for the Bunia churches to identify and deal with Christian nominalism in their congregations.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM IN BUNIA CHURCH MEMBERSHIPS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This final chapter of the present study seeks to answer the question how Bunia churches might respond to the challenge of nominal Christianity within their memberships. In this light the section focuses on practical suggestions for tackling the problem.

The findings of this research study have shown that the majority of pastors and church members in the town of Bunia, though they acknowledge the presence of nominal Christians within their church membership, do not fully understand the problem. With regard to the pastoral leadership of the churches researched, Christian nominalism reflects the inadequacy of theological preparation and engagement. As a result, pastors and church leaders are unable to break free from the grip of Christian nominalism because they do not take seriously the challenges of nominal Christianity within their memberships.

Nominalism has been understood in this study as a condition of those who are not Christians in any real sense at all except in name, although they appear to be or are regarded by others as true Christians. In the context of the churches researched, nominal Christians are to be found among church leaders and members alike.

In order to effectively confront Christian nominalism in church memberships, Bunia churches will need, as major issues, to revive their proclamation of the biblical gospel, develop a serious pastoral care of local churches by screening candidates for baptism more carefully, evaluating and be willing to change the processes for taking members in and out of church membership, develop biblical disciple-making and rethink their training of pastors and church leaders serving in this context.

## **5.2 The need for a strong evangelism**

To evangelise is “to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe” (Stott 1975:69). The difference between proselytism and evangelism is that the former only recruits adherents for the local church while evangelism simply declares the facts of the gospel of Jesus Christ, irrespective of the results. Because “faith comes from listening to this message of good news-the Good News about Christ” (Ro. 10:17, The New Living Translation), it is important to give particular attention to a clear presentation of what God has done in Christ on the cross for the salvation of humanity, the essential elements of which are briefly explained below.

### ***5.2.1 Proclaiming the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ***

The word gospel (*euangelion* in Greek) is used in the New Testament in the sense of “good news”. It is understood in this study as “the good news of Christ’s life-giving victory over the sinful separation from God that disfigures human character, blinds people to truth and leaves them without reliable power to overcome the brokenness of creation, the darkness of death, and the limits of



human love” (Meyer 2012:36). It means that the gospel is much more than a story about Jesus. It is also “the power of God” (Ro. 1:16) for salvation, transformation and restoration. For messengers of the gospel, then, the important thing is their faithfulness to the message proclaimed, not the results of it or the methods used. Messengers of the gospel should not manipulate hearers to accept it.

But the good news of Jesus Christ is wide-angled in that it is not limited to human beings only but embraces God’s entire creation. This truth is expressed in the scriptures in the following terms, “God was pleased...through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Co. 1:19-20). The exposition of this entire redemptive plan is beyond the scope of the present study, but in relation to Christian nominalism, the following brief summary of the basic elements of the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ is presented below.

#### *5.2.1.1 God’s sovereignty, holiness and righteous judgements as the foundation of the biblical Gospel*

The story of the biblical Gospel starts with the declaration that God is the creator (cf. Ge. 1:1-2:7; Ne. 9:6; Ps. 33:6-9; 102:25; Je. 10:10-12; Ac. 14:15; He. 11:3). Throughout the scriptures God is revealed as creator (Ps. 33:6-9; Je. 10:10-12), owner (Ps. 24:1; 89:11; De. 10:14), ruler (Ps. 33:10-11; Is. 40:22-24) and judge (Ps. 33:13-15), and in the book of Revelation, God “consummates the story of redemption by the creation of a new heaven and earth” (Isley 2007:134). It implies that God is not only creator, but also redeemer of his lost and disordered creation. As creator and redeemer, God has universal authority and deserves worship and service from his created order (cf. Ex. 20:2-6; De. 4:39; Is. 45:5-21). He is described in the scriptures as “a devouring fire, a jealous God” (De. 4:24) in the sense that being morally perfect, God hates sin and cannot accept those practising it. His jealousy makes a strong and

exclusive demand on humanity as part of God's creation to treat him, and no-one else in the entire universe, as God.

Thus God, "for whom and through whom everything exists" (He. 2:10), deserves that his entire creation display his glory, to honour, worship and serve his eternal purpose (cf. Re. 4:10-11; Co. 1:16). In this perspective, worship of God is demanded from heaven, the heights, and the angelic hosts who all came to existence because of the will of the Lord (cf. Ps. 147:7-13). In the same way, the earth and everything in it, including humanity, are asked, too, to worship God because "his name alone is exalted" and "his majesty is above earth and heaven" (Ps. 148:7-13). Adoration of and service to God is the *raison d'être* of the entire created order.

Such an understanding of God is a pre-requisite for hearers' apprehension of man's rebellion against God and a just appreciation of God's solution through the redemptive work of Christ, as Morris summarises it:

The gospel message entails the full scope of the work of Jesus Christ, involving the whole sweep of His redemptive purpose in history. Everything from the beginning of creation to the triumphal day when every living creature, at last, will confess the truth of Christ's lordship (Ph. 2:11) is part of God's redemptive plan (2009:217).

The point of the above is that often the preaching of the gospel in many churches omits important elements, whether by ignorance or deliberately by fear of losing adherents. What do hearers miss if these elements are left aside, overlooked or deliberately ignored is further pointed out by Allred (2001:13):

The sovereignty of God is often set aside because it is offensive to human pride. We mistakenly think that people will be more likely to respond if we keep quiet about it. The holiness of God has been relegated because we think the notion of God as being unable to 'tolerate wrong' (Habakkuk 1:13) and living in 'unapproachable light' (1 Timothy 6:16) would make the gospel less user-friendly. The judgement of God has gone the same way and for similar reasons – we have concluded that a gospel without judgement is more likely to be successful.

Allred's warning is relevant to preachers in Africa and, to some extent, to the Bunia churches researched. Some of the preachers of the Gospel in these churches avoid these topics out of ignorance and lack of knowledge. But others deliberately avoid them because they want to attract members rather than repel or lose them. Neglecting or ignoring God's rule as king and judge over the creation will dilute the biblical gospel in that it takes away God's hate for sin and focuses only on his love for sinners. Faith in a God who loves sinners without hating their sins is not biblical. Hearers need first to realise their sinfulness and their total inability to do anything to escape from God's just judgments. Meyer defines the gospel of Jesus Christ as

the good news of Christ's life-giving victory over the sinful separation from God that disfigures human character, blinds people to truth and leaves them without reliable power to overcome the brokenness of creation, the darkness of death and the limits of human love (2012:36).

The point here is that preaching a gospel that emphasises God's holiness and sovereignty will underline the depravity of the human nature and humankind's total inability to escape from God's just judgments. The Spirit's enlightenment will further lift hearers' eyes from their total inability to save themselves to God's all-sufficient power to save. Those who come to repentance in this way are likely to take seriously the decision to turn from their sins and turn back to God. Believing in Jesus is more than just lifting a hand or coming forward at the pastor's call. A clear understanding of the message and its demands on hearers is important for a saving response to the gospel.

#### *5.2.1.2 Human rebellion against God as the necessity of the biblical Gospel*

A better understanding of God as creator, and a holy and just judge further leads to an understanding of man's rebellion against this holy creator and his holy laws. The biblical account of how sin entered the world through Adam and Eve as representative of the human race (Ge. 3; Ps. 51:5; Ro. 5:12; 1 Jn. 3:4) highlights the nature of human sin and the seriousness of its consequences.

The fall of the first human couple is presented in Genesis not as a simple accident but rather, as the first couple's deliberate choice to disobey God's clear commandment in Genesis 2:17 (cf. Wenham 1987:89).

Sin is understood in this study as "any failure to conform to God's moral law not only in action and in attitude, but also in our moral nature" (Grudem 1994:490; cf. Omeire & Corrie 2007:362). The value of this definition is that it relates sin to God and to his moral law. David understood this truth well enough to confess, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps. 51:4). Sin is therefore described as the internal character of human beings, the corruption and perversion of the nature they were given by God (cf. Ro. 5:12). Sin is also relates to individual acts (cf. Ga. 5:20-21) and any attitude contrary to God's moral law, such as covetousness and lust (cf. Ex. 20:17).

The scriptures teach the universality of sin, that is, that all have sinned through the representative of the human race (Ro. 5:12), and the universality of guilt, that is, that human beings stand condemned before the holy and righteous God. Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, focuses on the universality of sin and guilt in the following terms: "We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles are all under sin" (3:9), that "every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (3:19) and that "no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" (3:20).

The problem of humanity, therefore, is that human beings are, at the very core of their being, "sinfully lost, cut off from God, condemned by God, and consequently destined for hell" (Piper & Mathis 2012:55). The universality of sin means that sin is the essential character of fallen humanity. It is the universal mode of existence of those who have not come to faith in Jesus. Sin is therefore a human condition as well as a human action and a human attitude.

As the result of human rebellion against God, sin has fractured the relationship not only between God and humanity, but also between God and the rest of his creation as well as between humanity and the rest of God's creation and among

human beings themselves. First, sin has alienated humanity from God. The biblical doctrine of sin is that God counts all humanity guilty because of Adam's sin. The scriptures underline the fact that Adam's trespass led to God's condemnation of all humanity (cf. Ro. 5:18) and that through his disobedience "the many were made sinners" (Ro. 5:19). But individually human beings are equally sinners before God through their acts and attitudes. This is clear in Paul's letter to the Romans, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their mind set on what that nature desires...The mind of sinful man is death...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (8:5-8). As a result, every human being stands condemned before God's righteous wrath unless he or she is forgiven and reconciled to God (cf. Ep. 2:12; Jn. 3:36; Ro. 1:18; 6:23). It means that, without Christ, humanity is unable to please God because sin has perverted its entire being. Consequently, no-one will save himself or herself from God's wrath and his rightful condemnation.

Second, sin has not only destroyed man's vertical relationship with God. On a personal level, it has alienated man from self and from fellow men. Paul depicts this alienation when exclaiming,

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Ro.7:21-24).

These words from Paul make it clear that sin is not just a foreign body in man. It is within the human nature. On a personal level, sin destroys the meaning and purpose of life. But it also affects man's relationship with fellow human beings. This can be seen in rivalries, conflicts in the family or in the church, hate speech, and the like.

Third, sin has affected the entire created order as described in the biblical account of the fall (Ge. 3:14-19). Man's alienation from the environment is a

direct consequence of sin. As a result, human beings abuse their authority, over other creatures by exploiting them and over the environment by destroying it.

