

CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY OF BLESSING RITUALS IN AFRICAN  
TRADITIONAL RELIGION: TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY OF  
CHRISTIAN FAITH AMONG THE *META*' PEOPLE IN NORTH WEST  
CAMEROON.

BY

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## DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own original work and has not in its entirety or in part been submitted to an academic institution for degree purposes.

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2 December 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) is an institution that is unique to the *Meta'* and *Moghamo* speaking populations of the North West Region of Cameroon. Many rites of blessing are performed in this house. For instance, the blessing of a girl to be handed over in marriage, the blessing of a barren woman/wife in the family, the blessing of a sick or an unfortunate child, the blessing of disputing parties after they have been reconciled, and the blessing of an entire family after the annual family gathering.

The *Meta'* speaking community called the *mbàn*: “the most important house in the compound,” “the original church” before the advent of Christianity, “the house of peace, love, unity, harmony and reconciliation”.

Unfortunately, Pentecostals among the *Meta'* community have labelled the *mbàn* an evil place and a place where *Meta'* people worship gods or idols. They vehemently state that the *mbàn* and the elements used for blessings should be thrown away or discarded.

Data about the *mbàn* was gathered, through interviews and questionnaires, from different people among the *Meta'* clan. In this study, therefore, I have attempted through interviews and questionnaires administered to participants consisting of thirty (30) Christians made up of (10) clergy and twenty (20) church members), ten (10) family heads, five (5) chiefs and two (2) regents, five (5) teachers, five (5) university lecturers. This data was then used to propose a strategy for a contextualised use of the *mbàn*, its blessing rites and tangible elements, for local churches among *Meta'* Christians and others.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

*Meta'* is a language and a clan name. It is one of the clans of the *Widikum* tribe, others being *Moghamo*, *Ngie*, and *Oshie*. Eighty-five thousand (85,000) people living in the Mbengwi sub-division of Momo in the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon speak this language. A large number of these people are Christians, while Muslims, followers of African Traditional Religions and others form the rest of the population (CABTAL: 2011).

According to verbal tradition (gathered from participants during my masters' course work at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS)) the ancestors of the *Meta'* clan introduced the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) many years ago as an alternative to the usual house (about three metres square) used for holding family discussions, conducting blessings, and other rituals. Furniture was excluded so that many people could fit in the *mbàn*. In addition, the *mbàn* has a special spot containing pebbles where raffia palm wine or water is sprinkled to invoke the presence of ancestors who are perceived as mediators between the clan and God. The *wèd mbàn* (the family head) usually presides at all meetings held in the *mbàn*. It is interesting that *Meta'* Christians often associate some scriptural passages with the *mbàn*. These passages include Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; James 5:13-16.

The participants further mentioned that a little over ten years ago, some Pentecostals caused a controversy when they argued that the *mbàns*, spread all over the *Meta'* clan, were idol worship shrines. They also argued that all practices and rituals performed in the *mbàn* are evil and satanic. Hence their position that the *mbàn* and all the tangible elements used in

them be destroyed or thrown away. Elements found in these houses include the family chair, the *to' inəbi* (family cup), the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) where raffia palm wine or water is sprinkled, and the *fiɓig* (cam wood) which is rubbed on the family members concerned. Those who did not agree with this view had less influence.

## 1.2 Problem

There has been much controversy among the *Meta'* Christians regarding the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) and its memorial and blessing rituals. Should it be maintained or done away with? As such the main research question I investigated is: How can the Cameroonian *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) practices be used as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church? To respond to this question, the following subsidiary questions needed to be answered:

1. Historically, what do Cameroonians believe regarding the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals?
2. How do contemporary *Meta'* Christians perceive the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals?
3. What are some biblical teachings that are related to remembrance and blessing rituals?
4. How can the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) and its practices be used as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church?

## 1.3 Objective

I was raised in a family that did not have the *mbàn* because, I am told, my grandfather, who was a catechist, refused to have one. This background stirred me to establish all the information about the *mbàn* from various sections of the society, namely, the clergy, university lecturers, teachers,

traditional rulers, family heads, farmers, Christians from various denominations, and others. The aim of this study is to use the gathered information to present a suitable Bible-based position and relate it to my faith as a Christian living in North West Cameroon.

#### **1.4 Purpose**

The aim of this mini-thesis is to develop a contextual theology for the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) in North West Cameroon.

#### **1.5 Design and Methodology**

This mini-thesis is a culmination of previous coursework for a master's degree at the South African Theological Seminary (SATS). Since this research falls within the domain of practical theology, the model used is the Osmer model (Smith 2012:98-102). This model suited the perspective from which this research was done; it also provided a basis to explore and analyse both the empirical data about the *mbàn*; it also enabled the analysis of the available literature to establish how African theologians and others have suggested ways to address African traditions and practices from a Christian perspective; in addition, some selected practices in the Old Testament and the New Testament are considered. In this mini-thesis the focus is on analysing the *mbàn*. The four tasks the Osmer model uses to solve a problem are: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretative task, the normative task and the pragmatic task.

**The descriptive-empirical task:** As far as is known, nothing has been documented specifically about the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) and the rituals that are carried out in it. Dillon has written extensively about the *Meta'* clan but has not touched on the issue of the *mbàn*. He only speaks of its position in the palaces. Ajaga et al (2008:10-12) have written briefly about the rubbing with cam wood in the open and in the *mbàn* but do not expand on it. In preparation for this study, the subjects from where

information was got include: the clergy, university lecturers, teachers, traditional rulers, family heads, farmers, Christians from various denominations. These responses formed the core of the data about the *mbàn*.

**The interpretative task:** Existing views of African theologians and others about addressing African culture and practices were read and analysed. One of the practices from the Old Testament (memorial stones) and two from the New Testament (the Lords' Supper and prayer for the sick) are also considered.

**The normative task:** Since some *Meta'* Christians connected the *mbàn* to some Old Testament passages (Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4) and New Testament passages (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; James 5:13-16), a literature review of these passages is presented. Bible Commentaries and scholarly works were considered to assist in the correct interpretation of these passages.

**The pragmatic task:** Based on the empirical and literary data in the study, some practical options are provided on how the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) and its practices can be used as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church.

## 1.6 Research tools

Two sources were used to design research tools. Firstly, Leedy (1993) was used to formulate the research questionnaire used to gather data from the participants. Leedy (1993:185-220) describes data, which is a research tool, as being hidden in the minds, attitudes, feelings or reactions of people. He states that the way to get this data is through the questionnaire and the interview. The exacting task of the interview and questions is that it must communicate effectively and must be designed to fulfil the specific research objective.

Secondly, an article, *Conspectus* (2017: 64, 67), was used to formulate the questionnaire, taking into consideration those aspects that deal with the blessing rituals and whether a Christian should be involved in the issues of the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house).

The questionnaire was formulated in consultation with the South African Theological Seminary (SATS) Master of Theology (MTH) course facilitator. The questions for the interviews and for the questionnaires were the same, because they are all aimed at achieving the same purpose. Thirty structured recorded interviews conducted in the *Meta'* language were used, and later transcribed into English. Twenty-five questionnaires were also used to gather data about the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house). Nineteen questionnaires were given out personally and six were sent to participants that could not be reached. These questionnaires were sent through their friends or family members. These questionnaires were enclosed in an envelope and addressed to the identified participants. He collected them back personally but eight of the ten that were given to the Pentecostal leaders and members were not filled and returned.

## 1.7 Research group

Participants in the study include the following (Appendix B):

1. **The clergy:** Ten clergymen from various denominations within the *Meta'* community were interviewed. These denominations include the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, The Cameroon Baptist Convention, the Roman Catholic Church, the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon. Those interviewed are mother-tongue speakers of the *Meta'* language. The clergy have daily interactions with those involved in the deliberations that take place in the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house). Some of them have these houses in their compounds.
2. **The university lecturers:** Five were interviewed: two from the University of Bamenda, one from the University of Buea, and two

retired lecturers living in Mbengwi. These are people involved in culture and who hold post of responsibility in the *Meta'* Cultural and Development Association (MECUDA). They were chosen because of the interest in culture and in development.

- 3. The teachers:** Five teachers were interviewed: three from the primary and two from the secondary sectors of education. These schools are Presbyterian School Mbengwi, Government School Mbengwi, Government Bilingual High School Mbengwi and Government High School Tudig. These also are those that are interested in culture and some of them hold posts of responsibility in their village councils.
- 4. Traditional rulers:** Five chiefs and two regents were interviewed. These chiefs are the chief of Mbengwi, the chief of Kai, the chief of Barakwe, the chief of Bessi-Tibatoh and the chief of Nyen. The two regents are the regent of Wumnembug and the regent of Njinibi. These are the more elderly chiefs of the land and have mastery on the functioning of the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house). Many of the others are young and do not know much about the functioning of this house and others are newly enthroned.
- 5. Family heads:** Ten family heads were interviewed: nine in Mbengwi and the neighbouring villages and one in Benakuma. These are those who are very active in the deliberations in the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house).
- 6. Christians from various denominations:** Twenty of these were interviewed or given questionnaires. Five Christians from the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon were interviewed and ten given questionnaires, as has been addressed earlier. Christians from the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Cameroon Baptist Convention (classified as Protestants in North West Cameroon, a classification which is used throughout this study) were given five questionnaires each as some of them are amongst those addressed above.

## **1.8 Research ethics**

Leedy (1993:185-220) and Mouton (2001: 98-110) describe research ethics in the following ways: preparing a good questionnaire, selection of those that will be sampled for interviews, calling or sending appeal letters to the respondents ahead of time, follow-up letters or reminders before interview or due dates, sending postage return envelopes, the attitude during interviews, keeping track of dates and many more. They elaborate the following ethical issues, among others, that must be taken into consideration before a questionnaire could be drawn up and a structured interview conducted: pre-testing of the questionnaire; clear language with no ambiguous or vague terms; no use of double-barrelled questions; the questions must be sequential; no use of negatively phrased questions; the questionnaire must not be long; the situation of the respondent must be taken into consideration. The SATS (2017) document "Introduction to your study" was also very useful in elaborating the research methodology, preparing the questionnaire for empirical studies and the actual writing process. There was also one Skype conversation with the facilitator concerning the way forward for the research which included the preparation of a questionnaire. The Skype conversation was on Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 at 2.30 pm.

Before any respondents were interviewed or given a questionnaire, they were called by phone or contacted directly to make a rendezvous. Their participation in the research work was secured after the nature of the research and its implication for the *Meta'* people was explained to each of them.

## **1.9 Data analysis and interpretation**

Mouton (2001: 98-110) gives a very excellent description of how research can be analysed using analytical tools such as tables, pie-charts, bar-charts, diagrams and many others. The aim is to understand the various

elements that make up the data, to find the relationships that exist between the concepts, the constructs or variables as well as to see whether there are patterns or trends to be identified, isolated, or established. He enumerates pitfalls to avoid when doing empirical research. These include: interviewer bias, the research selectivity effect, researcher distortion, the placebo effect, the Hawthorne effect, the research expectancy effect, non-response, refusal to participate, social desirability effects, evaluation apprehension and demand characteristics (Mouton 2001: 125-126). Following Mouton's recommendations, data was collected from recorded and transcribed structured interviews and from questionnaires. What each respondent said about a particular issue was examined in detail. and then analysed and synthesised to come to a common interpretation of the matter at stake.

### **1.10 Hypothesis**

This study is carried out on the assumption that the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) is a house in which all family members, Christians and non-Christians, gather to discuss family matters and bless family members. It is hypothesised since *Meta'* Christians associate the *mbàn* with some Bible passages. Therefore, the *mbàn* and practices performed in it may be contextualised to assist local churches.