Yet sin is seldom understood in the churches in terms of this biblical picture. In general sin is understood as “things we should not do”. Some churches have a list of do’s and don’ts that members should observe. This attitude towards sin reduces it to a set of don’ts and diminishes the gravity of sin. Some churches categorise sins, making some sins serious and others “tolerable”. Correct attitudes towards sin depend in a large measure on how people understand God’s sovereignty, his holy character and laws and his wrath and judgements against sin. An inadequate understanding of sin can lead to a Christian faith in name only. In African traditional worldview, the notion of original sin is foreign and sin is viewed more in relation to the community than as a direct offense to God (cf. Anguandia 2005:18-22). Many church members will hold to this African traditional view of sin unless they understand the biblical doctrine of sin.

Faithful communication of the biblical doctrines of sin and guilt is much needed in the churches because, first, it will highlight the total depravity of human nature, the righteousness of God’s wrath and of his judgements and the total inability of human efforts or merit to earn salvation. Second, it will lay the foundation for hearers of the Gospel to appreciate God’s solution in Christ’s redemptive works. Third, because of the lack of biblical teaching on the nature of sin, many church members may deceive themselves that they are suffering not from the consequences of their sins but from demonic attacks, from evil eyes, from sickness, and the like.

In some of these churches, pastors and preachers are busy driving out demons from church members and healing them from sickness, when the truth is that people are first of all suffering because of their sins. Such pastors need to make clear that in many cases suffering is a direct result of sin, and repentance is needed. One such preacher to whom researchers spoke explained his attitude towards sin, “these people will leave and the church will remain empty if we say that they are suffering because they are sinners. They will go to churches

helping them deal with demons as the ultimate cause of sufferings”. That is why, in this church and others resembling it, instead of encouraging hearers to repent from their sins, acknowledge them and renounce them, the preaching focuses on promises of blessings, healing, wealth, success and the like. Church members are seldom, if at all, taught about the nature of sin and its consequences according to the scriptures. This is true not only of RERC churches, but of ECC churches as well. Failure in teaching regarding sin may be the cause of nominal faith in the churches.

#### *5.2.1.3 The atonement as the focal point of the biblical Gospel*

The biblical doctrine of the atonement is the central theme of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The necessity of Christ's death on the cross is brought about by the universality and the seriousness of sin and the resulting inability of humankind to deal with sin. God's love for his lost creation stands as the foundation of the atonement. The New Testament clearly teaches God's love as the basis of Christ's death. God “so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (Jn. 3:16). Christ's death demonstrates God's love for sinners (Ro. 5:8).

Christ's death is sacrificial in that he died specifically for sin. The New Testament underlines that Christ “died for our sins” (Ro. 4:25), that he personally “bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pe. 2:24) and that he “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn. 2:2). That Christ died in our place is clear throughout the scriptures. Isaiah 53:4-5 describes his substitutionary death in these words, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”.

Justification, redemption and reconciliation are the positive aspects of Christ's atoning death. Through his death on the cross, God freely declares sinners righteous, that is, he declares that they are no longer guilty because Jesus has

taken away their sins. Through Christ's sacrificial death, God removes all the charges brought about by sin and frees believers from the consequences of all their sins. Christ's death on the cross secured redemption for those who believe in him. Redemption means that by paying the penalty of death for the sins of humanity, Christ fully satisfied God's demands and secured forgiveness, deliverance and freedom from slavery to sin (cf. Mk. 10:45; Ro. 3:21-26; He. 9:12-14). Christ's death reconciles not only humankind but also the entire creation to God (2 Co. 5:18-20; Ep. 2:14; Co. 1:20). It means that Christ alone is God's solution to humanity's problem. The only way to respond is through repentance and faith.

#### *5.2.1.4 Repentance and faith as the response to the biblical Gospel*

Repentance from sin and faith in Jesus are humanity's only saving response to God's love expressed in Christ's atoning death on the cross. Repentance and faith are the two essentials of conversion. The two are put side by side in several passages in the New Testament (Mk. 1:15; Ac. 3:18-19; Ac. 17:21). They complete each other.

Grudem defines repentance as "*a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ*" (1994:713, italics his; cf. Thrasher 2000:824). Repentance is the godly sorrow for one's sin past and present. This regret leads to the abandonment of sin and to trust in God. True repentance involves intellectual, emotional and volitional elements. Intellectually, repentance is a change of mind about God, sin, Christ and man. In the Lucan parable of the prodigal son, the rebellious son who wanted to live life in his own way was forced to come to his senses when he hit the bottom, plainly understanding the humiliating and even degrading situation he had fallen into, that is, feeding pigs and even eating food that pigs had touched (Lk. 15:17). Emotionally, repentance involves a change of worldview and purpose. In the case of the Lucan parable just cited, the prodigal son willingly decides to return back to his father and face the consequences of his



rebellion (15:18-19). Confession of sins and restitution can evidence genuine repentance. In the Corinthian church, the inward sorrow led believers to repent and produce outward actions such as earnestness, eagerness to clear themselves of the evil committed among them, anger about sin, longing, alarm, concern and readiness to see justice done (2 Co. 7:6-11). Volitionally, repentance is the will to turn to God instead. The Thessalonians turned away from idols and instead turned to God to serve him as the living and true God (1 Th. 1:10). In the case of the Lucan story, the prodigal son got up and returned to his father (Lk. 15:20-21). But pastors and preachers need to beware of false repentance, that is, emotional remorse and sorrow only for the consequences of sin. Examples of false repentance in the New Testament include Judas' bitter remorse in Matthew 27:3-5 and the rich ruler's great sadness in Luke 18:18-25. True repentance leads to faith in Jesus.

Faith, the other essential of conversion, is the turning around of the sinner to give his or her allegiance to Jesus instead of following his or her own way. Grudem defines it as "*trust in Jesus as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God*" (1994:710, italics his). Corrie (2007:121) adds to the point by distinguishing three dimensions of faith. First, there's "the faith that looks back to Christ's death and resurrection and the trust that these events are the means of being put right with God and receiving new life in Christ". This kind is the past dimension of faith in that faith relies entirely on what God has done in Christ on the cross for salvation. The second is the present dimension of faith. It is "the faith that trusts God for his presence, strength and guidance to live the Christian life in the present". It means a complete reliance on God and on the power of the Holy Spirit for daily living according to God's will. The future dimension of faith is "faith that believes God for his promises of future hope and glory". It stands firmly on the promises of God for final restoration in Christ. They are the necessary elements of a genuine faith and complete each other.

It means that in a saving faith, intellectual knowledge about Jesus' death and resurrection leads one to accept these events as true and issues in trust in

Jesus. So there is a need to stress the element of trust, commitment, dependence, including despairing of oneself and one's own goodness (cf. Jn. 5:24; Ro. 3:22; 10; 10:9-10). These dimensions of knowledge and trust are evident in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac. 8:30-38), Lydia (Ac. 16:13-15) and the jailer in Philippi (Ac. 16:29-34), to mention few. In the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip explained the meaning of the Old Testament passage the officer was reading and used many other passages in the scriptures to tell the good news about Jesus Christ (Ac. 8:35). It is the understanding of these events about Jesus that led the Ethiopian to put his trust in Jesus and to express his desire to be baptised. It is to say, as Morris (1996:358) points out, that "a genuine belief that what God has revealed is true will issue in a true faith".

Saving faith is the working of God in the heart of those hearing the message of the gospel. Jesus stressed that all those coming to saving faith in him have been enabled by the Father (Jn. 6:37, 65). Paul underlined this when writing to the Ephesians, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ep.2:8). Lydia's conversion happened as "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Ac. 16:14).

In the light of the above examples, it can be said that saving faith is much more than intellectual assent. It is a personal trust in Jesus as a person. The Greek preposition *eis* following the verb *pisteuein* carries the meaning of "into". It is, as Morris points out, "a faith which, so to speak, takes a man out of himself, and puts him into Christ" (1996:358). In other words he or she sticks to Jesus with all his or her heart. John expresses this truth as "remaining" in Jesus and Jesus in the believer (Jn. 15:1-4). It means, among other things, believing that Jesus is the Son of God (cf. 1Jn.4:15), receiving him as Saviour and Lord (Jn. 1:12) and doing what he says and wants (Jn. 15:12; 1 Jn.2:24; 3:24).

It is possible for people to believe all these facts about Jesus without trusting in him as a person. It is probably in this sense that the Scriptures say that even demons believe in God (Ja. 2:19), but they cannot put their trust in him. That is

what Allred (2001:108) means when he states that many people have only “an ‘intellectual faith’ in the ‘Christian faith’”. He says that such people may come to church services and hear teachings but lack saving faith in Jesus. The fact that they come to church may deceive them to think that they are true believers, to which he concludes, “Instead of leading them on to a personal trust in Christ, their ‘faith’ acts as a barrier, insulating them against the gospel”.

Allred is pointing out what is a reality in many churches, and this applies to those researched in the present study. He accurately pictures what is described in this study as a nominal Christian faith. Many of those filling church membership rolls may be deceiving themselves by thinking they are true Christians. Some of them may be ignorant of their status because the church may be giving them the impression that they are true Christians.

That is why it is important for churches to understand that true faith is, first of all, the work of God in those who believe. Jesus was stressing the divine origin of the saving faith when he told his hearers that “no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him” (Jn. 6:65). Regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement” (Jn. 16:8). Paul’s letter to the Ephesians stresses this truth, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast” (Ep. 2:8-9).

Genuine faith, like true repentance, continues throughout the lives of Christians. The initial saving faith, like the initial repentance, occurred once at conversion. In fact, believers’ willingness to identify their sins on a daily basis and to forsake all known sins in their lives constitute two indicators of genuine repentance. The local church’s duty is to call believers to continuing repentance from sins. Many of the problems in the churches today can be traced back to failure in preaching this biblical gospel of repentance and saving faith in Jesus. Allred further stresses some of the disastrous consequences of failure in the prominence of the preaching on continuing repentance when he says,

In some churches I know, the practice of turning a blind eye to immorality among Christians, sometimes even among those who hold office, is well established. The fellowship of the church is strained because we do not 'walk in the light as he is in the light' (1Jn. 1:7). The spiritual well-being of believers is adversely affected because postponed repentance halts spiritual growth (2001:115).

Bunia churches could in many cases fit in Allred's description. For example, among the indicators of lack of spiritual growth churches mentioned unbelief and ungodly leaders and members. These could be due to lack of emphasis on the biblical teaching on conversion as turning from sin to Christ in repentance and faith. It could be that the command to repent and believe the gospel is not insisted upon from the beginning. For most of the churches researched, failure in preaching this repentance can be out of ignorance of the biblical doctrine. Some of the pastors assume that these terms are readily understood by hearers instead of taking time to preach and teach what the Bible says as truth regarding repentance and faith. As a result of this assumption, some church members are allowed to deceive themselves as true Christians because nobody in the church community challenges their profession of faith.