### **1.11 Definition of terms**

1. **Əbrəbəd:**This word means peace and blessing, depending on the context in which it is used.
2. **Əfù'ù:**This word means good luck. This is used when the family head or an elderly person is wishing the younger one well or wishing him good luck in life.



3. **Əghem:** This is the spot in the *mbàn* where pebbles are placed. The flat stone used to cover the pebbles and used to mix cam wood is found there. It is also a spot where raffia palm wine or water is sprinkled to call on God and the ancestors. Blessings are performed on this spot.
4. **Əzwiiri əchwī:** This word means “cooling of the sun”. This is the first food and drink that is given to guests when they first arrive for a ceremony. This is to cool them down from their journey. The main meal and drink will be provided later.
5. **Fibig:** This is cam wood (a small shrubby African tree with hard wood used as a dyewood yielding a red dye). This wood is harvested and dried. Then it is pounded into a fine powder and is preserved to rub on people as a sign of peace, blessing and good luck.
6. **Gywi əbaŋ ifě:** “Goat with red face.” This is a young she-goat that is given to the grand-parents of one’s mother. When the goat is taken to them, they rub its face and that of the person bringing it with cam wood. This is a sign of blessing. While this is being done, they make some incantations wishing the family well. They give some of the cam wood to the one who brought the goat to go, mix and rub other children.
7. **ƚ tari bəɗ:** This expression means to provide common food for an occasion or for a ceremony. This is the expression that is used for the Lord’s Supper.
8. **ƚbiiri:** This word means “ask”. This is the first money that is given by the suitor to the prospective in-laws. The rest of the bride-price is paid later. This sum ranges between 10,000 and 25,000 CFA.
9. **ƚgən:** This is the bride or a newly married woman.

- 10. *fsi zεŋ*:** “Clean places”. This expression refers to good luck and the wish that one achieves his or her desires.
- 11. *fti ibig*:** This is the flat stone next to the *εghəm* on which cam wood is mixed with water. It is also used to cover the pebbles in the *εghəm*.
- 12. *ɪzin mino'*:** Literary, this is “cork of wine”. This wine is served to the prospective in-laws during the engagement discussion of a young lady. Only the prospective father in-laws may open it. Once opened, that wine is poured into the cup, the bride-to-be drinks a bit of it and takes to rest of the wine along with the cork to the prospective in-law who drinks the wine and sends the cup and the cork back with some money. This is the same as “ask”.
- 13. *Juju*:** This is not a *Meta'* word. It is from Pidgin English, a language of wide communication in Cameroon. It means “masquerade”.
- 14. *Mbàn*:** This is the *Meta'* family meeting house. It is a house in which all the family members assemble when they want to discuss important matters.
- 15. *Mbàn Dwiè*:** Family house of God. This is the *Meta'* term for Temple.
- 16. *Meta'*:** This is the name of the clan as well as the language of the people.
- 17. *Ndòn*:** This means ill-luck or a curse.
- 18. *Nəb bən məyi*:** The *Meta'* family meeting house is sometimes called the “House of the girl children / daughters” because young women are handed over to enter into marriage in this house. When the condition of the house deteriorates only sons in-law may repair it.

**19. *Dwiè*:** God, the creator of the universe.

**20. *Dwièkɔ'*:** God Almighty, the One that is high up.

**21. *Wèd fibig*:** This is the person that is responsible for rubbing members of the family meeting house with cam wood.

**22. *Wèd mbàn*:** The family head. He is responsible for the welfare of the family and for seeing to it that the activities that are carried out in the family are well done.

## **1.12 Chapter outlines**

### Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the background, problem statement, objectives and hypothesis of the study and the research methodology.

Chapter 2: An historical survey of what Cameroonians believe regarding the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals.

This chapter presents the origin of the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house), the people involved in the house and the tools they use in the blessing rituals.

Chapter 3: Views on how contemporary *Meta'* Christians perceive the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals.

This chapter describes how Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Baptists regard the *mbàn*.

Chapter 4: A brief discussion of Bible passages some *Meta'* Christians associate with remembrance and blessing rituals performed in the *mbàn*.

*The Meta'* Christians often quoted some scriptural passages to support the *mbàn*. The passages are from Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; James 5:13-16. A discussion of these passages is presented.

Chapter 5: A strategy for using the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) practices as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church.

Practical options that could be used as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church are presented.

Chapter 6: Summary, conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter summarises the study, and presents conclusions and recommendations for further study.

## Chapter 2

### An historical survey of what Cameroonians believe regarding the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the historical background of the *mbàn* gathered from different participants from the *Meta'* clan (see Appendix B). It will cover how the *mbàn* is created, those who function in it and the blessing rituals that are associated with it.

#### 2.2 The *mbàn* (the family meeting house) in the *Meta'* clan.

According to the participants (see Appendix B and C), the *mbàn* is a single-room house found in a strategic location in the yard of most families to enable easy access for everyone. Sometimes other rooms might be attached to it. Members of the *Meta'* clan usually call it “a family meeting house”. It is also a house where many rituals in the *Meta'* culture are performed. Except for family heads who are buried in compounds determined by senior clan members, Dillon (1985:3) also indicates that in the palaces, past chiefs were buried in the *mbàn*.



Figure 1: The *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) of the palace at Njinibi

According to the participants (see Appendix C: 12), this single-room family meeting house has been given many attributes. For example, some people regard it as “the most important house in any compound” because all family matters are discussed in this house. Others refer to it as a “house of peace and reconciliation,” because disputes are discussed here in order to promote reconciliation and peace among family members. Others see the house as “a house where family activities which need prayers, peace, blessings and the award of titles are carried out”. Consequently, the *mbàn* is not limited to holding family meetings and prayers but a place where peace and reconciliation are advocated; and a place where traditional titles are awarded.

The participants (see Appendix C:12) acknowledge that these titles are only awarded in the palace *mbàn* when someone has achieved something great for the village. Usually such a title was awarded after the killing of a leopard or tiger, the bringing home of a human head during inter-tribal wars or the bringing in of spoils after the war. At the present time, when there are no inter-tribal wars, people are rewarded for developmental projects carried out for the wellbeing of the entire village.

### **2.2.1 The origin of the *mbàn***

I have observed that the *mbàn* is only found among the closely related clans, namely the *Meta'* and the *Moghamo*. Even if the participants from both clans (see Appendix C: 2) were unable to explain the exact origin of the *mbàn*, they associated the origin of the *mbàn* with their ancestors who established a culture of holding family occasions and meetings in it, centuries ago.

Two oral stories surfaced from the participants about the origin of the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 2). One mentions that various clans settled at Tadkon in Gukah in *Moghamo* after a sojourn from *Widikum*. These clans also possessed the following valuable articles found in the *mbàn*: *əghəm*, *fibig* and *to' inəbi* (the pebbles, the cam wood, and the family cup). Sometime later these clans separated and went in different directions. The other oral

story indicates that the ancestors left *Widikum* and settled in *Tadkon* and finally came to *Zang-Mbeng* in the present day *Meta'* land. As they settled in the land, they thought it wise to do something to foster family unity. As such they conceptualised the idea of the *mbàn*. Afterwards, the *mbàn* spread all over the area where the *Meta'* clan settled.

## **2.2.2 Elements used in the *mbàn* to blessing family members.**

This sub-section is a discussion of elements found in the *mbàn* and how they are used to effect blessings. These elements are the spot where the pebbles are placed, the cam wood, and the cup.

### **2.2.2.1 The *əghəm* (the place with pebbles)**

According to the participants (see Appendix C:4), the most important spot in the *mbàn* is the place with pebbles, commonly called "*əghəm*". Most of the blessing rites and other rituals are performed on this spot.

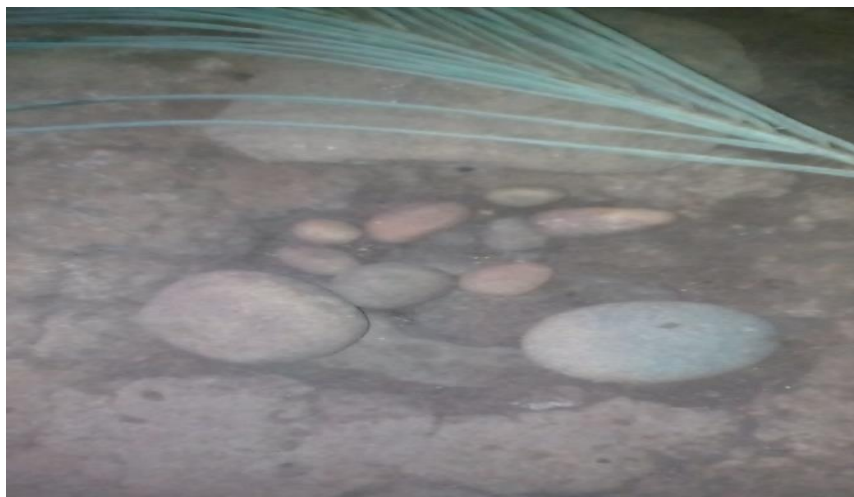


Figure 2: The *əghəm* (place with pebbles)

Dillon (1985:3) calls the *əghəm* "the libation hole". It is not just a hole: it is a hole with pebbles in it. These pebbles are taken from a river or a stream. (We will talk about the concept of libation later). In addition, raffia palm wine

or the water used during a family ritual is kept next to this hole. The *wèd mbàn* (the family head) usually sits next to the *əghəm* which is quite close to the door. Although it cannot be proven, participants explain that some *Meta'* people believe that ancestors come and drink the wine sprinkled into the *əghəm*. According to the participants, the spirits of the ancestors or the god of their ancestors are said to live in this hole or are present when raffia palm wine or water is sprinkled on the *əghəm*.

The participants (see Appendix C: 4) further mention that the pebbles in the hole represent departed family heads (*bêd mbàn*). *Bêd mbàn* means “keepers of the family meeting house”. Usually *wèd mbàn* (the family head) presides over the family meeting house. When he dies, a pebble is added to the existing stock to associate and count him among the family ancestors. This implies that the number of pebbles represent the number of deceased *bêd mbàn* (family heads). As the family expands, another *mbàn* will be built, and the total number of pebbles from the first *mbàn*, called the mother *mbàn*, is placed on the new *əghəm*. The *wèd mbàn* from the mother *mbàn* always presides over the ceremony.

#### 2.2.2.2 The *to' inəbi* (family cup)



Figure 3: An example of the *to' inəbi* (family cup)



Another important element used in the *mbàn* is *to' inəbi* (the family cup). According to the participants (see Appendix C: 6), the *wəd mbàn* (family head) uses this cup to sprinkle raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm*, and to sprinkle raffia palm wine or water on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone), used to mix cam wood before it is rubbed on family members. The *wəd mbàn* gives raffia palm wine or water from *to' inəbi* for family members to drink. This is a sign of blessing and of fellowship.

### 2.2.2.3 The *fibig* (cam wood)



Figure 4: The pounded or ground cam wood that has been mixed with water and dried in preparation for use

According to the participants (see Appendix C: 8) members of the *Meta'* clan pound or grind cam wood tree to produce a powder called *fibig*. This powder is mixed with water and dried and preserved for later use. When it is to be used, a piece of this dry powder is cut and put on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone); some water is sprinkled on it to make it into a paste. The *wəd mbàn*, in the presence of *wəd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood), applies the paste on the forehead; chest or legs of the family members a sign of blessing. In an instance where there is no *iti ibig* (cam wood stone), a fresh plantain leaf is used for that purpose. It is spread on the ground and the cam wood is mixed on it.

#### 2.2.2.4 The *iti ibig* (cam wood stone)

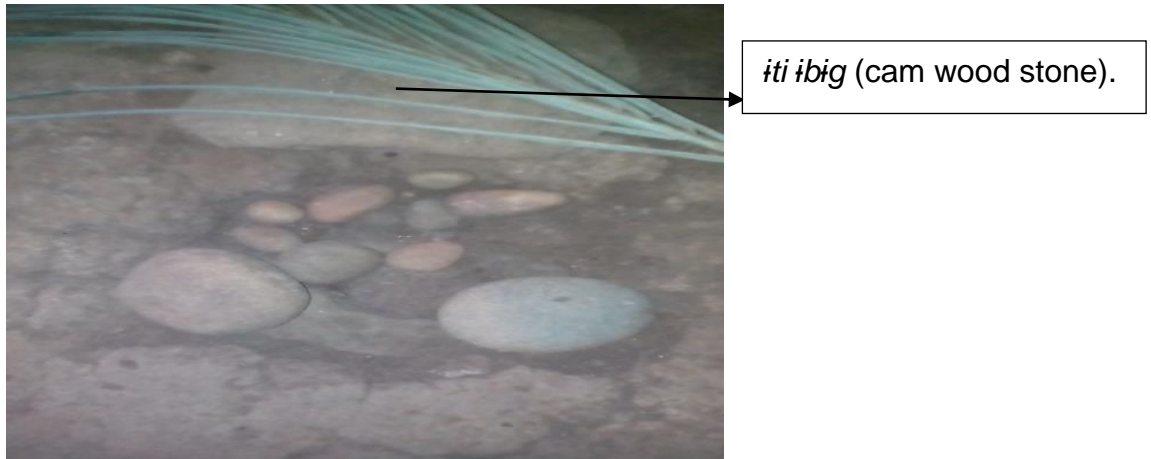


Figure 5: *iti ibig* (cam wood stone). This is the flat stone by the *əghəm* on which camwood is mixed

According to the participants (Appendix B) the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) is used to cover the *əghəm* (place with pebbles). It is also used to mix the *fi big* on it before it is applying or rubbing on the people's foreheads, chests or legs during the blessing ceremony. It is also used to preserve the *əghəm* from dirt and from the pebbles being picked out by children.

### 2.3 How a *mbàn* is built

The establishment of the original (mother) *mbàn* is addressed above. This section focuses on the establishment of a new *mbàn*. According to the participants (see Appendix C: 2) the *mbàn* is built in stages. The first stage is that the person who intends to establish a new *mbàn* communicates the intention to the *wəd mbàn* of the original (mother) *mbàn*. Once the permission is granted, the *wəd mbàn* of the original (mother) *mbàn* sets out requirements which are: preparing a goat and a chicken, cooking food, and providing drinks and money to give to the important personalities that will attend the ceremony. The date of the ceremony would then be fixed. The initiator would then build the new *mbàn*, and obtain a *to' inəbi* (family cup) and some pebbles from the river. During the transfer ceremony, the *wəd mbàn* of the mother *mbàn* performs three rituals. First, he holds the old *to'*

*inəbi* with his right hand and places the new *to' inəbi* upon it. Second, he places the new pebbles in the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) in the old *mbàn*. Third, as he is doing all the above, he makes some incantations showing and telling the ancestors that the family is growing larger and larger and this warrants the establishment of another *mbàn*. Therefore, the ceremonies that are being performed in this family meeting house will henceforth be performed there also. He adds one pebble from the original (mother) *mbàn* to those that were brought by the person that intends to establish the new *mbàn*. There is no need for the new family to come to the original (mother) *mbàn* for such rites.

Thereafter, the ceremony proceeds to the new *mbàn* where the pebbles are put in place and the *to' inəbi* is handed to the new family head. The entire process is then followed by prayers and feasting. This explains why, when raffia palm wine or water is being sprinkled into the *əghəm*, the names of the ancestors that the current family head can recall are pronounced, such as, “the God of X, the God of Y, the God of Z ....” He calls their presence to assist in the deliberations and to tell God to answer the prayers of the people.

This *əghəm*, (place with pebbles) is generally described as “a place of remembrance”. As explained above, after the death of the family head, one other pebble from the stream is added to those that had been there, so as to remember him. This is how the forefathers are being remembered. When the family needs to discuss an important matter, they sprinkle raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm* and in this way invoke the spirits of the departed ancestors to come and listen to what they are saying, join with them and empower them for what they intend to do.

Members of the *Meta'* clan agreed (see Appendix C: 4) that the mere mention of *əghəm* indicates blessings and that the *wəd mbàn* intercedes or invokes the blessings of God upon members of the family from this spot. It is equally widely held that the spirits of the ancestors and God cooperate for the well-being of the family to grant the request of the *wəd mbàn*. It is further believed that sprinkling raffia palm wine or water on the *əghəm*

appeases the spirits of the ancestors. Such rituals bring peace to the family. Consequently, people believe that the invocation of God or the ancestors makes God and the ancestors hear their prayers and they expect some positive answers.

The next section looks at the people who are in charge of the *mbàn*, their functions, and how they are appointed.

## 2.4 People who function in the *mbàn*

Only two males officiate in the *mbàn*. These are the *wèd mbàn* (family head) and the *wèd fibig* (person who rubs cam wood).

### 2.4.1 The *wèd mbàn* (the family head)



Figure 6: A *wèd mbàn* (family head) holding the *to' inəbi* (the family cup)

According to the participants (see Appendix C: 3) the key person in charge of the *mbàn* is the *wèd mbàn*, which translates “the family head”. Usually this person is a male.

The *wèd mbàn* holds the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and sprinkles raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles), and performs most

of the blessings in the *mbàn*. This role has made some people Christianise this man as “the family priest”. He is usually chosen by his father before the father passes on. The father communicates this to his brothers, but in a case where he is suspicious of his brothers, he passes the role to a very close friend. The new *wèd mbàn* is chosen from amongst brothers of the same father. In instances where there is no male successor to the *wèd mbàn*, a male from among his brothers’ children will be appointed to succeed him. Unfortunately, the new successor cannot begin to function until some rituals are performed. An elderly male of the family assumes this duty until proper rituals are performed. The prospective *wèd mbàn* should be eloquent and intelligent; any dishonest person cannot be the family head. He must be simple and easy going; he must be sociable with members of his family and even with those outside the family circle. He must be strong and capable of handling and controlling a family; he must prove that he is responsible. No one without a family can be given a *mbàn*.

#### 2.4.2 The *wèd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood)



Figure 7: The *wèd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood) rubbing *fibig* (cam wood) on the chest of some children

The second person in charge of the *mbàn* is the *wèd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood). Participants (see Appendix C: 8) mention that not all families have the *wèd fibig*. In some families the *wèd mbàn* (family head) handles all the affairs of the family, including rubbing people with cam wood

(*fibig*) on the forehead, chest and legs. The *wèd fibig* assists the *wèd mbàn* and his position differs from family to family. In instances of a man having many wives, he may prefer to make one the family head and the other the assistant. The *wèd fibig* must have the same qualities as the family head: he must be honest, truthful, eloquent, and sociable to members of the family and to those outside. He must be simple, sensible and have good morals. Once a person has been chosen and designated this role, it becomes hereditary in his family line. Where there is no male successor, a brother or a brother's son takes over. In instances where a man has only one wife but decides to distribute the roles to the children of this one wife, one becomes the *wèd mbàn* and the other the *wèd fibig*. This allocation of responsibilities is essential since the rituals related to the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and that of the rubbing of the *fibig* (cam wood) accompany each other, particularly in the blessing of family members. The *wèd fibig* cannot function in the absence of the *wèd mbàn* unless authorised to do so. Only the *wèd mbàn* can perform both functions. As discussed above, pounded or un-pounded *fibig* (cam wood) is found in every *mbàn*. The *wèd fibig* takes the ground powder, puts it on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone), always used to cover the *əghəm* (place with pebbles), and sprinkles some water on it and rubs the one concerned on the forehead, chest or legs depending on the part of the body where the people want it done. Rubbing the *fibig* (cam wood) on a person is a sign that the person is blessed. Those who notice cam wood on someone's body know that the person has been blessed.

## **2.5 The blessing ritual associated with *mbàn***

The participants (see Appendix C: 6) have also mentioned that there are some blessings associated with the *mbàn*. These are discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Handing over a daughter in marriage**

According to the participants (see Appendix C: 6), usually, when a girl child has grown up and is ready for marriage, the parents of the suitor, who is often absent, visit the girl's home to convey their intention to have the girl

as their son's wife. Should the son be part of the delegation, he has to remain quiet and just observe the proceedings taking place in the *mbàn*. The parents of the suitor bring food and drinks—usually ten litres of raffia palm wine corked in a special way with the raffia palm leaves. The host family usually serve the visitors with a meal called “*əzwiiŋ əchwɪ*” meaning “cool down”. After the meal, an interesting process will begin by the *wəd mbàn* (family head) asking the visitors why they have come. The visitors usually respond by saying, “We have come to uproot a plantain sucker from here and to plant it in our compound.” In response, the *wəd mbàn* will first uncork the wine the visitors brought and stretch the raffia leaves and place them next to the *əghəm* (place with pebbles). Second, he will then sprinkle some of the wine on the leaves and into the *əghəm*, pour some of it into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup), and give it to the girl to take a sip. If the girl agrees to marry the man, she will first respond by kneeling and taking the *to' inəbi* from the *wəd mbàn*. She will then take a sip and pass the rest of the wine to the prospective father-in-law to confirm that she is willing to be married into his family. Once she does that, there will be general applause from those present, particularly from the prospective in-laws because this is a sign to show that she has accepted to marry into their family. Such jubilation is followed by the prospective father-in-law drinking the remaining wine in the *to' inəbi* and returning the *to' inəbi* with the sum of money that is between ten thousand CFA and twenty-five thousand CFA. This sum of money is called *izin mino'* (cork of the wine) *oribiiri* (ask). In response, she will take the empty *to' inəbi* and the money and hand them to the *wəd mbàn*. After this ritual, the entire assembly will be served with the food that was brought by the suitor's parent and consume the remaining wine. At the end, the total bride wealth is determined, and the dates of payments agreed. The visitors will return several times to pay the bride-price and to give food as well as tokens to some of the family members of the bride-to-be.

On the day of the last payment, after a grand feasting ceremony involving both families have been held during the day, the daughter is taken away as the *igən* (bride). The blessing ceremony is held on that day, at about midnight. She is taken to the *mbàn* where her family members, particularly

the elderly, provide marriage counselling. After the counselling session, the *wəd mbàn* takes the *to' inəbi*, pours some raffia palm wine into it and gives it her to drink. Those present will pronounce a blessing on her as she drinks. After that the *wəd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood) sprinkles some water on the *fibig* (cam wood) placed on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) at the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles), and mixes it. He then rubs the mixture on her chest, hands and feet. This action symbolises blessings, child bearing and being light in her home. In some instances, she is anointed with palm oil and rubbed with the cam wood. Prayer always follows all these procedures in the *mbàn*. After prayers, she is presented with various gifts and handed to her husband's family who then take her that night to their home amidst joyous singing and dancing.

The role of the *mbàn* during marriage and its related blessings cause the *Meta'* people to call it "*nəb bən məyi*" meaning "the house of girls" or "the house of daughters". Hence, they are the only people to repair the *mbàn* when it needs to be repaired.

Arising from what the survey mentioned (see Appendix C:6), it is important to explain that no marriage can be discussed if the woman refuses to take the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) from the *wəd mbàn* (the family head) and hand it to the leader of the visiting team.

*Meta'* people believe in a woman's reproductive ability, hence the blessing and reproductive ability are pronounced in the *mbàn*. A barren wife must come back to the *mbàn* and another blessing ceremony will take place.