For this reason, the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be clearly proclaimed in its full biblical content. In relation to the problem of nominalism in the Bunia churches often the sermons appeal to hearers to commit their lives to Christ without first making sure that they have understood the truth they are asked to respond to. The New Testament underlines the principle that clarification of the gospel must come before an appeal to its hearers to respond to it. It was the apostles' clear proclamation in Acts 2, with Peter warning hearers and pleading with them, that cut the audience to the heart and brought them to see their need of salvation (cf. Ac. 2:14-41). In the book of Acts, Paul is presented as reasoning with his hearers from the scriptures (cf. 17:2-4; 17:17; 18:4; 19), persuading them (18:4), arguing with them (19:8-9), refuting them (18:28), warning them (2:39-40), disputing with them (17:18-20), discussing with them (19:9) and teaching them (11:26). As Stott points out, the apostles "sought to

make an intellectual conquest, to persuade men of the truth of their message, to convince them in order to convert them". The New Testament apostles' method of proclaiming the gospel highlights the importance of clearly and faithfully exposing the basic truths about salvation.

In relation to Christian nominalism, it is important to underline that genuine faith in Christ goes together with genuine repentance from sin. Jesus warned of some who profess to believe and even show signs of spiritual life, but whose profession of faith is short-lived because they have "no root" (Mt. 13:20-21). Even among his own disciples "many turned back and no longer followed him" (Jn. 6:66). Faith that is not "a wholehearted trust in Christ for salvation", says Allred, "becomes a mere mental assent or a superficial emotional response that changes nothing for long" (2001:113). When the proclamation of the gospel does not expose the seriousness of sin and man's accountability to God, the appeal may be a manipulation of hearers to come forward to show belief in Jesus. Some people will believe under pressure. Others will come forward for emotional reasons. In other words, some people will profess faith in Jesus under pressure rather than as a responsible decision to turn to Christ.

Also, genuine repentance and faith must result in loving service to God and to his people. God's people, Ferdinando points out, demonstrate the gospel in actions, "by being a community of acceptance and grace, of compassion and service, of reconciliation and healing, and by pursuing righteousness in social relationships and environmental stewardship (2007:141). Faith that has no fruit to attest it is nothing more than a nominal faith as amply demonstrated in the epistle of James (2:14-26). While the Pauline epistle to the Romans speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of by true faith, the epistle of James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with genuine faith. Genuine belief in the truths of the gospel will transform one's conducts, thoughts and attitudes. True faith will always result in a changed life. In this perspective, it can be said that where faith is not demonstrated in actions, the gospel is not present.

### **5.2.2 Pitfalls in the Bunia churches' evangelism**

#### **5.2.2.1 Repeating a prayer after someone as a genuine response to the Gospel**

It is important to underline, at this stage, that biblical evangelism is about winning people to Christ. When someone becomes a Christian he or she becomes by that action a member of God's people, the church. It is different from just joining the pastor's church or denomination. Inviting people to repent and believe in the good news was Jesus' model of evangelism and that of the apostolic evangelism in the New Testament. Winning people to Christ means, in the words of Uzodinma, "helping people, through the preaching of the gospel, to receive salvation which is by faith in Christ Jesus" (2001:39).

The first pitfall in winning people to Christ is to ask hearers to say a written prayer after the pastor or the evangelist. In this method, preachers follow the method of the Campus Crusade in their booklet commonly known as "les quatre lois spirituelles"<sup>12</sup>. After presenting these "four spiritual laws", the pastor or the evangelist reads the following written prayer,

Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and I accept you as my Saviour and Lord. Thank you for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life that you give me. Take over the direction of my life. Make me the person you desire me to be.

The pastor then asks the person, "Does this prayer express your heart's desire? If yes, then make this prayer now and Jesus will come into your life as he has

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<sup>12</sup> « Connaissez-vous les quatre lois spirituelles? » (Do you know the four spiritual laws?) written by William R. Bright of Campus pour Christ (The Campus Crusade) France in 1994 to help evangelists introduce people to Christ by briefly presenting the Gospel message. "The four spiritual laws" are as follows. First, God loves you and offers you a marvellous plan for your life (cf. Jn. 3:16; 10:10). Second, Man is a sinner and separated from God. He can neither know nor experience God's love and his plan for his life (cf. Ro. 3:23; 6:23). Third, Jesus is God's only solution to man's sin. Through Him you may know and experience God's love and his plan for your life (cf. 1 Co. 15:3-6; Jn. 14:6). Fourth, we must accept Jesus Christ personally as our Saviour and Lord. Then we can know and experience God's love and his plan for our lives (cf. Jn. 1:12; Ep. 2:8-9; Re. 3:20).

promised". Then the pastor or the evangelist goes on encouraging the "new believer" to be sure he or she has been saved on the basis of Jesus' promise in Revelation 3:20 and 1 John 5:11-13. He points the "new believer" to basic things he or she needs to know and do in order to grow spiritually.

It is worth pointing out here that not all pastors and evangelists use the Campus Crusade booklet. But among those who do use it, there are pastors and evangelists who use their spiritual discernment and personal knowledge of the Scriptures to present the biblical gospel. Many, however, just endorse the booklet as "the quickest way" of winning people to Christ. In so doing, they fall into the pitfall of manipulating decisions for Christ and therefore creating false assurances of salvation.

It would be helpful for pastors and church leaders to study the preaching of the apostles and the early Christian preachers in the New Testament. A distinctive feature of their preaching that can guide the presentation of the gospel message today is that they frequently insisted on hearers' response to the Gospel. This response is often described in terms of "belief in the truth" (2 Th. 2:9-12), "a knowledge of truth" (2Ti. 2:25), "obeying the truth" (Ga. 5:7), "coming to know the truth" (Jn. 8:32; 1Ti. 2:4; 4:3; 1Jn. 2:21), encouraging "the fruit of repentance" in the lives of those who believed (cf. Mt. 7:15-27; Jn. 15:8; 2Pe. 1:5-12), holiness of conduct, love for others (1 Th. 3:12-13; 1Jn. 4:8; Ga. 1:6-9; 5:22-25; 1Ti. 6:3-5) as key indicators of the assurance of salvation. There is great danger in encouraging people to feel assured of salvation simply because they have prayed a written prayer or have lifted up their hands during an altar call. There is no solid biblical foundation for such assurance of salvation. It cannot be said with certitude that the persons say the prayer from their deep hearts' desire. How many of these evangelists try to further probe people who came to faith through this method? The research came across respondents who justified their assurance of salvation by saying that the pastor or evangelist just asked them to repeat after them the prayer for salvation. This "quick way" of

bringing people to faith in Jesus can be one cause of nominal faith in church membership.

#### *5.2.2.2 Lifting up one's hand or coming forward after a church service as genuine repentance*

A second pitfall is to invite people to come forward after a sermon, which in the churches researched was referred to as an “altar call”. In these churches, this is carried out in three basic ways. The first way is that some churches call people forward to make a decision for Christ and baptise them immediately or shortly after the decision and add them onto the church's number rolls. No evidence is called for the genuineness of repentance. The pastor (and the congregation) assumes that the people have genuinely repented because they are “crying with tears” or fall prostrate at the altar. Others use music, whether powerful or quiet, to play while they make a lengthy call to people for a decision to repent and believe. Others “manipulate” decisions by promising blessings for those who accept the message and make a decision for Christ straight away. As far as Christian nominalism is concerned, this is probably one major area or a major “entry point” for nominal Christians into church membership today.

#### *5.2.2.3 The problem with these methods of winning people to Christ*

Though the gospel can be clearly presented and then an altar call issued or a prayer asked of the responding person, the problem with these kinds of “invitations to believe” is that hearers may confuse genuine repentance with praying a prayer and coming forward after the sermon. These methods often allow ambiguity by assuming that those who have walked to the front of the altar or have said a prayer after the pastor are saved. They only deceive those who have not in fact genuinely repented and believed. In this case, such methods of evangelism risk filling the churches with “false converts” and nominal Christians. Churches relying on these methods for winning people to Christ fail to apply



biblical criteria for recognising true Christians and differentiating them from nominal ones. It may show they have an inadequate concept of leading people to Christ and indicate an inadequate understanding of biblical evangelism. This deficiency may be due, on one hand, to a failure of theological education. On the other hand, they may be influenced by other churches, especially RERC churches using these methods. In following methods such as described above, church leaders themselves have no time to look for evidence of genuine repentance and true faith in the lives of church members. This may also be due to a desire for impressive numerical growth.

Ambiguity in presenting the gospel message can lead to a nominal profession of faith in Jesus. A gospel message is ambiguous when it leads hearers to confuse, as Dever & Alexander point out, “any other response with the only saving response” (2005:52). The message is ambiguous if pastors and preachers think that conversion is a humanly accomplishable task. Such an understanding of the gospel allows people to believe they have been saved because they have repeated a prayer after the pastor.

### **5.3. Ministry of the Bunia churches in regard to Christian nominalism**

How could a local church organise itself and its ministries in order to effectively confront Christian nominalism within its membership? This study suggests dealing with two things. The first is the screening of baptismal candidates and the second is serious pastoral care to existing baptised church members, especially those who give cause for concern.

### **5.3.1 The screening of baptismal candidates**

#### **5.3.1.1 The screening of baptismal candidates among children**

A possible entry point for nominal Christians in church membership is the process leading to water baptism. Regarding children, the practice of water baptism varies from one church denomination to another in Bunia churches. The two major views are those of the advocates of “infant baptism” and those of the advocates of “believers’ baptism”. In the former view, churches baptise infants but require a public profession of personal faith before integrating them into church membership<sup>13</sup>. The ceremony which accompanies the profession of faith is called “confirmation”. The “confirmed” may now take Holy Communion and become therefore “communicant members”. All the churches researched, except one, are of the view that water baptism is only for believers. Children are baptised only when they are able to give a believable profession of faith, at the age of ten, twelve and fourteen respectively in CNCA 21, CECA 20 and CEBCE 55 (see table 3). The presupposition of this study is that baptism as the outward sign of inward regeneration should be administered only to those who have given “a believable profession of faith”, who have already been saved and who have effectively begun the Christian life. As for children, the question is how old they should be before being baptised. Grudem points out,

The most direct answer is that they should be old enough to give a believable profession of faith. It is impossible to set a precise age that will apply to every child, but when parents see convincing evidence of genuine spiritual life, and also some degree of understanding regarding the meaning of trusting in Christ, then baptism is appropriate. Of course, this will require careful administration by the church as well as a good explanation by parents in their homes. The exact age for baptism will vary from child to child, and somewhat from church to church as well (1994:982).

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<sup>13</sup> Bunia churches researched in the Anglican tradition baptise infants but wait until confirmation around the age of twelve to welcome them into the church’s membership rolls. Until this point, baptised children can actively participate in church activities, save that they cannot take Holy Communion.

As far as the Bunia churches are concerned, Grudem underlines an important element in the decision whether or not to accept a child for baptism. It is the necessity of evidence of a genuine profession of faith and of a genuine spiritual life before baptising the child. The reality in the churches, however, is that some of the constitutions set the age limit for baptism at ten, others at 12 and others at 14. Churches' assumptions are that it is only at the age of ten or 12 or 14 that children are able to make a genuine profession of faith.

But particular assumptions are not enough as guidelines. Children vary greatly depending on their background of parental upbringing, formal education and their relationship with churches. The responsibility of parents and the local church to bring up children to understand the meaning of trusting in Christ and its implications for daily lifestyle cannot be overemphasised. Many parents, however, shy away from this God-given responsibility to raise their children in the ways of God, as underlined in several scripture verses. For example, God intended for Abraham to direct "his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Ge. 18:19). He commanded Israelite parents to obey his word and impress his commandments on their children (De. 6:6, 20-26) and to train their children in the ways of the Lord (Pr. 22:6). Christian parents are asked to bring their children up "in training and instruction of the Lord" in Ephesians 6:4. But the reality in the churches researched is that many Christian parents leave this God-ordained responsibility to pastors and Sunday school teachers. In some of the cases researched, parents pushed their teenagers into baptism only because they had reached the age limit set by the church constitution.

This study argues for the responsible spiritual upbringing of children by both parents and churches in order to judge when baptism is appropriate and when it is not. In this way churches may screen baptismal candidates among children, not according to their age, but according to the genuineness of their profession of faith. If this does not happen in many families, the local churches need to

take responsibility both for teaching children and young people, and for organising appropriate teaching on parenting for the mothers and fathers.

#### *5.3.1.2 The assessing of adult baptismal candidates*

The screening of baptismal candidates must also apply to adult candidates. Those churches that baptise believers immediately upon the profession of faith should take great care to ensure that they turn away from their sins and instead turn to God. Genuine change occurs by God's grace through the faithful preaching of God's word. The pastors' concern should not only be for gathering large numbers. They should be concerned with their hearers' understanding of biblical conversion and its implications for daily Christian life. True conversion is different from converting people to the church denomination. Misunderstanding of the biblical teaching on conversion by pastors and church members can lead to spurious professions of faith in Christ. Churches will need to ascertain that the lives of individual believers are "the confirming echo" of their Christian witness, so that "the salt and light" of those who profess to believe in Jesus permeate the non-Christian society, influencing changes in it (cf. Mt. 5:13-16; Stott 2007:144).

#### *5.3.1.3 Improving catechetical instructions in the churches*

For those churches giving catechetical instruction before baptising, candidates should be assessed before baptism. It is understood from this study that catechetical instruction is used by most of the researched churches as a major means by which to recruit people onto their membership rolls. The present study therefore suggests the following in order to improve both the content and the methods of instruction.

First, catechetical instructions in the churches researched are intended only for those desiring water baptism. Once catechumens have been baptised these instructions stop. Against this background the present study suggests that

catechetical instructions be understood to include all believers, including baptised church members. In this perspective, catechetical instructions should aim to help believers to obey God and his word (cf. Mt. 28:20). In this perspective, catechetical instruction should not be the only form of teaching for believers. A holistic approach to teaching believers will require different levels and types of teaching, not all of it necessarily catechetical. Sunday school, vacation Bible school, children's camps, Bible study groups, etc., can all serve as educational agencies where children and young people will learn about God. Sermons may offer opportunities to teach believers to grow spiritually. Various seminars and workshops may also play a part in the education of believers.

If pastors and evangelists have disciple-making in mind, it would change the way they use the catechism booklet. It will not only be to prepare believers for baptism. Instead, the instruction will aim to train believers for God's service of building up the body of Christ. In this perspective, the content of the instruction needs to be reworked to include the basic elements of the gospel as described at the beginning of the present section, teachings to establish believers in the faith as well as deeper insights for growing Christians. It implies that topics on evangelism should come first so that essential elements of the gospel, that is, God, man, Jesus and conversion are clarified right from the beginning of the instruction. Then gradually the teaching should move to the assurance of salvation, the elementary foundations of faith in Jesus, indicators of spiritual growth and of spiritual maturity. At each of these levels there should be a way of assessing learners before proceeding to the next level of teachings. Such an assessment should enable instructors to recognise both those who show signs of spiritual progress and those who give cause for concern. The latter should not be allowed to proceed further, let alone be baptised, until they are assessed positively. It means that catechetical instructions should be adapted to the various levels of the learners' spiritual understanding. In this sense, those who have yet to be sure of their salvation will be taught differently from those already laying the foundations for spiritual growth. In the same way, those learning the elementary principles of the Christian faith will be taught in a different group

from those already walking with Jesus. Catechetical instructions should fit in with the way churches organise teaching in Sunday schools, except that where Sunday schools teach according to age groups, catechetical instructions should be given according to the level of spiritual understanding. In a program following the above guidelines, the minimum duration of a typical catechetical instruction will be 18 months. Some churches may go up to two years or more. The important thing, though, is not the duration itself, but the degree of members' understanding of the teaching and its application to their lives.

Second, this study suggests that catechism classes consist of serious study, not merely memorisation. It is understood that many churches only ask pupils to memorise the questions and their answers. There must be a deliberate effort to explain the meaning of the answers and of the scripture passages. For examples, catechumens do not need to merely state that sin is the transgression of God's law. They must understand what it means to transgress God's law. In a typical catechism lesson, then, there should be reading assignments, explanation of the passage and time for students to ask questions and for teachers to answer, and time for memorising key scripture verses. There will also be homework for students to work on before the next lesson. For those catechumens who do not have the assurance of salvation, it will be useful to start with exposing clearly the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. For those who are already assured of salvation, catechism should integrate foundational teachings to establish them in faith. For those already growing spiritually but not yet baptised, catechism class should take the form of a disciple-making class in order for participants to grow into the likeness of Christ. In a typical catechism class, there should be interaction between the instructors and the learners. Teachings should take the form of bible study groups, allowing participants to ask questions and seek answers, pray for others and be prayed for. A bible verse should be memorised per lesson and homework given for the week. It means that it takes more than catechetical instruction to make believers grow into spiritual maturity. In this perspective, the educational task of the church is primarily the responsibility of the pastoral leadership. Whether it is catechetical

instruction or other forms of teaching and preaching, pastors should take full responsibility. Those delegating the responsibility of teaching to others in the local churches should ensure to only entrust it to faithful church members who are able to teach and are good role models for believers (cf. 2 Ti. 2:2).

Third, those learning should be assessed on a regular basis during the period of the instructions. This should help instructors to monitor learners' spiritual progress. On the basis of this assessment, only those who give proof of understanding should be allowed to progress to the next levels of teaching. In the same way, only those assured of salvation should be baptised. For those in the church membership giving cause for concern pastors should have "a father's heart", as underlined in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (2 Co. 11:28-29).

### ***5.3.2 The need for more evangelistic churches***

The reality in the researched churches suggested that church leaders and members are not as zealous for sharing their faith today as they used to be in the past decades of the history of their respective denominations. The faithlessness of some church members may be due to the neglect of Christian witness. Many church leaders and members have lost the sense of urgency to reach lost people. Many Christians have left evangelism to be pastors and church elders. Often churches are full of church-based activities throughout the week that keep members busy at church with the overall goal of inviting people to "come" to church. Their activities designed to reach out are fewer than those inviting people in. Even within church memberships Christians seldom spend time with the lost or those with different problems. Church membership seems to be more about getting one's needs met rather than reaching out to the lost.

If churches encourage every believer to witness to his or her faith as did the early Christian church in the book of Acts, there would be opportunity to befriend nominal Christians and share the gospel with them. Today's evangelism, however, is more of a proselytism to win people to church

denominations in order to increase numbers than to really bring them to Christ. True evangelism will happen only where reaching to the lost within the church becomes the mission of every true believer, not only the church staff.

If pastors and preachers of the word of God want to follow in the footsteps of Jesus they will need to teach intentionally with both catechetical and apologetic purposes in mind. Whether in public or privately Christians need to confront those who claim to be Christians but whose testimonies negate their claims. Pastors should not avoid confrontation just because of fear of losing the sheep or for fear of threat from church members. The general tendency to just follow the crowd can be a cause of the nominal faith of many church members. Pastors with God's heart for the people will look beyond the crowd to rescue those hiding under hypocritical attitudes and falling into the routine patterns of church activities.

#### **5.4 The need for biblical pastoral care of the church**

The biblical foundation of the ministry of pastoral care is the affirmation that God created humankind for relationship with him as well as with God's other creatures. In this perspective the pastoral care of the church is undertaken on the basis of God's care for his creation and should therefore model itself on God's care.

In light of the above definition, the present study identifies Jesus' care for his followers and that of Paul as the best models of pastoral care that today's churches should emulate if they are to deal effectively with the phenomenon of nominal Christian faith in church memberships.



#### **5.4.1 Imitating Jesus' model of pastoral care**

Jesus Christ presents himself as the true shepherd (Greek, *kalos poimen*) in his parable of the shepherd (Jn. 10). He is presented as the Chief Shepherd in 1 Peter 5:4. He is different from others who claim or are claimed to be shepherds. The difference is that Jesus has authority over the flock by virtue of being *the* shepherd (emphasis mine). He has access to the flock because they belong to him. Others are only thieves and hirelings. Second, he has an established relationship with them (Beasley-Murray 2000:168) seen in that he knows each of his own sheep and they know him and listen to him because they recognise his voice.

Jesus' model of pastoral care emphasises preaching and teaching, seeking the lost among the sheep and discipling believers. Jesus started his ministry with the proclamation of the gospel. His gospel message stressed the need for repentance and faith as saving responses to God's solution to the problem of sin (cf. Mk. 1:15). The Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) is a good example of Jesus' teaching, modelling Christian character in those who believed and followed him. Jesus commissioned his disciples to make disciples and "teach them to obey everything" he had taught them (Mt. 28:19-20). The distinctiveness of Jesus' teaching was the authority with which he taught and that he always taught the truth. His hearers acknowledged the authority in his preaching and teaching, setting him far above their own teachers of law (Mt. 7:28-29; Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32). He worked miracles throughout his public ministry, driving out demons and healing various diseases. His pastoral care was holistic in that he cared for both the soul and the body.