### **2.5.2 Blessing of a barren daughter**

Barrenness creates anxiety and stress among the bride's family. According to participants (see Appendix C:6), a barren wife is returned to her home and another ceremony to bless her will be held in the *mbàn* in the presence of the *wəd mbàn* (the family head), parents and a few family members. The *wəd mbàn* (the family head) will pour raffia palm wine into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and give it her to drink. While she drinks, the *wəd mbàn* will call



on the ancestors, one by one, to look at their married daughter who has come back because she is barren. He will request them to look at her and intercede to God on her behalf, so that she can bear children. After this the *wəd fībig* (the person who rubs cam wood) or the *wəd mbàn* (the family head) sprinkles some cam wood on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) at the *əghəm* (the place of pebbles). He sprinkles some water onto it, mixes it, and rubs her on the chest declaring that whatever has caused her to be barren should be removed. Prayer follows, and a pat is given on her back to close this ceremony. Two outcomes can be expected from this ceremony, namely, she either conceive and bears children, or she continues to be barren. In the case of the latter, the family will have to enquire from traditional healers since this ceremony cannot be repeated. In the event of the former, the family will perceive it as an answer from God, and will thank the ancestors for interceding on behalf of their daughter.

### **2.5.3 Blessing of children born to daughters of the compound**

Participants (see Appendix C: 6) mention that in the case of serious illness or misfortune befalling one or many children, the mothers bring the children or the child to the family compound from which they originate. The child or children will be taken to the *mbàn*. When they are in the *mbàn*, the *wəd mbàn* perform some rituals. First, he pours raffia palm wine or water into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup). Next, he sprinkles some into the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) calling on the ancestors and asking for health or for blessings on the children or on the child. Thirdly, he pours some of the raffia palm wine or water into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and gives it to the child to drink. If there is more than one child, they will drink according to their ages. Prayer asking God to answer their prayers for the children and even for those that are far off and facing the same or similar challenges always precedes this ritual. The mother may drink first before the children. Lastly, he tells them that they should have *əfù'ù* meaning “good luck” and that any stumbling block on their way should be removed.

Participants further mention an additional process (see Appendix C: 8); they mention that the *wəd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood) pinches a little bit of the dried *fibig* (cam wood), spreads it on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) by the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) and sprinkles water on the *fibig* (cam wood). When he has mixed this up, he rubs the children or the child on the forehead or on the chest. As he does this he pronounces the following blessings: that their faces should shine like the cam wood and that any obstacle on their way should be removed; if they hit their feet against a stone, the stone should be broken and not the feet; if someone looks at them with evil intentions, the man should be blinded; if anyone wants to give them something, they should do so generously. Many other such blessings and strong words are showered on the children. At the end of the blessings, they will give some of the *fibig* (cam wood) to the mother to go and rub the other children back at home.

#### **2.5.4 Blessing of people after resolving a dispute**

The *mbàn* is also a place to resolve family and village feuds (see Appendix C: 6). No harsh words are ever used in the *mbàn*. No one fights in the *mbàn*: this is strictly prohibited. A person who fights or abuses someone in the *mbàn* is fined heavily (see Appendix C: 12). The *mbàn* is a place of safety and security for everyone; it is a place where peace is established and where blessings are sought: as such some persons have called it “a holy place” (see Appendix C: 11).

Participants (see Appendix C:11) mention that after the matter has been resolved, all the parties will be made to drink from the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) to show that everything is over and that anyone who talks again about the matter or restarts the quarrel or the fight, will meet his doom. While they drink, the *wəd mbàn* (the family head) says something like, “I do not know why brothers should be quarrelling or fighting. As we have discussed here in the presence of the spirits of our ancestors, I know that whatever evil must have come upon us to divide us must disappear. What we want now

is 'əbɔrəbɔd, əbɔrəbɔd, əbɔrəbɔd', meaning 'peace, peace, peace'. Anybody who quarrels again will carry *ndòn* (a curse or ill-luck). We do not want anyone to have *ndòn*." Each person then greets the other, and they leave.

### 2.5.5 Blessing of family members

Some *Meta'* families hold an annual family gathering (see Appendix C: 6) where the welfare of the entire family is addressed. On the day of departure, everyone assembles in the *mbàn* where family members drink from the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and are rubbed with *fibig* (cam wood). After that, some blessings are pronounced. Two such blessings are firstly, "əfù'ù, əfù'ù. *tsi zɛŋ, mbə wo kəb ighi ye'e na' mba*" which translates "good luck, good luck. Your faces should be bright; you look for things and bring our own". The second blessing says: "əbɔrəbɔd, əbɔrəbɔd. *Mbə mi kəb ighi, mbə zə,*" which translates "peace, peace" or "blessing, blessing. If you look for anything, you should find it." Many more such blessings could be given. All the family members will then return to their respective places of residence and return the next year to observe the same ceremony.

## 2.6 Summary

The *mbàn* originated centuries ago before the various clans (the *Meta'* and the *Moghamo*) settled in current western Cameroon. This house is used to bless and solemnise marriages, settle family and clan disputes, bless children born in the compound, bless daughters who are unable to bear children and bless family members during the annual family gathering before they return to their respective places.

## Chapter 3

### Views on how contemporary *Meta'* Christians perceive the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals

#### 3.1 Introduction

The Christian population among the *Meta'* clan consists of Roman Catholics, Pentecostals (the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon) and Protestants (the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Cameroon Baptist Convention). The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon is the largest denomination, and the Cameroon Baptist Convention is second (CABTAL, 2010:11). These two denominations comprise about ninety percent of the Christians in the *Meta'* clan. Catholics comprise about five percent, while Pentecostals comprise about two percent (CABTAL, 2010:11). The remainder consists of Muslims (about one percent) and adherents of African Traditional Religions (about two percent).

Over the years, there has been much controversy, among the *Meta'* clan, about the institution and functionality of the *mbàn*. This controversy occurred in two phases. First, it involved Christians and non-Christians. Second, the controversy now involves Christians from three different backgrounds, namely, Catholics, Protestants (Presbyterians and Baptists) and Pentecostals (the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon). Views from these Christians range from saying that the *mbàn* and all the rituals should be maintained to saying they should be abolished because they are pagan practices. My view considers the contextualisation of the entire *mbàn* and its related rituals.

What follows will be an examination of the various views held by the various Christian traditions.

### 3.2 The Pentecostal perspective

Most of the non-Pentecostal participants in the research (see Appendix C: 12) insist that, generally, the Pentecostals do not support anything related to tradition and/or culture. They consider that Pentecostals do not want to associate with those who wish to perform traditional practices. This view was confirmed during my interview process.

Of the five Pentecostal leaders from the Full Gospel Mission and the Apostolic Church of Cameroon requested to participate in the study, three of them vehemently stated their unwillingness to be part of the survey if it had anything to do with tradition or culture. Of the ten other Pentecostal Christians invited to participate in the study, eight did not respond to the questionnaires mailed or given to them. Two of them responded (see Appendix C: 12). The two Pentecostal leaders and the three Pentecostal Christians from these churches said that the *mbàn* is a house for evil rituals and for the worship of false gods. They see the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) as the god the *Meta'* people worship. They see the sprinkling of raffia palm wine or water and the mixing and rubbing of people with cam wood as sacrifice. One of the Pentecostal leaders and two Pentecostal Christians argued that there is no way sacrifices could be made where there is no god (see Appendix C: 12). When asked about the names of the *Meta'* gods, one of the Pentecostal leaders stated that only the older generation knew the names of the *Meta'* gods (see Appendix C: 12). In addition, one Pentecostal leader and one Pentecostal Christian cited part lyrics of a *Meta'* Christian song: "...the gods of the mountains are no gods, the gods of the *əghəm* are no gods, and the gods of the rivers are no gods ...". They insist that Christians cannot be singing like that when *Meta'* gods do not exist (see Appendix C: 12).

I asked the Pentecostal leader and the Pentecostal Christian; who insist that the *Meta'* people worship the gods of the mountains, the gods of the *əghəm* and the gods of the rivers, the specific spots on the hills or in the rivers where these gods are worshipped, and the items used for the worship. Surprisingly, they were unable to point the specific spots on the

hills or in the rivers where the *Meta'* clan worship these gods, and the items that are used for the worship (see Appendix C: 12). They could not even identify the presiding priest(s), when asked to do so (see Appendix C: 12). When I asked one Pentecostal leader what he thought about the *əghəm*, he responded that the *əghəm* is a god and should be destroyed (see Appendix C: 12). The other Pentecostal leader and the two Pentecostal Christians call it an idol and say that people believe in it unconsciously (see Appendix C: 10). One Pentecostal Christian, an elder in one of the Pentecostal churches, accepted that the *əghəm* is not a god. When I asked one of the Pentecostal leaders about the *mbàn*, he emphasised that the *mbàn* is a bad place because libations are poured in it (see Appendix C: 12). When asked about the negative aspects of libation, he said it is a non-Christian practice (see Appendix C: 12). He argued that Christ had made the final sacrifice; so there is no need for another sacrifice (see Appendix C: 12). This particular clergyman insists that libation is a form of sacrifice and should be discouraged (see Appendix C: 12). Regarding the words uttered during the libation, he said the words do not matter: someone could be speaking to the devil and make people believe that he is talking to God (see Appendix C: 12). It is observed that the two Pentecostal leaders and three Pentecostal Christians consider the activities that take place in the *mbàn* to be idolatrous (see Appendix C: 12). They think that this place should be destroyed; regardless of the belief of some families that the *əghəm* makes them prosper (see Appendix C: 6).

With regards to *to' inəbi* (family cup), two of the Pentecostal Christians accepted that this cup is used for blessings, but they also argue that it is used for cursing (see Appendix C: 7). These two Pentecostal Christians insisted that when some family heads are in need, they use the *to' inəbi* to sprinkle wine or water into the *əghəm* and invoke curses on family members so that they can be sick and as a result bring them money or food (see Appendix C: 7). One of the Pentecostal leaders intimated that this cup has been dedicated to the gods and everything associated with it is evil (see Appendix C: 7). He further insisted that African tradition and Christianity are two opposite practices (see Appendix C: 12). According to

the two Pentecostal leaders and the three Pentecostal Christians, the *mbàn* should be destroyed and in its place, people can use ordinary parlours for meetings and for prayers and the idea of *to' inəbi* and the *əghəm* should be discarded (see Appendix C: 12). One of the Pentecostal leaders and one Pentecostal Christian suggested that if the *mbàn* is the parlour of a house, then the Christian can be conveniently made the *wəd mbàn* (the family head) because he will use scripture and not a cup to guide and direct the people (see Appendix C: 12).

According to many of the non-Pentecostals in the study, that is the Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Baptists, some Pentecostals exhibit double standards. They pretend to be very pious when they are among other Pentecostals, but act differently outside Pentecostal circles. According to the participants (see Appendix C: 12), some have been known to ask other family members to perform rituals on their behalf (see Appendix C: 12). That is why some of these non-Pentecostals call them “hypocrites”. To substantiate this appellation, one of the participants, a Protestant (see Appendix C: 12), recounts that he went to offer a sacrificial goat called *gywi əbanj ifě*, meaning “goat with a red face,” to his Pentecostal uncle. This goat is offered at one’s grandmother’s compound. The *Meta'* people believe that this goat is part of the bride wealth that was not paid and had to be given to one’s great grandfather, and in his absence, to his successor.