Jesus' pastoral care is seen best in his search for the lost. Whether the lost was one among 100 (1%), or one among ten (10%) or one among two (50%), Jesus valued them and sacrificed himself to save them (cf. Lk. 15; Mk. 10:45). He modelled the heart of true care for those who have not yet

acknowledged Christ's claims upon their lives or those who have gone astray from the faith (cf. Jn. 10:16). He frequently addressed the physical needs of hearers as part of his pastoral care. In this sense he modelled a holistic pastoral care of God's people.

Jesus also invested his earthly ministry in discipling some of his followers and commissioning them to carry out his mission worldwide. He selected twelve among the multitude of his disciples and spent his lifetime with them, modelling his image in them and entrusting them with his mission. It is this investment that prepared the twelve to continue Jesus' mission of reconciling the world with God. His training offers a paradigm churches researched in particular and the African church in general should seriously revisit and apply.

#### **5.4.2 Emulating the apostles' model of pastoral care**

The New Testament apostles have modelled the pastoral care of God's flock. The church described in Acts 2:42-47 showcases several aspects of depth within a short space of time. The passage shows a new culture emerging, different from the hypocritical religion of the time.

This study singles out Paul as worth emulating. In his address to the Ephesian church elders (Ac. 20:18-28), two important principles can be drawn as characterising his pastoral care. First, he presents himself as having thoroughly taught "the whole will of God" to members and leaders of the church, both publicly and in private homes (Ac. 20:27). In the same way, he thoroughly carried out the gospel message to the extent that "all the Jews and Greeks living in the province of Asia heard the word of God" in just two years (Ac. 19:10). Stott underlines Paul's seriousness in the pastoral ministry in the following terms:

Such was the pastoral thoroughness of the apostle's three year in Ephesus. He omitted no part of God's revealed message. He

neglected no segment of the local community. He left no method untried to reach the city. On the contrary, he shared all possible truth with all possible people by all possible means. He taught the whole gospel to the whole city with his whole heart (2007:84).

Second, Paul was particularly concerned about false teachers and false teachings. He knew that false teachers would rise up from within the ranks of church members and leaders and teach things to lead believers astray. His advices to the elders can still constitute a relevant warning to church leaders today. It teaches the pastoral leadership that theirs is not only the duty of teaching the word of God, but also of identifying false teachers and combating the errors they are helping to disseminate. Paul warns church elders to watch over themselves and over God's flock (20:28). Those preaching regularly will need to heed this warning. The pastoral ministry is not only about preaching and teaching God's word. It is also a question of who is preaching and the content of what is being preached and taught. The credibility of the preacher and the truthfulness and faithfulness of the message are likely to affect the reception of the message and its application in life by its hearers. One implication of the warning is that today's pastors and evangelists can be to blame for the nominal faith of their respective church members if they are not first watching over themselves, not following Paul's exhortations to the Ephesian church elders.

#### ***5.4.3 Implications of the New Testament model of pastoral care for Bunia churches***

The following can be drawn from the pastoral model of Jesus and Paul for Bunia churches. It underlines the fact that biblical pastoral oversight of God's flock includes feeding the flock, leading them and protecting them.

#### *5.4.3.1 Feeding the flock*

The first priority in the pastoral care of the church is that of giving spiritual food to help believers to grow spiritually healthy. Jesus' model in John 10 is that the shepherd leads the sheep to a good pasture where they can feed themselves. It means that the responsibility of selecting the best food in terms of its location and quality rests with the shepherd.

Pastors feed God's flock by preaching and teaching God's word. Jesus who is rightly described as the good shepherd (Jn. 10) and "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Pe. 5:4), is the living model of feeding people with the word of God. He did this by teaching (cf. the Sermon on the Mount). When reinstating Peter, Jesus insisted that Peter feed and take care of both the lambs and the sheep as a matter of priority (Jn. 21:15-17). He meant that Peter's love for Jesus should be seen in the way he cared for God's flock. Paul declared to the Ephesian church elders that he had proclaimed to them, both publicly and privately, "the whole will of God" (Ac. 20:20-21, 27). For him, the chief responsibility of church elders was to feed God's flock under their care (20:28). It means that the pastor's chief priority is to feed God's flock as underlined throughout the scriptures (Ps. 23:1-2; Ez. 34:13-14; Jn. 10; 2 Ti. 4:2-5; 1 Pe. 5:1-3). The faithful preaching and teaching of the word of God to the church is much needed for the following reasons. First, it helps the pastoral leadership to clarify the gospel for those unbelievers who come to church services as well as for those nominal Christians within church membership. Evangelistic messages confront sinners and challenge them to repent and believe. They provide the pastoral leadership with opportunity to seek the lost among the sheep. Second, biblical preaching allow the pastors to feed new believers on milk to grow spiritually healthy (cf. 1 Pe. 2:2) and clarify the continuing implications of the gospel for growing Christians (cf. He. 5:14).

It can be said that many of the researched churches have forgotten or overlooked this truth, substituting other things for this kind of preaching. Lawson (2001:331) identifies a missing link in today's preaching and teaching as the

restoration of God's power in the churches' pulpit ministry. Instead, he says, today's churches "are preoccupied with pouring their energies into secondary strategies, such as pursuing the latest church-growth programmes, alternative worship styles, and corporate marketing plans to build their churches".

Though Lawson's immediate readers are churches in North America, his point is no less relevant to churches in Africa and those researched in Bunia. Preaching the gospel with power is not necessarily being popular with large crowds or shouting from the pulpit or luring hearers through false promises of blessings. It means, among others, being in intimate relationship or "in tune" with God through intensive prayer, extensive study of his word and developing a holiness lifestyle.

The systematic and faithful exposition of the "whole will of God" is what churches need to rediscover. It has been understood in this study as biblical preaching. The study's assumption is that these kinds of sermons could help churches to effectively tackle nominal Christian faith within church memberships.

The lack of biblical preaching was cited by Bunia churches as a major cause of nominal Christian faith. One reason for this failure can be in the preachers themselves. Their authority and credibility as communicators of God's word, their experience of the gospel, their motives and the character of the messages they deliver, all can affect the ministry of the word either positively or negatively. In many cases pastors are to blame for this situation when they "want to keep all the reins of leadership in their own hands and refuse to delegate" (Stott 2007:78). But churches, too, are to blame; especially those who expect too much from the pastors in that they overload them with unnecessary administrative works that lay people could easily carry out. In both cases, the result is that pastors are often busy attending different church committees, drafting programs, etc., keeping them away from their flock most of the time. Consequently, they have little time to feed themselves and search for quality food for the congregations. In some of these churches pastors serve on a part-

time basis because they have full jobs outside the church in order to provide for their families. As a result, the standards of biblical preaching decline in many churches.

#### *5.4.3.2 Guiding the flock*

The second priority of the pastoral leadership is to guide the flock. The biblical image of the shepherd is that he leads by walking in front and the sheep following him (cf. Jn. 10:3-5). The following are key guiding functions of the pastoral leadership.

First, the pastoral leadership models the Christian lifestyle for followers of Christ by being good examples in every aspect of life (1 Ti. 4:12). If pastors and church elders are holy in lifestyle, gentle in speech, selfless in relationships, sound in doctrine and have a loving concern for church members, the church will be likely to imitate them and develop a culture of holiness and service to others. But if pastors and church elders have a questionable lifestyle, are preoccupied with getting their own needs met, the church will be likely to develop a culture of ungodliness that can encourage nominality. As a city on top of a hill, their lives can either draw people to the faith or drive them away (cf. Mt. 5:13-16). Bad examples of those in church leadership were mentioned by Bunia churches as a major cause of the absence of spiritual growth in many church members. Some of the nominal church members may be deceiving themselves because of the bad examples of church leaders.

Second, pastoral care of the church means that the pastoral leadership empowers believers in building up the body of Christ. They can do this by encouraging the “every-member ministry” of the local church. They help each believer to discover his or her spiritual gifts and use them for the common good of the body of Christ. A second guiding function of the pastor is setting godly examples for believers to emulate (1 Ti. 4:12; 1 Pe. 5:1-5). Third, pastors lead by serving the flock and not by lording it over them (Mt. 20:25-28). It takes time

and effort to be a servant leader. When pastors ignore the needs of church members, they may be wasting God-given opportunities to recognise among them Christians who are nominal but seeking. Seeker-sensitive pastors are the most likely to meet people who are in the membership without genuine faith.

The fourth guiding function of the pastor is to keep the flock together by bringing back those who go astray (cf. Ez. 34:16; Jn. 10:16). Seeking the lost is the very heart of God (cf. Ge. 3:9; Ez. 34:16; Mk. 10:45). Therefore, those whose heart is tuned into God's will find fresh opportunity to confront registered church members whose faith does not evidence genuine repentance and whose lifestyle is dubious. The Lord will reveal to them people who may have gained entry into church membership without prior understanding of the gospel. This will require, among other things, a father's heart from pastors and church leaders. Paul uses the metaphor of the relationship between a father and his children several times in his letters. He writes to the Galatians as his children for whom he is "in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed" in them (4:19). Corinthian believers were his beloved children whom he begot "through the gospel" (1 Co. 4:15) and for whom he sacrificed everything to watch over their spiritual well-being (2 Co. 11:28-29). Stott explains this father's heart in terms of a loving relationship between the preacher and his audience, suggesting that "before, during and after the sermon the preacher is, or should be, conscious of this relationship in which he is involved" (1961:81).

#### *5.4.3.3 Watching over the flock*

Guarding is the third priority of the pastoral ministry. The guarding function of the pastoral leadership deals with the threat of false teachings, those who spread them and with those who are wondering away for other reasons. The New Testament is abundantly clear about the reality of false teachers within church memberships (Ac. 20:28-31; 2 Ti. 4:1-4; 2 Pe. 2:1-3; Jd. 4). Dever & Alexander suggest that the pastoral leadership be alert to the presence of false teachers and false teachings. Pastors may do this, they say, either by defusing

a potentially divisive situation, or engaging in doctrinal battle over issues that affect both the gospel and the unity of the church. Standing in the gap for God's people, they say, is part of their "protective responsibility to the local church we serve to engage in doctrinal controversy for the clarity of the Gospel and the health of the church" (2005:95).

The need to speak against false teachings requires that local church pastors hold firmly to what the Bible teaches as the truth, in order to "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Ti. 1:9). It is the responsibility of the pastoral leadership to protect the flock from false teaching and establish them in the truth. Combating errors may be one way of opening the eyes of those blinded by deceitful teachings.

Watchful pastors will make serving the platform for the gospel. They will see a relationship between evangelising and serving. By serving the needy, pastors have opportunity to evangelise them because very often the hearts of those who feel hopeless are receptive to the message of the gospel. The best context for pastoral care is everyday life. Chester & Timmis underline that the seeker-sensitive pastor will always find opportunity to learn about a person's relationship with God, whether he is welcoming them into his house, walking in the street, reflecting on events or eating meals (2011:75). Serious pastoral attention may help pastors teach or instruct where people are ignorant (cf. Co. 1:28), encourage and comfort the fainthearted (cf. 1 Th. 5:14) and rebuke or admonish the wayward (cf. 2 Ti. 4:2).