As my informant was approaching the compound, the goat escaped, and it was already getting dark. Unknown to my informant, the goat had rushed into the *mbàn* and gone to a far corner with a piece of rope on its neck. My informant was contemplating what to tell the uncle. When he reached the compound he found the uncle (who was the *wəd mbàn*) and his wife in the *mbàn*. The uncle asked him if the goat was his. He agreed it was his. So the uncle showed him the goat and asked him why he brought it. After explaining, the uncle mentioned that had his family not sent him to bring the goat, he would not have accepted it, since he is now a born-again Christian. After a brief discussion, he performed the usual blessing ritual by mixing *fi big* (cam wood) with water and rubbing the forehead of the goat and that of my informant. My informant was also made to drink from the *to' inəbi* (the

family cup) and was given some cam wood to take home and rub on his siblings. According to this informant, even though his uncle knew that he was doing something contrary to what his church teaches, he went ahead with performing the blessing rituals. My informant did not expect his uncle to receive the goat or worse still to rub *fibig* on the goat and on himself and to give him some to take home. My informant questions what his uncle as a professed born-again Christian should be doing with the *to' inəbi* and *fibig* (see Appendix C: 12).

The next to be examined is the Roman Catholic perspective and their reactions to the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals.

### **3.3 The Roman Catholic perspective**

I handed seven interview questions to seven Roman Catholic Christians and I personally interviewed two Roman Catholic priests. The responses of the two priests will be presented first while those of the seven Roman Catholic Christians will be presented last.

One of the priests maintains that the *mbàn* is still relevant (see Appendix C: 12). His view is that the family can still participate in obtaining blessings from the church and from the *mbàn* but emphasised that the blessings in the church supersedes all other blessings (see Appendix C: 12). Yet he admits that each religion has its merits and that some aspects of the African Traditional Religions are good and must be maintained (see Appendix C: 12). He describes the blessing of family members as not bad provided that it is done with good intentions. According to this clergyman, the *mbàn* is an important means of settling family disputes and uniting family members who do not know each other. A family reunion meeting in the *mbàn* prevents such members from marrying each other (see Appendix C: 12). Regarding the question of doing away with the *mbàn*, this priest believes that the *mbàn* unites the family and is a means of fostering peace amongst them (see Appendix C: 12). He also believes that the meetings held in the *mbàn* show a sense of belonging, but in the case where there is no peace, justice,



and blessings, the use of the *mbàn* should be discontinued (see Appendix C: 12).

The other priest suggested that the *Meta'* people should not discontinue the use of the *mbàn*, instead they should name it “family hall” (see Appendix C: 12) and the *əghəm* (the place of pebbles) be removed because the rituals performed in the *mbàn* appear fetish-like. This priest holds that no one has been able to give him a convincing explanation regarding the “stones” (pebbles) in the *əghəm* (see Appendix C: 12). According to him, some *Meta'* people compare the twelve stones that God commanded Joshua to pick out of River Jordan to those that are placed in the *əghəm* (see Appendix C: 12). He acknowledged that God asked Joshua to pick out twelve stones from River Jordan (see Appendix C: 12) and these stones represented the twelve tribes of Israel and were to remind the people of Israel of what God has done for them. When later generations asked about the significance of the stones, they were to be informed that these stones are a reminder of God’s miracle when Israel crossed the River Jordan (see Appendix C: 12). This explanation, which his grand-father and father advocated, does not convince the priest. He firmly believes that the *Meta'* people should do away with the *əghəm* in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 12).

The views of these Roman Catholic priests differ from those of the other Roman Catholic Christians whose views are presented here and who see nothing wrong with the *mbàn*.

One of the Roman Catholic Christians refers to the *mbàn* as a house where members of a specific family meet to discuss family problems good or bad (see Appendix C: 1). Another one refers to the *mbàn* as “a meeting and prayer house” which existed long ago before the coming of the missionaries to establish churches (see Appendix C: 1). All the other five participants concur that the *mbàn* is a house to meet and discuss family issues. All the seven Roman Catholic participants traced the *mbàn* to the forefathers, and observed that, to date, subsequent families have kept it existing (see Appendix C: 2). They further agree that *wəd mbàn* is chosen by his father before his death and that he is chosen from among the brothers of one man

(see Appendix C: 3), and must be a person of good character (see Appendix C: 3). On his death-bed, the *wèd mbàn* who has no son will choose his successor from amongst sons of his brothers (see Appendix C: 3). All the participants mentioned that the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) is the spot where the *wèd mbàn* sits to preside over rituals as he sprinkles raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm* invoking the blessings from God on the family or an individual (see Appendix C: 4). According to them, the *wèd mbàn* never sprinkles raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm* with the left hand. He either uses the right hand or he sprinkles it with both hands (see Appendix C: 4). The *wèd mbàn* also rubs people with cam wood (see Appendix C: 9). Six of the seven Roman Catholic participants in the study hold that a house without the *əghəm* cannot be called the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 5). One of the participants insists that any house in which the family meets for any type of deliberation can be called the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 5).

Regarding the *to' inəbi* (the family cup), all the participants mentioned that it is used to bless people (see Appendix C: 6). One of the participants mentioned that an elderly person acting on behalf of an absent *wèd mbàn* may use any other cup in exceptional circumstances (e.g., when someone is critically ill) (see Appendix C: 7). Six Roman Catholic participants, held that no other cup may be used since the *to' inəbi* has been set aside for that purpose (see Appendix C: 7). Regarding the *wèd fibig*, (the *wèd mbàn* assistant), six of the seven participants mentioned that he is selected from the children of one man and he should have the same characteristics as the *wèd mbàn* (see Appendix C: 8). They also agreed that this man rubs family members with cam wood as a sign of blessing (see Appendix C: 9). However, one participant holds that it is only the *wèd mbàn* who gives the wine and water as well as rubbing the people with cam wood (see Appendix C: 9). All the participants mentioned that the role of the *mbàn* is to settle family disputes; and is the place for rubbing daughters with cam wood before they enter marriage. Interestingly, one of the participants mentioned that the *mbàn* was the original church before the advent of Christianity (see Appendix C: 11). Regarding the appointment of a Christian as a *wèd mbàn*,

all the seven Roman Catholics unanimously said the *wèd mbàn* should be a Christian since the *wèd mbàn* stands for peace and justice, and that many of his people are Christians. They further opposed the view that the *mbàn* be dissolved (see Appendix C: 12).

Next, and last, in the discussion of the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals is a discussion of a Protestant (Presbyterian and Baptist) perspective of the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals.

### **3.4 The Presbyterian and Baptist perspective**

Most of the participants in the study were from the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the Cameroon Baptist Convention. These were thirty-six in number, including all the categories of the sample groups mentioned in chapter one. Thirty-one accepted to be interviewed while five responded to questionnaires. Of the thirty-six, thirty-one were Presbyterians and five were Baptists.

Both the Presbyterians and the Baptists show a common understanding of the *mbàn* and the rituals that are performed in it (see Appendix C: 1, 10, 11 and 12). They agreed that: (a) the *mbàn* was and is still very necessary for the holding of family gatherings, discussions, commemorations, and for performing rituals and blessings (see Appendix C: 1 and 10); (b) when anything happens in the family they gather in the *mbàn* and pray there; and (c) this house is used to solemnise traditional marriages (see Appendix C: 1 and 6).

One of the Presbyterians, took it further by referring to the *mbàn* as “the original church” that existed among the *Meta’* clan before the advent of Christianity (see Appendix C: 1). He calls it “a house of prayers to God” (see Appendix C: 1), because no activity takes place in the *mbàn* without prayers. Another Presbyterian explained that the *mbàn* was instituted because our forefathers were looking for a way to communicate with God (see Appendix C: 1). For this Presbyterian, their forefathers had perceived that God was far from the people; as such they had to look for a way to draw closer to him (see Appendix C: 1). Hence, the significant role of the

forefathers, who intercede to God Almighty on their behalf (see Appendix C: 1). He further illustrated that the *mbàn* is a house of peace and reconciliation as fighting, quarrelling and finger pointing are not permitted in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 1). The *mbàn* is also a place for refuge - no-one who takes refuge in it can be chased out or caught (see Appendix C: 1). Another Presbyterian participant explained that their ancestors knew God Almighty and related with him in prayers. That is why they rose up in the morning at sunrise and prayed to him, and did so again at sunset (see Appendix C: 1). He added that each time anyone encounters a problem, where the person is of the view that he or she is not wrong, he or she will go outside, look up to the sky and ask God why he has permitted the problem (see Appendix C: 1).

Regarding the origin of the *mbàn*, thirty-three participants cannot recount its origin (see Appendix C: 2). Even in *Moghamo*, where the *Meta'* people left to settle at the present site, this is not known (see Appendix C: 2). All of the thirty-six participants agree that their ancestors established the *mbàn* many generations ago and the *mbàn* continues to exist among the current generation (see Appendix C: 2). However, two elderly Presbyterian participants presented two oral traditions about the origin of the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 2). According to one oral story Before the *Meta'* people left *Tadkon* in *Gukah Moghamo*, as they sojourned from *Widikum*, they carried the elements of the *mbàn* which include: *to' inəbi* (the family cup), *fibig* (the cam wood), and the *əti əghəm* (pebbles) (see Appendix C: 2). They placed all these elements in the first *mbàn* at *Zang Mbeng* and as the families multiplied and dispersed, they were given the same (see Appendix C: 2).

The other oral tradition is that as the *Meta'* people left *Tadkon* in *Moghamo* and settled at *Zang Mbeng*, they conceptualised an idea to foster family unity. As such the idea of *mbàn* was introduced (see Appendix C: 2). As the various families dispersed and went in different directions, the chief gave them the elements that constitute the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 2). More *mbàns* were built as families kept expanding (see Appendix C: 2). Another Presbyterian participant gave a detailed description of how the *mbàn* is created. He explained that the person seeking a new *mbàn* approaches the

*wèd mbàn* from the *mbàn* he desires to leave to request permission to establish his own *mbàn*. The request is accompanied with food and drinks. Once confirmed, the building of the *mbàn* will resume with the acquisition of the cup, and the creation of the *əghəm* along with some pebbles. The *wèd mbàn* from the original (mother) *mbàn* first touches the new cup with his cup, and makes some incantations informing the forefathers about the request. Secondly, he places the pebbles brought by the person seeking a *mbàn* close to those in the mother *mbàn* and continues with the incantations. He then proceeds to the new *mbàn* along with elements for the *mbàn*. He adds one pebbles from the mother *mbàn* to those in the newly established *mbàn*. (see Appendix C: 2).

On the choice of the *wèd mbàn*, all the Presbyterian and Baptist participants say he is chosen from among the male children of the previous *wèd mbàn*, who appoints his successor to his brothers on his death-bed (see Appendix C: 3). Twenty-nine of the Presbyterian and one of the Baptist participants say that if the previous *wèd mbàn* is suspicious of the brothers, he may declare it to a very close friend (see Appendix C: 3). All the participants listed the qualities of the one chosen to be the *wèd mbàn*: he must be of good character, amicable, honest, eloquent, sociable both within and out of the family (see Appendix C: 3). One of the Presbyterian participants added that he must be intelligent and must be capable to handle a family (see Appendix C: 3). All the participants accept that, usually, a previous *wèd mbàn* who has no son will choose his successor among those of his brothers (see Appendix C: 3). They all confirm that if the new *wèd mbàn* is still too young, an elderly person handles the family until he comes of age (see Appendix C: 3).