An important implication of the guarding function of the pastoral ministry is that pastors and church elders should protect the church against infiltration by unqualified members. While everyone is welcome to hear God's word being proclaimed, not everyone is welcome in church membership. Purity in church membership is consistent with God's desire to distinguish his people from the surrounding culture. In the Old Testament God said to the Israelites, "if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Ex. 19:5; cf. De. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps. 135:4). In the New



Testament this is stated in 1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God". Just as in the Old Testament not every nation was God's elected people, in the same way in the New Testament church not everyone is a member of the body of Christ.

The issue of church membership in the researched churches concerns the criteria for church membership in light of the elements of the biblical gospel analysed earlier in chapter two. The process should start with what churches preach and teach regarding church membership. The first Christian community in Jerusalem set an example that today's churches will do well to emulate. In that first Christian community, only those who were touched by the message of the gospel that the apostles preached and who accepted the message were baptised and added to the number of disciples (Ac. 2:37-41). When people were saved God added them to the church community (2:47; 5:13-14). These and other passages in the New Testament tell us that God's saving power was at work, attracting unbelievers to the community of believers through the proclamation of his word, and the living model of generosity, sincerity, honesty and unity of these early believers. The implication for Bunia churches is that people can be drawn to church memberships because of beautiful programmes or powerful speakers or the size of the congregations or the beauty of church buildings. But genuine attraction to church membership should be because the Spirit of God is at work or, as Stott points out, because the church is a learning church, a caring church, a worshiping church and an evangelising church (2007:24-47).

It is clear that Bible-based church membership is for regenerate members only. New Testament writers certainly understood church membership as being for true believers only. It is made clear throughout the Pauline epistles where believers are called saints (Ro. 1:6-7), sanctified (1 Co. 1:2) and holy (Co. 1:2). Biblical church membership is not for those claiming or just assuming Christian identity on the basis of coming to church, growing up in a Christian home,

having a Christian name given at water baptism, or being a choir member, for example.

The pastoral leadership should have the courage to accept as church members only those who demonstrate by their fruit that they have repented of sin and turned to trust in Christ. There may be people already in church membership who were baptised for other reasons. It is the responsibility of pastors to nullify their status until they regularise it. This can be done by either withholding such people's member certificates or stopping them from taking communion. In the testimonies shared in section two, for example, Lydia and Justin came to true faith in Christ after they were excommunicated from church and the Lord's Table. Aristotle, for his part, was confronted by his wife regarding his nominal faith. For others, it was the preaching of God's word that brought them to realise their nominal faith.

This calls for the pastoral leadership to be sensitive to the needs of the people they put out of the church membership. The local church is "the miniature pattern of the church universal" (Radmacher 1978:343). For Radmacher, discernment is needed in taking members in as well as putting them out of church membership. Outwardly, Radmacher contends, this responsibility means that the church community is called to "maintain an eternal vigilance to see that only those who are truly born again share in and create the intimacy of the local fellowship". Inwardly, he continues, the local church exercises discernment by excluding from membership those whose salvation is in doubt.

Many of the churches researched appear to be caring little for the purity of the body of Christ. Some pastors would say that heeding this advice will only result in emptying the church. But those who are serious about their divine calling for the pastoral oversight of local churches will set their priority on the purity of the body of Christ. Biblical church discipline should be applied indiscriminately to both church members and those in the pastoral leadership. Those who are willing to heed these teachings can make positive progress in confronting Christian nominalism in their respective church memberships.

#### ***5.4.4 Implications for Christian nominalism in Bunia church memberships***

The first implication for strong pastoral care is that nominalism could be effectively confronted if all those in the pastoral leadership of the churches would take seriously the pastoral oversight of their respective congregations, committing themselves wholeheartedly to feeding the flock through biblical preaching, being role models for those under their care and guarding themselves and the flock against false teachers and false teachings. Pastors in the churches researched can be classified into three categories. The first category is made up of those pastors who really care about the seriousness of their calling to the pastoral oversight of God's people under their care. They make an effort to deliver sermons that clarify the gospel for unbelievers attending church services and nominal Christians within their membership, and they challenge them to repent and believe in Jesus. The second category is made up of the majority of the pastors who are so busy with administrative works or providing for their families or taking a full-time job outside their pastoral ministry that they have little time left to take care of the sheep. They are Sunday pastors, leaving church members to fend for themselves during the week. The third category is made up of pastors who overlook these pastoral duties out of ignorance. Some of them have never gone to bible schools. Others have no pastoral gift but they see their pastoral ministry as the only way of making a living. The last two categories of pastors value their own personal interests more than those of the flock either by ignorance or willingly. They will never truly care about the state of the flock. Some of them are hirelings who have no real heart for church members, who are only concerned about what they can get out of the people under their care. The well-being of the flock is not a major preoccupation for them.

Nominal Christianity will not be adequately addressed in Bunia churches unless the pastoral leadership realise that they are part of the problem for failing in their ministry of the word. This in turn calls for the need for a renewal in their

understanding of biblical pastoral care. Those who fail out of ignorance and who are teachable can be approached through appropriate structures that are in place, such as the pastor's meetings organised by the ECC church denominations on a monthly basis. There is also a plan to start a forum for preachers that will regroup ECC and RERC churches.

Second, because serious pastoral care is the very heart of God for the church, which belongs to God, those genuinely called to the pastoral care of the flock should re-examine themselves in light of serious nominalism in their church membership. They need to first watch over themselves as was commanded to the Ephesian church elders, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Ac. 20:28). The church is precious in God's eyes because Christ purchased it with his own blood (Ep. 5:25-27; Ti. 2:14; Re. 1:5-6). It is the Holy Spirit who appoints people to watch over God's people. Christ is the head of the church, which is his body (Ep. 1:22-23). He is the chief Shepherd (1 Pe. 5:4). Therefore, self-proclaimed pastors or shepherds or apostles or prophets of the church of Jesus Christ constitute a serious threat to biblical pastoral care. Some of them are nominal Christians. Understanding of this important truth should, as Stott (2007:88) points out, humble, inspire, and motivate pastors to take seriously the pastoral care of the body of Christ. This in turn should radically transform the way pastors see the church and their responsibility towards God's people.

Third, taking pastoral care seriously will require that local churches understand their Christian identity and structure themselves according to the Scripture. The local church's double identity means that it is both "a royal priesthood" and "a holy nation" (1 Pe. 2:9-10; Re. 1:5-6). As holy, church members are called to belong to and worship God. As priests, they are sent back into the world to witness to Christ. This understanding of the church implies that it is both a worshipping and an evangelising church. The two belong together because true worship of God leads to witness and true witness leads to worship of God.

Pastors who have God's heart for the flock will see to it that those in their church membership are involved in worship and evangelism. Those whose witness is dubious will attract the attention of true servants of God.

Fourth, serious pastoral care is a divine calling. In most of the churches researched, pastors are chosen by vote or appointed by committees. Some are self-appointed pastors over churches they have planted. In this kind of church structure, pastors see their churches more as belonging to them or to their denominations than to Christ. It is the very notion that bringing people to faith in Christ is a humanly accomplishable task that contributes to Christian nominalism. Consequently, pastors help to deceive church members when they regard them as Christians simply because they have been baptised and regularly come to church or just because they say they are Christians.

Fifth, the biblical understanding of the pastoral care of the church implies that it is God who chooses leaders for the church. In the case of the church denominations researched in this study, churches wait for bible schools and theological seminaries to train leaders for them instead of recognising and developing believers in their church membership by understanding and applying the biblical qualifications for church leaders.

The Cape Town Commitment (2011:72)<sup>14</sup> seems to have captured this reality by stating that the spiritual growth in many local churches in many places “remains shallow and vulnerable” because many in the pastoral leadership have not been disciplined well. But the CTC believes that leadership training programmes do not solve the problem of better leadership for local churches for two probable reasons: “First, training leaders to be godly and Christlike is the wrong way round”. Because, it argues, “biblically, only those whose lives already display basic qualities of mature discipleship should be appointed to leadership in the first place” (2011:73). Second, the CTC says, “some leadership training programmes focus on packaged knowledge, techniques and skills to the neglect

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<sup>14</sup> References to page numbers for the Cape Town Commitment (CTC) are from the French copy, *Engagement du Cap*.

of godly character”. The findings of the present study support the CTC statement that qualities such as a servant heart, humility, integrity, purity, lack of greed, prayerfulness, dependence on God's Spirit, a deep love for people and ability to teach God's Word to God's people, which are essential for Christlike leaders, are nurtured through disciple-making.

In light of the above statement of CTC, it is understood in this study that bible schools and seminaries will never truly solve all the local churches' problems of godly leadership if they only give lectures and focus on imparting academic knowledge. Effective pastoral care requires that leaders are discipled before, during and after training. This means that churches sending candidates for pastoral training should ensure that they are already disciples of Christ. Bible schools and theological colleges should ensure that students are trained in godly characters besides imparting knowledge. After training, an accountability relationship should exist between the training institutions and the graduates. In this way they are likely to take care effectively of God's people. This is what Ngewa (2009:251) means when pointing out, “Teaching ability is not just a skill that can be learned, it is also a matter of character”. Good teachers, he says, “should be like magnets, drawing people towards the gospel they preach”. He concludes:

No matter how well trained teachers are, if they cannot make disciples they are not actually teaching but merely talking. The same is true of a pastor whose message is rejected by those who hear him because of the pastor's character. Christian ministry is not only an activity but also, and primarily, an example of Christ-like living (2009:252).

Sixth, the pastoral care in many Bunia churches is in need of renewal. As Davids points a ministry that should “be done with ever new vigour” has come to be carried out “as a routine undertaking” (1990:178). New vigour in the pastoral oversight of God's flock, he says, is suggested in Peter's commendation to fellow elders, “Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers” (1 Pe. 5:2). It could greatly renew the pastoral care of the churches if

pastors were willing to heed this advice from the scriptures. They could strengthen their pastoral ministry by willingly accepting to serve in the oversight of the church rather than seeing it as being something forced upon them. Even where pastors are elected, it does not serve the church if they see their work as a burden (He. 13:17). The pastoral oversight of the church must be a joyful voluntary undertaking rather than an unnecessary burden. Because the church belongs to God, pastors have no proprietary rights over it. True servants of God will not try to turn their pastoral oversight of the church into a business.