Regarding the use of the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) in the *mbàn*, twenty-nine Presbyterian and one Baptist mentioned that most of the rituals are performed at this spot and the rafia palm wine or water is sprinkled during family gatherings (see Appendix C: 4). This spot is usually close to the door, and the *wèd mbàn* and *wèd fibig* sit next to it (see Appendix C: 4). Nineteen Presbyterians and one Baptist mention that the spirits of the ancestors live in the *əghəm*, while sixteen Presbyterians believe that these

ancestors and God are present in it when they are invoked (see Appendix C: 4). Regarding the origin of the pebbles, all the participants said they are picked from a river or stream (see Appendix C: 4) and all of them said the pebbles represent departed family heads (see Appendix C: 4). When a *wəd mbàn* dies and another one is enthroned, a new pebble is added to the old stock (see Appendix C: 4). Both the Presbyterian and Baptist participants indicate that during a ceremony, the *wəd mbàn* invokes the names of the departed ancestors and associates them with God. He could use words such as “the God of A..., the God of B..., the God of C ... (see Appendix C: 4). Four Presbyterians and one Baptist associate the pebbles in the *əghəm* with the memorial stones in Genesis 28.13; 28.18-22 and Joshua 4 (see Appendix C: 4). One of the Presbyterian participants further associates the rubbing with cam wood with the instruction to anoint the sick with oil mentioned in James 5:13 -14 (see Appendix C: 4). Seven of the Presbyterian and one of the Baptist participants explain that when the *Meta'* people eat and drink in the *mbàn*, they say they are sharing communion in a similar way described in 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 and Luke 22:17 (see Appendix C: 4).

One of the Baptist respondents felt that the pebbles in the *əghəm* represent a family tree (see Appendix C: 4) because each pebble represents a deceased family head from past generations. According to her, it is not a bad thing to know family history. She insisted that few people do remember their grandparents to the third generation. The *mbàn* assists members of the clan to remember their grandparents to the fifth generation.

Regarding the use of the *əghəm*, all the Presbyterian and Baptist participants emphasise that the *əghəm* makes the *mbàn* important because most rituals are performed on it (see Appendix C: 5). They say that a house without the *əghəm* cannot be called *ambàn* (see Appendix C: 5).

According to all the participants, the *wəd mbàn* performs five blessings with the *to' inəbi*: he blesses daughters who are to enter marriage; he blesses barren daughters; he blesses children that are not successful in life; he blesses the sick; he blesses disputing parties after they have been

reconciled (see Appendix C: 6). All the participants mention that each family member drinks from the *to' inəbi* at the end of any normal family meeting or discussion (see Appendix C: 6 and 10) and the *wəd mbàn* pronounces blessings on each of them, as each member drinks (see Appendix C: 6). The participants equally mentioned that *fibig* (cam wood) is applied on each family member as they leave the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 6). Two Presbyterian clergy stated that Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists and government officials hold that no marriage can be solemnised before it is first done traditionally in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 6). Five Baptist and twenty-five Presbyterian participants feel that a couple from a traditionally blessed wedding can never experience ill-fortune, since the entire family sent out the lady, showered blessings on the couple and gave them gifts to begin their home (see Appendix C: 6).

Fifteen Presbyterian and three Baptist participants felt that, often, family members do have disputes; these disputes are resolved in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 6). When I asked about what will happen if the dispute cannot be resolved in the *mbàn*, a Baptist participant mentioned that it is either taken to the traditional council, the court or to the church (see Appendix C: 6). He mentioned that even in the church, the pastor will ask if the dispute has been addressed in the family (see Appendix C: 6). He continued that the church appreciates it if issues are resolved amicably in the family. He concluded that the church does not desire its Christians to be in dispute (see Appendix C: 6).

Asked if any other cup can be used in the *mbàn*, all the Presbyterians and Baptists, except one Baptist, responded negatively (see Appendix C: 7). Only one participant felt that this may be done because the meaning is in the ceremony and not in the cup (see Appendix C: 7).

Concerning choosing the *wəd fibig* (the person of cam wood), twenty-five Presbyterians and five Baptists responded that he is chosen the same way as the *wəd mbàn* is chosen, that is, he is chosen by his father on his death-bed (see Appendix C: 8). These participants mentioned that the *wəd fibig* can be from the same mother as the *wəd mbàn* or he can be from another

woman (see Appendix C: 8). He must possess the same characteristics as the *wəd mbàn* (see Appendix C: 8). The other six Presbyterian participants say that not all families have the *wəd fibìg* (see Appendix C: 8 and 9). In this case the *wəd mbàn* handles the cup and rubs the cam wood (see Appendix C: 8).

With regard to the cam wood, all the participants felt that the cam wood is harvested from the cam wood tree, dried, ground or pounded, mixed with some water, dried and preserved (see Appendix C: 8). If needed to be used, a piece of it is cut and mixed with water on the *iti əghəm* (flat stone used to cover the *əghəm*) and applied on people (see Appendix C: 8). The *wəd fibìg* or the *wəd mbàn* pronounces the following blessings as he applies the *fibìg* (cam wood): that their faces should shine like the cam wood; that any obstacle on their way should be removed; if they hit their feet against a stone, the stone should be broken and not the feet; if someone looks at them with evil intentions, the man should be blinded; if anyone wants to give them something, the one should do so generously (see Appendix C: 8). The participants also said that many other such blessings and strong words are showered on the blessed. They also said that at the end of the blessings ceremony, the *wəd fibìg* or the *wəd mbàn* will give some of the *fibìg* (cam wood) to the mother to rub the other children back at home (see Appendix C: 8).

Concerning the relevance of the *mbàn* to the *Meta'* people, after the advent of Christianity, all thirty-six participants indicate that it is still relevant and there is no need to destroy the *əghəm* (see Appendix C: 10). One of the Presbyterian participants emphasised that those who need it will come to it and those who do not need it should stay away from it (see Appendix C: 10). Six Presbyterians and two Baptists emphasised that the *mbàn* (a) should be kept as a monument that displays the customs and culture of the *Meta'* people, and (b) should be kept to be used for research purposes (see Appendix C:10).

A strong view emerged about destroying the *mbàn* and removing the *əghəm*. A Presbyterian participant cited a case of someone who removed



the *əghəm* from the *mbàn* and threw away the family cup and stool. After some time, the person realised that he had done something wrong and went in search of them, but they were no more to be found. He had to pay very highly before another one was installed (see Appendix C: 10). A Presbyterian participant emphasised that when people encounter something that had been there for generations, they should not discard it (see Appendix C: 10). On the contrary, one of the Baptists (see Appendix C: 10) said that people can still talk to God even without using the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) or the *əghəm* (the place with pebble). A Presbyterian participant mentioned that prayer in the *mbàn* becomes effective when the cup is used (see Appendix C: 10). To these two, it is the words that the *wəd mbàn* utters that matters, and the drinking from the cup is only like a covenant that seals what has been said (see Appendix C: 10). One participant re-emphasised that ancient generations perceived the *mbàn* as a church and all the rituals were for the good of the people. The following phrases are uttered to pass blessings: *əfù'ù*, *əfù'ù*, which translates “good luck, good luck” and *əbərəbəd*, *əbərəbəd* which translates “peace, peace” or “blessing, blessing” (see Appendix C: 6). According to twenty-one participants, when the *wəd fībig* rubs the cam wood, he pronounces other blessings (see Appendix C: 10).

Regarding meetings and discussions held in the *mbàn*, two Presbyterians mentioned that family members eat and drink together during meetings and discussions. The *wəd mbàn* and others provide the food and drinks (see Appendix C: 10), and those present often carry parcels home to their families (see Appendix C: 10). One of the Presbyterians compares this part of the ceremony to the wine the disciples drank with Jesus at the Last Supper (see Appendix C: 10). He points out that the Lord's Supper is similar to a fellowship meal (*i tari bēd*) in the *Meta'* clan (see Appendix C: 10). One of the elderly participant intimates that the family meetings and discussions will have little impact if the family members do not drink from the family cup and if they do not have cam wood applied (see Appendix C: 10). He concludes that at the end of it all, they will go and wish to come

again, particularly if they prosper in what they are doing (see Appendix C: 10).

### **3.4.1 Comparing the current conditions and the *mbàn***

The *mbàn* is usually regarded as a house of peace, love, fellowship, reconciliation, unity and blessing (see Appendix C: 1 and 12), and it is not a place to harm people (see Appendix C: 11). One of the Presbyterians observes that these values are disappearing, and contemporary Christians perpetrate evil more than people in the days of Noah in the Old Testament (see Appendix C: 12). He continued that there is much more hatred, division, suspicion, occultism, and the manifestation of evil in the church, which can never happen in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 11).

This view resonates with the opinion, among the Presbyterians and Baptists, that the *wèd mbàn* should be a Christian (see Appendix C: 11). Twenty Presbyterians and five Baptists said it is good for a Christian to be made a *wèd mbàn* because he is already a peace maker and should be there to make the family know more about God (see Appendix C: 11). Three Presbyterians add that the *wèd mbàn* is already the family pastor (see Appendix C: 11) as he presides in the family as the pastor presides in church (see Appendix C: 11). They continued that he leads the people into what is good and beneficial for the family (see Appendix C: 11). One of the Presbyterians said that many Christians and even pastors have become *bêd mbàn*. He cites the case of a late moderator emeritus of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (Late Rev. Jeremiah Chi Kangsen) who was also the chief of his village (see Appendix C: 11). To him this means that tradition and Christianity do converge, contrary to what the Pentecostals say (see Appendix C: 11). One other Presbyterian participant insists that the *wèd mbàn* does nothing evil (see Appendix C: 11), and so the *mbàn* is not a bad place (see Appendix C: 11). He continues that it exists for good purposes (see Appendix C: 11). According to him, the *mbàn* is the same as the church, and as such the *Meta'* people cannot do without it (see Appendix C: 11). Anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, can enter

into the *mbàn*. It is not a place of taboo. To the three participants mentioned above, the church cannot represent *Meta'* culture and tradition (see Appendix C: 11). They conclude that since culture is the identity of the people, the *mbàn* and all the rituals performed in it must be maintained (see Appendix C: 11).

### **3.4.2 Bad and evil rituals found in the *mbàn*.**

Twenty-nine Presbyterians and three Baptist participants emphasised that there is no evil ritual in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 12). One of the participants further insists that no one has ever seen any evil in the *mbàn*; if it were the case, then no one will ever enter that *mbàn* again (see Appendix C: 12). Two Presbyterians and two Baptists doubted if everything is good. These respondents raised the issue of hygiene, namely, many people drinking from the same cup without cleaning it. They also raised the moral issue, where some of the family heads could in turn be wicked, but these issues cannot cancel the overall good of the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 12).

### **3.4.3 Concerning the Christian God and the practices in the *mbàn***

Four Presbyterians and one Baptist (see Appendix C: 11), stated that the *Meta'* people have a God-given culture and tradition that must be preserved. *Meta'* culture should not be like one of the lost cultures in the world (see Appendix C: 11). One of the Presbyterians said that God has various ways of revealing himself to people, and the *mbàn* is certainly one of them (see Appendix C: 11). He emphasised that the name for temple in *Meta'* is *mbàn Dwiè*, which translates “the family meeting house of God” (see Appendix C: 11). According to him, the name resonates with the intended function of the *mbàn* discussed above (see Appendix C: 11). Six Presbyterians and two Baptists identified a close relationship between the temple of the Israelites and the *mbàn* of the *Meta'* people (see Appendix C: 11). They mentioned that as the Israelites went to the temple for blessings and for cleansing so do the *Meta'* approach the *mbàn*. According to them,

the key difference is that no sacrifices are made in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 11).

Regarding sacrifices in the *mbàn*, all the Presbyterian and Baptist participants noted that nothing is ever slaughtered in this house (see Appendix C: 12), and nothing is ever offered as a sacrifice to the gods or a god (see Appendix C: 12). According to nineteen participants, the *Meta'* people do not have gods, neither on the mountains nor in the rivers nor behind the house nor anywhere else (see Appendix C: 12). They further state that there are no shrines or special places where *Meta'* people slaughter animals for sacrifices (see Appendix C: 12). They say that if for any reason an animal has to be slaughtered, it must be done outside of the *mbàn* and there is no particular spot for that (see Appendix C: 12).

Five Presbyterian participants indicated that the objections Pentecostals raise about the *mbàn* influence people with no deep Christian background (see Appendix C: 12). They further pointed out that these Pentecostals have not done any study to prove that the *mbàn* and its rituals are bad (see Appendix C: 12). Three of the Presbyterian clergy accuse them of perpetuating colonial theology, saying that they are still looking at things with the eyes of the white man (see Appendix C: 12). In their view, those who refuse the *mbàn* will one day come back to their senses and see the usefulness of it (see Appendix C: 12). One of the Presbyterian participants decried the fact that elements in the *mbàn* are handed to the *wèd mbàn* in good faith, but some of them throw these elements away or destroy them, instead of handing them over to someone else (see Appendix C: 12).

Regarding the worship of gods in the *mbàn*, three Presbyterians mention that in the *mbàn* no one is asked to: (a) bow down; (b) remove his or her shoes; (c) dress in a particular way before entering the *mbàn*; (d) ever says that when the cup is held up, people must bow because the cup is a god, or that when the wine is sprinkled into the *əghəm*, people must bow because the *əghəm* is a god (for all of the above see Appendix C: 12). One of the elderly Presbyterians (see Appendix C: 12) mentioned that no one in *Meta'* land has ever picked up a pebble or a stone and said that it is a god. He

insists that from the time the *mbàn* and the *əghəm* were instituted, he has not seen anything bad come from there. He has not seen someone inflicted with an illness in the *mbàn* and no one has died because he went into the *mbàn*. He continued that the *Meta'* people pray to God Almighty and to no other deity in the *mbàn*. He added that all the proceedings begin and conclude with prayer. He reiterated that (a) no one is forced to drink from the family cup - those who do not drink alcohol may just touch the cup and pass it on because no one is compelled to drink from the cup (see Appendix C: 12); (b) no one is forced to enter or to leave the *mbàn*, (c) one can stay outside and listen to the deliberation in the house, but can come in to make contributions, and (d) no one is forbidden to talk in the *mbàn*.

Concerning those to head the *mbàn*, all the Presbyterian and Baptist participants agree that the *mbàn* exists for good purposes (see Appendix C: 11). They say that when a pastor comes into a compound, he can enter and be entertained in the *mbàn* (see Appendix C: 11). They see nothing wrong with that because no evil exists in the *mbàn* and no one should fear to enter it or should be exempt from entering it (see Appendix C: 11). One other respondent adds that God knows all families and that He works for their good (see Appendix C: 11).

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter provides the diverse views participants (Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and Protestants, represented by Presbyterians and Baptists) hold about the *mbàn*. Pentecostals wish that all the *mbàns* (the family meeting houses), the *to' inəbis* (the family cups), the *əghəms* (the places of the pebbles), and even the *fi'big* (cam wood) be discarded. That is why some of their church members have either destroyed or thrown away these antiquities, and are encouraging others to do same. They do not think that a Christian can become a *wəd mbàn* and perform the rituals since the rituals are regarded as evil and associated with idol worship.

The majority of Roman Catholics hold that the *mbàn* and all the rituals should be maintained and the elements in them be used; and a Christian

should be made a family head. The minority are against the family house or doubt its use.

The Protestants, represented by Presbyterians and Baptists, hold that the *mbàn*, elements found in it, and its related rituals should be maintained. They describe the *mbàn* as a house of peace, of love, of unity, of harmony, of reconciliation and of blessings, these being the same values that Christianity promotes.

The focus of the next chapter is to explore portions of Scripture that the *Meta'* people claim are related to the *mbàn*.

## Chapter 4

### **A brief discussion of Bible passages some *Meta'* Christians associate with remembrance and blessing rituals performed in the *mbàn***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In chapter three, one Roman Catholic, four Presbyterians and one Baptist associate some of the ritual practices related to the pebbles in the *mbàn* and the practice invoking the names of the ancestors with some Old Testament passages regarding memorial stones and the name of God. Eight of the Presbyterians and one Baptist associated other ritual practices of drinking from the family cup and rubbing family members with cam wood with celebrating the Lord's Supper and the anointing with oil in the New Testament.

This chapter seeks to provide a brief discussion of these passages (Genesis 28:18-22; Genesis 28:13 and Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4:1-24; Luke 22:17; I Corinthians 11:23-29 and James 5:13-16). The ritual practices identified in the Old Testament will be examined first.

#### **4.2 The Old Testament passages**

This section discusses some memorial practices mentioned in the Old Testament.

##### **4.2.1 The memorial stones in Genesis 28:18-22**

According to six of the respondents (see Appendix C: 4), the *əghəm* and the pebbles in the *mbàn* and the ritual blessings that are associated with them originated in Genesis 28:18-22 where Jacob encounters God in a dream. Here God reminded Jacob of what he had done for his ancestors,

as well as assuring him that he is going to follow in their footsteps (Assohoto and Ngewa, 2006:53). The first thing Jacob did after this encounter was to erect a stone as a pillar. Secondly, he poured oil on it and named the place “Bethel” which means “house of God”. We can therefore conclude that wherever God is present, that is his house. Thirdly, when Jacob encountered God at Bethel, he made a vow that God will be his God for ever. Fourthly, he promised to give God a tenth of all that God had given him.

Fleming (2005) indicates that despite Jacob’s shameful attitude, God still repeated to him the promises he had made to Abraham and to Isaac. In addition to that, God promised to bring him safely to Canaan. Kselman (1988:104) mentions that this story lays the foundation of the sanctuary of the Lord at Bethel which was a very important site of worship after Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the northern and southern kingdoms.

#### **4.2.2 The phrase “God of...” in Genesis 28:13 and Exodus 3:6**

Nineteen Presbyterians and one Baptist trace the origin of the phrase “God of” from Genesis 28:13 and Exodus 3:6 (see Appendix C: 4). Genesis 28:13 states that, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac”. Assohoto and Ngewa, (2006:53) indicate that the Lord finally repeats the promise that Abraham’s family will bring blessings to many others. Kaiser (2008:76) mentions that the phrase in Genesis 12:2-3 shows that from the very beginning, God’s promised blessings were intended to be worldwide. To Kaiser, the phrase “the God of Isaac” would be particularly poignant to Jacob’s ears because Jacob finds himself before the one who says, I am the God of the one whom you deceived and of whom you took advantage” (Hamilton, 1995:241). Maclaren (1910:1) says that:(1) the great interest of this story lies in the process by which God purified Jacob, (2) the stone he raised made him a worthy child to Abraham, (3) the story was the first step towards Jacob’s education, and (4) the most important meaning of



the vision is the familiar ancestral promise that is repeated to him, thus confirming his birth right.

In Exodus 3:6, Moses had an encounter with the Almighty God at Horeb (Sinai). God told Moses, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". Lasor, Hubbard and Bush (1996:66) state that this caused Moses to know who was talking. In this passage, God acknowledges the role the three patriarchs played in the life story of the Israelites.

The expression "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" is often repeated in the Old Testament for various reasons. In the first instance in Exodus 3:6, when God revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, He introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The feeling is that if God did not introduce himself in this way, Moses might not have believed him. God proved to him that He was no ordinary God but the one who established the family of Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ndjerareou (2006:90) states that God had to reveal himself to Moses that way because Moses needed to know which god was speaking to him. Moses was brought up in the midst of Egyptian polytheism, and so God's repetition of his identity was very important (McCarter, 1988:136). This is the same way that Moses will later introduce him to the Israelites.

In the second instance (Exodus 4:5), God reveals himself to Moses as the God of miracles (Dickson, 2011:74), Moses will perform many miracles in the presence of Pharaoh and his court officials, to defy the power of the gods of Egypt and of Pharaoh himself (Ndjerareou, 2006:92). In my opinion, it is this series of miracles that caused Pharaoh to permit the Israelites leave Egypt.

#### **4.2.3 The memorial stones in Joshua 4:1-24**

As seen in the introduction, six of the respondents (see Appendix C: 4) perceive Joshua 4:8-9 as the most quoted biblical passage related to the

pebbles in the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) in the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house). The passage reads thus:

So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant had stood. And they are there to this day (NIV).

Matthews (1907:213-224) calls these stones “memory stones”. The forthcoming generations will see them, ask about them and be told the story, and they will learn about the powerful works of God from this story (Life Application Study Bible, 2013:319). Oginde (2006:265) reminds us that the human mind has a tendency always to forget. That is why there must always be reminders, particularly about the great things God has done. Hence, the practice found among Jews of reciting the names of the patriarchs as a means of fostering remembrance.

The stones in Joshua were placed in Gilgal and according to Pressler (1989:34-35) and Kitshen (1996:172), Gilgal probably means “circle of stones”. Creach (2003:44) makes us understand that when Joshua was laying the stones in Gilgal, it was an elaborate ritual. It is this ritual that provided meaning to the laying of the stones. If the stones were placed without the ritual, they would be meaningless to the Israelites and to any other person. Seitz (1960:247-254) mentions that these stones were a literary device to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and Graesser (1972:33-63) affirms that stones represented many aspects in the life of the people of Palestine.

In Joshua 4:18ff, the Lord God dried up the River Jordan as the Israelites crossed over, just as he did with the Red Sea. In this passage we read why God asked that the stones be placed at a particular site. He did so in order to show to the world that he was powerful and that they and the entire universe should always fear him (Seitz, 1960:247-254).

### **4.3 The New Testament passages**

This section discusses some memorial practices mentioned in the New Testament.

#### **4.3.1 The Lord's Supper in Luke 22:17**

Five Presbyterians associated the family meeting in the *mbàn* with the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:17) (see Appendix C: 4, 10). Stein (1992:539) indicates that Luke's version of the Lord's Supper differs from that of Matthew and Mark in that the betrayal of Jesus comes after supper and not before it, and secondly, there was the mention of another cup in Luke 22:15-18. This gives the order of "cup-bread-cup". Amstrong (2017:1) writes that this new and significant fellowship meal was instituted during the age-old celebration of the Passover festival. This is significant because it marked a great revolution in the worship life of the Jews and consequently that of the Christian church. Winfield (2017) adds that Jesus took an old symbol and gave it a new meaning. The words of Christ which say, "Take this and divide it among you," are key. Bock (1996:1729) mentions that amongst the variety of truths that can be gained from sharing the cup is that of oneness. This oneness or unity is what Christ desires if his followers. Hays (1997:193) records that the Lord's Supper was an actual meal that Christians ate in a private home. As such those Christians who think that the Lord's Supper is only a ritual in church remove the meal out of its original context. Morris (1985) adds that the Lord's Supper at Corinth was a full meal, of the type called a "love feast". In my opinion this reminds those who think the Lord's Supper is only wafers and a sip of wine that they are mistaken.

#### **4.3.2 The Lord's Supper in I Corinthians 11:23-29**

Barclay (1956:114) declares that there is no passage in the entire New Testament of greater interest than that concerning the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians 11:23-29. Firstly, this passage gives us the most sacred act of worship in church: the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Thus, the Lord's Supper is a sacred and not a secular feast, even though it was incorporated in a communal meal (Guthrie, 1990:461). Secondly, since I Corinthians was written earlier than Mark, it is therefore the first recorded account of the words of Jesus that exists. Still on the Lord's Supper, Armstrong (2017:1) says that Paul includes a new dimension in I Corinthians 11:23-29 when he elaborates on the Lord's Supper. Dowling and Dray (1996:123) state that Paul is right when he states that the Corinthian believers were actually eating the Lord's Supper. This meal that was derived from the Last Supper was supposed to be eaten by all the believers in the presence of God and to His honour. But some, particularly the rich, were eating their own supper while the poor remained hungry. It is a call by Paul for the rich to put off their privileged positions and seek a common unity in Christ. Paul mentioned that anyone who eats or drinks the communion in an unworthy manner brings judgment on himself. Just as Armstrong (2017:1) suggests, each person must examine himself well before he or she drinks from the cup. Dowling and Dray (1996:125) say the phrase "in remembrance of me" is a dynamic process and not a mental one. It is compared to the remembrance of the Passover in Exodus 13:9. Therefore the Lord's Supper is the remembrance of the Lord Jesus Christ and also a memorial affirming that we will be saved.