The understanding of the pastoral ministry from this biblical perspective could revolutionise the way pastors in Bunia churches carry out their God-given responsibility. It could help them to value the flock and to care for it in individual terms as well as corporately. The eyes of genuine shepherds will be more on the lost among the sheep than on those in the sheepfold. Good shepherds will find fresh ways of identifying the lost within and outside the sheepfold and strive to rescue them.

As far as Christian nominalism in church membership is concerned, the present study advocates as effective ways of confronting Christian nominalism in church memberships a renewed evangelism that clarifies the gospel for unbelievers and nominal church members, and Bible-based pastoral care of the church. This happens only when pastors and church leaders take seriously their God-given responsibility of overseeing the local churches. It is possible where there are leaders “after God’s heart” in the local churches.

## **5.5 Summary**

Chapter 5 focused on how Bunia churches might effectively confront the challenges of nominal Christianity within their memberships. Two main actions have been recommended, namely a strong evangelism and a biblical pastoral care of the churches.

An evangelism that confronts Christian nominalism will need to focus on the proclamation of the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors and preachers need to clarify the gospel over and over again to church members, focusing on the essential elements of the biblical gospel as underlined in 5.2 of this section. Pastors and church leaders need to avoid “quick” methods of winning people to Christ to avoid filling churches with Christians in name only. Evangelism as the responsibility of every believer needs to be rediscovered in order for leaders and members to confront people in their memberships whose salvation status is in doubt. Evangelism is much more than leading someone to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord. True evangelism will go all the way to making disciples of believers.

Besides a strong evangelism within local church memberships, there’s need to rediscover the biblical pastoral oversight of the congregations, which includes feeding the flock, modelling Christian lifestyles through their good examples and protecting the flock from false teachers and false teachings. Pastors need to reach out to the lost within church membership and help those in church memberships with different problems discover transformational relationships with Jesus Christ.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

Chapter 6 is a concluding summary of the present research, presenting an overview of the research, a summary of the research findings in Bunia churches, the relationship of the research findings with the research problem, and the contributions of the research to the field of practical theology.

#### **6.1 Overview of the research project**

##### ***6.1.1 The research problem***

The present study was an attempt to examine how far nominal Christianity is a problem in Bunia churches in the DR Congo.

##### ***6.1.2 Purpose of the study***

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is nominal Christianity?
- (2) To what extent and in what ways do the Bunia churches recognise the problem of Christian nominalism within their memberships?
- (3) To what extent is the Bunia churches' understanding of Christian nominalism within their memberships sufficient or deficient?

- (4) How might the Bunia churches respond more effectively to the problem of Christian nominalism within their memberships?

### **6.1.3 Research hypotheses**

The working hypotheses of this study are:

- (1) The majority of pastors and church members in Bunia churches are aware of the presence of nominal Christians in their respective church memberships but they have no clear cognizance of the phenomenon of Christian nominalism because their definition of what it is to be “a Christian” is inadequate.
- (2) Many pastors and church leaders are apparently satisfied with increase in attendance at church worship and church activities, to the detriment of seeking the lost among church members and making disciples of believers.
- (3) Many church members do not seem to understand what it means to be a Christian and what makes them Christians. The important thing for them seems to be the status of local church membership, with little interest in or hunger for the transformational impact of the gospel in their daily lifestyles.

### **6.1.4 Research methodology**

- (1) The research team composed of twenty five members surveyed protestant local churches in all the twelve *quartiers* making up the town of Bunia. The research identified forty-six ECC churches and thirty-five RERC churches in the town of Bunia. From this total, twenty-two local churches were researched, eighteen from ECC and four from RERC.

- (2) Selection criteria for local churches included the following: existence in the location for at least nine years, average membership above fifty, and belonging to an ECC or a RERC umbrella denomination. In each local church, the research team interviewed five church leaders, including women where applicable, and ten church members, both male and female.
- (3) Techniques for data collection included interviews (whether personal or in focus groups) and questionnaires. To ensure ease in comprehension, questions were translated from French into the two Congolese national languages spoken in Bunia, namely Swahili and Lingala, depending on the language best understood by respondents. For the educated respondents, French questionnaires were used. Questionnaires were semi-structured and open-ended. This allowed respondents to introduce new issues relevant to their concerns, thus extending the scope of the research.
- (4) In addition to interviews and questionnaires, researchers also used participant observation. They spent time with church leaders outside ministry-related situations. They also participated in Sunday worship, and the weekly church activities of the local churches researched. They took part in the elders' court once a month during the period of the survey. They attended church events such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, fundraising, and communal work as specified by the church calendar. They visited church members in their homes throughout the survey period.
- (5) The research was designed according to the LIM model of research in practical theology, which requires the following four sequential steps (Smith, 2008:205-212):

Section1: An introduction identifying a real-life problem.

Section 2: The present situation interpreting "the world as it is".

Section 3: The preferred scenario interpreting “the world as it should be”.  
Section 4: Practical suggestions interpret “our contemporary obligations” by developing a feasible action plan to provide a remedy to the problem.

(6) The present study adapted the LIM model but modified it to fit the flow of ideas. In this study therefore, the preferred scenario comes before the present situation. Also, the present situation is expanded to two sections, making the total of five sections as outlined below:

- Chapter 1 presents Christian nominalism as an unsatisfactory situation in Bunia churches.
- Chapter 2, the LIM model’s “preferred scenario”, seeks to answer the question “what is nominal Christianity” from a biblical perspective.
- Chapter 3, the LIM model’s “present situation”, seeks to find out to what extent and in what ways the Bunia churches recognise the problem of nominal Christians within their memberships.
- Chapter 4 of the present study is the continuation of the LIM model’s “present situation”. It seeks to find out the extent to which Bunia churches understand the problem of nominal Christianity within their respective church memberships.
- Chapter 5 looks into practical suggestions as to how Bunia churches might respond more effectively to the problem of nominal Christianity.
- Chapter 6 is the conclusion of the research.

## **6.2 Research findings**

This research into the understanding of Christian nominalism in church membership in Bunia churches of the DR Congo tentatively revealed the following:

### **6.2.1 Biblical insights into Christian nominalism (The preferred scenario)**

The analysis of three biblical passages in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament revealed the following differences between true faith in God and nominal faith:

- (1) Unbelief expressed in lack of trust in God and rebellion against him, and stubbornness to obey his words despite much evidence of his care in the past, can be an indicator of nominal faith as it was in the case of the people of Israel in the golden calf episode (Ex. 32-34). Not all members of the Israelite community, called by God's name, were truly his people. Many only followed the crowd and adhered to the traditions. It can be deduced from this passage that not all in Bunia church memberships are truly born again believers. Some are Christians in name only.
- (2) The generation after the death of Joshua failed to develop personal faith in God. That it was a faithless generation is evidenced by their obstinate rejection of the God of their fathers. It was a nominal people of God (Ju. 2:6-3:5). This case study showed that Christian nominalism affects particularly the second and subsequent generations of adherents. Each new generation has to hear for itself and believe personally in God.
- (3) Hypocritical worship that does not involve the heart but only outward religious ceremonies and rituals can also evidence nominal faith (Is. 29:13-14). Religious rituals and activities can be empty exercises unless they come from a heart full of love for God and his people. Empty worship may be an indication of faithlessness.
- (4) True children of God are born of God or born again (Jn. 1:12; 3:3). The new birth status is never granted depending on one's racial or ethnic identity, nor on any human act (Jn. 1:13; 3:6). Racial inheritance, law-keeping, good works and knowledge of scriptures do not automatically qualify someone to become an authentic child of God.

- (5) Even among church leaders, there may be those who are not true servants of God, but Christians in name only. Believers must discern the character of such people by identifying their fruit (Ga. 5:19-23) and differentiate true Christian leaders from nominal ones (Mt. 7:15-23).
- (6) Biblical criteria for genuine repentance from sin and true faith in Christ are trust in Jesus, obedience and love for God and for fellow believers (1 Jn.). Church members whose lifestyles do not demonstrate the above may be Christians in name only.
- (7) Nominal Christian churches may appear outwardly alive but are inwardly dead as was the church in Sardis (Re. 3:1-6). Christ's letters to the churches in Sardis and in Laodicea give warnings of the existence of Christian churches that may even appear in the eyes of society as remarkable "Christian" churches but whose members are not spiritually joined to Christ and are therefore "in name only".

#### ***6.2.2 Understanding Christian nominalism in Bunia church memberships (the present situation)***

- (1) The majority of church leaders and members acknowledge the presence in their church memberships of people who appear to be Christians but are Christians in name only. These nominal Christians are to be found among church members as well as among church leaders. A few church leaders and members, however, denied the presence of nominalism in their church memberships. Among the testimonies of former nominal church members, many admitted that they had gone through the rite of water baptism without believing in Jesus. They were "actively involved" in the church until they came to realise that they had not yet received Jesus into their lives.
- (2) Christian nominalism is understood both as a condition of those who are not Christians in any real sense, only in name, and as a condition

of those who are Christians but who have not grown spiritually due to a failure in disciple-making. The study shows that the Bunia churches understand nominal Christians more as church members not growing spiritually than those who are not Christians at all.

- (3) The above confusion is observable in churches' criteria for recognising true Christians and nominal ones. Their evidences of true faith in Christ are described more in terms of what believers have done (baptism) or are doing (partaking of communion, participation in church services and church activities) than in terms of what God has done and is doing in producing the fruit of genuine repentance and faith in those who believe.
- (4) Churches' deficient understanding of the Christian faith is evidenced in the following: in most local churches church membership is based chiefly on catechism class and baptism, with little insistence on evidence of genuine repentance and faith; salvation is sometimes understood as dependant on doing something, such as being baptised, being on the church's membership roll, being a regular churchgoer; spiritual growth is described more in terms of participation in church services than in terms of Christlikeness in the lives of believers; some pastors and church members even believe that all church members are true Christians because of their membership status; repentance and faith seem to be understood more in terms of what hearers of the gospel have to do in order to become Christians than on what God does in bringing repentance and faith in their lives.

### **6.2.3 Practical suggestions (*The world as it should be*)**

This study has suggested the following as practical steps to effectively tackle Christian nominalism in church memberships.

- (1) Because Christian nominalism in Bunia churches seems closely related to their understanding of the Christian faith, it is imperative that the biblical gospel, which declares God's redemptive work in Christ on the cross for the salvation of the world, be proclaimed again today, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a proclamation should include declaration of God's sovereignty as the foundation of the gospel, human rebellion against God as the necessity of the gospel, Jesus' redemptive work as the focus of the gospel, repentance and faith as the condition of the gospel and Christian lifestyle as the practice of the gospel as it was underlined earlier in this section (cf. 5.2.1, p. 174-187). Such a proclamation of the gospel should confront unbelief and identify evidences of genuine repentance and of true profession of faith.
- (2) Because church membership as understood in Bunia churches can open the doors to nominal Christians, churches should avoid "quick ways" of leading people to Christ, such as just "praying a prayer" or calling people forward after a sermon. Instead, they need to practice responsible evangelism (see p. 193-4, paragraph 3.1.1) leading to Bible-based church membership. They then need to follow up those who repent and believe by ascertaining the new birth status, laying foundations on Christ, giving teaching that will help to grow believers spiritually. They need to screen candidates for evidence of genuine repentance before baptising them as suggested in this section (cf. 5.3.1, p. 191-193). When appropriate, church leaders need to exercise biblical discipline towards unworthy church members.
- (3) Because much of the blame for nominal Christianity rests on the pastoral leadership, there is a need to develop biblical pastoral care of the church as explained earlier in this section (cf. 5.4. p. 197-212). Biblical pastoral care implies that pastors and those in the leadership will prioritise the spiritual nurture of the church members over church administration and personal interest. They will promote godly examples for believers and



watch over the church to detect false teachings and combat them. They will give special attention to the lost and those being led astray by falsehood and counterfeits within the church as well as outside.

### **6.3 Relationship between the research findings and the purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the extent of to which Bunia churches know the problem of nominal Christianity within their memberships. The study

- (1) Analysed what nominal Christianity is from a biblical perspective.
- (2) Examined the extent of Bunia churches' cognisance of the problem in their memberships.
- (3) Sought to find out whether their understanding of the problem is sufficient or deficient.
- (4) Suggested practical steps for pastors in Bunia to effectively address the challenges of Christian nominalism in their memberships.

The following may be drawn from the findings of the research:

- (1) Christian nominalism in church memberships is a reality in Bunia churches, among church members as well as church leaders.
- (2) However, churches' criteria for identifying nominal Christians and differentiating them from true Christians are unclear, a fact attributable to their deficient understanding of the Christian faith and its implications for Christian lifestyle.
- (3) The pastoral leadership may be to blame for, among other things, not preaching the biblical gospel clearly, not doing appropriate evangelism,

not following up those who convert to Christ and not being role models in their lifestyle.

- (4) Deficiency in the communication of the biblical gospel can be attributed to church leaders' degree of understanding of the biblical gospel, the level of their spiritual maturity, the effectiveness of their training in bible schools and theological seminaries, the focus on doctrines of their church denominations rather than on biblical truths and lack of personal initiative attributable to the hierarchical structure of the church government in most of the local churches.
- (5) Few pastors and church leaders, however, are looking for ways to confront nominal Christianity through active evangelism and the screening of candidates for water baptism.

## **6.4 Contribution to the field of practical theology**

The findings of the understanding of Christian nominalism in Bunia church memberships can be a contribution both to the church and to the field of practical theology in the following ways.

### **6.4.1 The Bunia churches**

The findings suggest that the failure of the pastoral leadership is one of the catalysts of a nominal Christian faith in the churches researched. While churches are mushrooming everywhere and representing a variety of denominations (ECC or RERC), the observable nominalism in church membership suggests a leadership dearth. This could be redressed by doing the following:

- (1) Churches should ensure that evangelism is done not only outside the church but also inside it, and that it is done by every believer, not just the pastor and those in the pastoral leadership.
- (2) The preaching and the teaching of the gospel should be carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit. More attention needs to be given to aspects of the proclamation of the Gospel that are overlooked or ignored. These are: God's sovereign rule, his holy character and just wrath against sin; man's rebellion against God and its consequences; the necessity of repentance from sin and faith in Jesus for salvation; holiness of life as the evidence of being a true Christian.
- (3) Pastors should take their oversight of local churches as a divine calling. The pastoral leadership should not be a family or commercial business. Pastors need to exercise serious pastoral oversight of the flock to avoid filling the church with unconverted members. They will do this by giving priority to the ministry of God's word and to prayer. Theirs is also the task of protecting the flock from infiltration by false teachers. Theirs is also the duty of seeking the lost within church memberships as well as outside the church and of modelling a Christian lifestyle in church members.
- (4) The training of pastors in Bible schools and theological seminaries should seriously be revisited with nominalism as an actual focus.

#### **6.4.2 Practical theology**

- (1) The study into "Christian nominalism in church membership: A case study of the church in the town of Bunia in the Democratic Republic of Congo" makes a significant contribution in the area of practical theology by redefining the concept of nominalism.
- (2) Christian nominalism in church membership can be the result of an inadequate conception of the church by both church leaders and

members. Their knowledge of and thinking around what the church is inevitably shape their behaviour toward the exclusive nature of biblical church membership.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **SURVEY: CHRISTIAN NOMINALISM**

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this brief survey, the results of which will be used for the doctoral dissertation of Enosh Anguandia. The dissertation investigates the understanding of Christian nominalism in church membership in the town of Bunia by pastors and church members and the main challenges associated with this phenomenon. It targets all the ECC church denominations as well as the RERC churches. All information you provide will be treated confidentially.

Thank you in advance for your contribution!!

#### **Questions to pastors and church elders**

1. Your age?
2. Your educational level?
3. Your church denomination?
4. The name of the local church?
5. The name of the location where your church is planted?
6. When was your church planted in this location?
7. How many registered members?
8. What is the average Sunday service attendance?
9. What is your responsibility in this local church?
10. Have you been saved?
11. How do you know this?
12. What is a Christian?



13. How do you recognise true Christians?
14. Are there church members who are not true Christians?
15. How would you recognise them?
16. Why do nominal Christians exist in your church membership?
17. What could the church do to confront such church members?

**Questions to local church members and university students**

1. Your age?
2. Gender?
3. The name of your church?
4. Since when are you a member of this local church?
5. Have you been saved?
6. How do you know for sure?
7. Are there members of your local church who are not saved?
8. How do you recognise them?
9. What could your local church do to confront such church members?

## APPENDIX 2

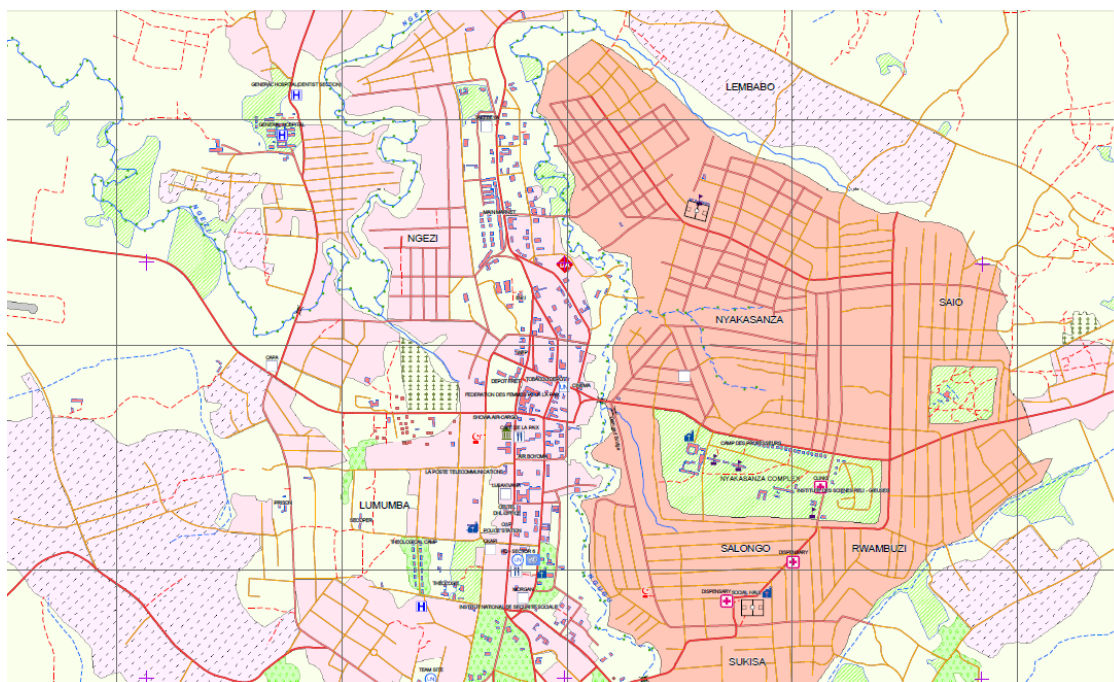
### LIST OF CHURCHES RESEARCHED

Church name	Location	Year planted	Denomination
Eglise locale Sukisa	Quartier Sukisa	1942	ECC, CECA 20
Eglise locale Ville	Quartier Lumumba	1970	ECC, CECA 20
Eglise locale Bankoko (S)	Quartier Bankoko	1971	ECC, CECA 20
Congregation Senga Nzambe	Quartier Lembabo	1973	ECC, CECA 20
Eglise locale Ngezi	Quartier Ngezi	1974	ECC, CECA 20
Eglise locale Kindia	Quartier Kindia	1974	ECC, CECA 20
Paroisse 8e CEPAC Bunia	Quartier Lumumba	1980	ECC, CEPAC 8
Paroisse Universitaire Shalom	Quartier Lumumba	1980	ECC, Aumônerie
Paroisse CBCA Ville	Quartier Lumumba	1985	ECC, CBCA 3
Eglise locale Yambi Yaya	Quartier Lumumba	1985	ECC, CECA 20
Eglise locale Brazza	Quartier Mudzipela	1986	ECC, CECA 20

Eglise locale Simbiliabo	Quartier Simbiliabo	1986	ECC, CECA 20
Chapelle CAC Gbanday	Quartier Bankoko	1990	ECC, CAC 11
Paroisse CECCA 16 Yambi	Quartier Lumumba	1992	ECC, CECCA 16
Paroisse CNCA Ville	Quartier Bankoko	1995	ECC, CNCA 21
Eglise locale Bankoko (L)	Quartier Bankoko	1999	ECC, CECA 20
Paroisse AOG Ville	Quartier Bankoko	2002	ECC, AOG 12
Eglise La Louange	Quartier Lumumba	2002	RERC
Eglise Christ pour les Nations (ECN)	Quartier Ngezi	2003	RERC
Assemblee Evangelique Koromodjo	Quartier Mudzipela	2004	ECC, CE 39
Eglise Corps de Christ (CC)	Quartier Lumumba	2005	RERC
Eglise de Victoire en Jesus- Christ (EVJC)	Quartier Lembabo	2005	RERC

## APPENDIX 3

### MAPS OF BUNIA, ITURI AND DR CONGO



UNITED NATIONS  
MONUC - DPKO  
GIS UNIT

For additional copies and information,  
contact: GIS Unit, MONUC HQ, Kinshasa

Date: 18 September 2003.