#### **4.3.3 Healing in James 5:13-16**

Four Presbyterians, one Catholic and one Baptist mention that one of the blessing rituals performed in the *mbàn* is that of blessing sick children or those facing the challenges of life (see Appendix C: 6). They associate this practice with James 5:13-16:

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.... Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (NIV).

Adamson (1976:135) suggests that James includes the element of olive oil so as to avoid the temptation of using charms, incantations and other pagan practices. Piper (1990:1) says that we must pray for one another, no matter where. He insists that not everyone prayed for will be healed, but prayers must be made for the sick and suffering. The emphasis is on mutual prayers (Yoder cited in Asbury Bible Commentary 2017). Alexander and others (1973:634) call this prayer a “believing prayer”. They say this “believing prayer” is a force to be reckoned with and that God heals the sick and forgives sins in response to this prayer. They insist that prayer is the main element in healing and not the oil. The sick man should be brought back to Christ who should forgive all his sins and restore him. In addition, the power of prayer is exemplified by the fervent prayer of Elijah when he prayed for rain (Guthrie, (1990:759).

#### **4.4 Summary**

From the aforementioned, it was observed that some of the ritual practices in the *mbàn* related to blessing people are similar to those mentioned in the Bible. Passages like those that deal with memorial stones were identified in the Old Testament. Other practices, such as the pronouncement of “God of...” similar to those used in the *mbàn* were identified in some passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

Similarly, the *Meta'* common meal known as *t tari bêd* (communion), appears to carry the same meaning as the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Equally identified is the practice of anointing the sick. In the New Testament olive oil is used by the elders, while among the *Meta'* people cam wood is used.

## Chapter 5

### **A strategy for using the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) practices as a contextualised tool for teaching memorial and blessing practices in the local church**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In chapter four, I examined Bible passages some *Meta'* Christians associate with the *mbàn*. In this chapter, I intend to design a contextualised strategy to use the *mbàn* and its memorial and blessing practices to benefit *Meta'* Christians in North West Cameroon local churches. This task is related to Osmer's fourth and final stage of doing practical theology: the pragmatic stage (Osmer, 2008). This stage is part of the aim of practical theology to introduce change within some areas of the congregation in order to assist the members of the local church to reflect the gospel and the kingdom of God more faithfully to the world.

According to Osmer (2008:173), this last stage is an intentional process "to move from particular episodes, situations, and contexts toward desired ends," and involves "forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable" (p, 176). This stage draws insights from theological discussions known as contextualisation (Engle 1983; Chepkwony 2005, Fernando 2007, Kato (1985).

#### **5.2 Contextualisation**

The argument about contextualising African practices among Pentecostal Christians, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Baptists is contentious. Proponents of contextualisation argue for a critical approach that does not compromise the Christian faith (Engle 1983:1). Critics of contextualisation, comprising mostly the clergy trained in the West and those on the African continent, favour the existing status quo which seeks to maintain the church in Africa as the European missionaries brought it. They also uphold the

missionary perception that everything African is evil, and therefore they must imitate a Western lifestyle, worship in the European way, and condemn African musical instruments (O'Donovan, 2010:11).

In the following sections, I discuss how African practices can be contextualised. This will be followed by a strategy to contextualise the *mbàn* and its memorial and blessings practices.

### **5.3 The views of some African theologians on contextualisation**

African theologians have proposed two distinct views about engaging African culture and practices, these are: (1) theology of enculturation (Kurgat, 2011:31-41) and (2) the evangelical theology of contextualisation (Engle, 1983:1). Chepkwony (2005:31) argues that one of the ways to be truly Christian and to be truly African is through enculturation. That is, one needs to adapt the behavioural patterns of the surrounding culture in order to be a true Christian and a true African. On the other hand, contextualisation may be defined as “showing the whole Bible to be relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life,” (Engle 1983:1). Wagenaar (2002:94) reiterates this view by citing Kwame Bediako, a prominent proponent of contextualisation, who argues that African Christians are both “authentic Africans and true Christians”.

As noted in chapter two, the *wèd mbàn* invokes the presence of ancestors and associates them with the Supreme Being (God) in the *mbàn*. This practice is based on the African belief that “the living-dead” (Mbiti, 1989:25) are living and are next to the Supreme Being(God) (Mbiti, 1989:82). Mbiti further explains that, (a) “the majority of prayers and invocations are addressed to God and some to the living-dead”; (b) “invocations are shortened and common versions of prayers”; and (c) they “...show a spontaneous response to God” (1989:61,65).

These views express African spirituality as noted in the previous chapters. When the *wèd mbàn* invokes the presence of remembered ancestors (living- dead) up to the fifth generation (cf Mbiti 1989:81, 83), he does this

by using the following phrases: “the God of ..., the God of ..., the God of ...” For Mbiti (1994:36) this is similar to what is used in the Old Testament: “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and Jesus reminding us that God is not a God of the dead but of the living. He further affirms that:(a) belief in the Supreme Being (God) is central in African spirituality, (b) in Africa the dead continue to live in the memory of the living and (c) that it is possible to mention the names of the dead when rituals are being performed (Mbiti 1994:36). Kalilombe (1994:115-135) concurs with Mbiti that Africans pray to the Supreme Being (God) through the ancestors (living-dead). The ancestors (living-dead) are the departed ones who have played a very important role in the lives of the members of a family or that of the entire community (Kalilombe, 1994:115-135). It is a true African belief that the Supreme Being (God) is only approached through an intermediary (Mbiti, 1989:67-71).

Bujo (2013:48-60) concurs that in Africa the dead continue to live in the memory of the living. In fact, the dead have been noted to have appeared to the living in visions and in dreams and to have talked with them and given directions on how certain things should be done. Thus the living cannot readily wipe out the memory of the departed ones. The living communicate or relate to them through offerings, sacrifices and other ritual practices.

Chepkwony (2005:31) posits that “African religion and culture form the context, or the root paradigm, for interpreting the Christian message from the socio-cultural and historical experiences of African peoples.” He regrets that there has not been adequate presentation of African religions and that the West has tarnished the African way of life as heathen; thus many Africans still regard African religions and culture as pagan. He accuses theologians trained in western influenced theological seminaries of perpetuating this belief and not engaging in a critical evaluation of the merits of African religions, traditions and cultures (Chepkwony, 2005:31). They condemn everything African except for their body pigmentation, he says (Chekwony, 2005:31). One of the leading African theologians, Mugambi (1995:1-2), regrets that African missionary churches have



depended on theological mentorship from the parent denominations in Europe and North America. One of the greatest worries Mugambi has about African theologians and African theology as a whole is whether, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they should still continue to rely on “theological packages” that have been designed for other cultures and historical contexts (Mugambi, 1995:1-2). I will add that African theologians need to provide theological guidance and leadership to the African churches. Not all theology from the parent denominations is bad, but African theologians can embrace theological insights that are relevant to the African situation (Mugambi, 1995:2).

Kayandango (2010:111) argues for convergence and wishes to see African theology and Western theology edifying African Christians. To him, this is a must. We must not promote one and degrade the other or lift up one and lower the other. They must function as a unit, with the African theologians playing the leading role. To this end, Kato (1985:19, 23) intimates that the African way of worship is an honest craving for God and this can be consummated only in Christ. Thus, “Christianity should be contextualised in Africa without compromise.” In fact, contextualisation is the only means to solve the religious impasse and confusion that is gaining ground in many African churches today.

Still on contextualisation, Fernando (2007:123) declares that the creation of a distinct African Christian identity depends to a very large extent on the positive re-evaluation and the recovery of the African religious past. As already said, there needs to be a critical examination or re-examination of the merits and demerits of the African Traditional Religions so as to arrive at a concrete solution on how contextualisation can be effected in Africa. Kalilombe (1985:151) concurs, and asserts that studying theology must encourage and give room for the constant examination and careful evaluation of the situation in the communities in which the theology is based.

I have discussed some views of African theologians about contextualisation, and how this may benefit Africa Christianity. The next

section proposes a contextualised, biblical, and practical alternative for using the remembrance and blessing practices in the *mbàn* to benefit *Meta'* Christians.

#### **5.4 A contextualised use of the *mbàn***

The following elements are found in the *mbàn*: *to' inəbi* (the family cup), held by the *wəd mbàn* (the family head), the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles), the *əti əghəm* (the pebbles at the *əghəm*), the *fi big* (cam wood) that is rubbed on the people by the *wəd fi big* (person who rubs people with cam wood), and the *əti fi big* (stone on which the cam wood is mixed with water and rubbed on people).

Data gathered from Christian participants (chapter four) in the field research conducted during my masters course work indicated two opposite positions about the *mbàn*, namely, discard it or continue with it (Appendix C). Those who argue that the *mbàn*, its elements, and related memorial and blessing practices be maintained suggest that it be kept for future generations; others felt that these elements should be used for their intended purpose. Some referred to the *mbàn* as “a family church”. Some felt that they did not wish discard an institution that promotes peace, love, unity, harmony, reconciliation, and the conferring of titles, particularly in the palace *mbàn*.

I concur with the last two perspectives which introduce the *mbàn* as a “family church” and as an institution which promotes nation-building values. The five main values which resonate with biblical values are: (a) peace among people (Eph. 2:14-17); (b) love between one another (Lev. 19:18, Rom. 12:10); (c) unity and harmony (Jn. 17:21); and (d) reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11, 2 Cor.5:18-20).

I propose two steps in the process of contextualising the *mbàn*. The first step is to use the prevailing perception among some *Meta'* Christians that associates practices in the *mbàn* with some memorial and blessing practices in the Bible, as discussed in chapter four.

The second step is to prayerfully target *wəd mbàns* (family heads) attending the churches within the community, and encourage pastors and

priests of local churches to introduce Bible studies where they are encouraged to use their position to teach family members that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between them and God, and then introduce a second Bible study series teaching the perceived similarity between memorial and blessing practices in the *mbàn* and those found in the Old and New Testaments. I also recommend a similar step for the the *wàd fìbig* (the person who rubs cam wood).

The two steps described above may be used to strengthen the view of the *mbàn* as “a family church” and to teach the five main values (promotes peace, love, unity, harmony, and reconciliation) mentioned above, which both the *mbàn* and the Bible promote. This is possible since Christians constitute a large percentage of the population.

The next sections discuss how to contextualise the view of the family and the five main values (promotes peace, love, unity, harmony, and reconciliation) associated with the *mbàn* and the Bible.

#### **5.4.1 The *mbàn*'s role in promoting the family should be kept**

The above given reasons for not discarding the *mbàn* become a reasonable basis for enhancing the biblical values of family-centred fellowship (Heb. 10:25). Our families are actually a great treasure to us and to mankind (Azange, 2017:73). Families are certainly one of the greatest blessings that God has entrusted to us and for which he has made us stewards. In I Timothy 5:8 the apostle Paul reminds Timothy to teach believers to care for their relatives, and especially their immediate families. He who does not do so has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. This elevates the importance of a family among believers in the same way the *Meta'* clan does. Kunhyihop (2008:5) affirms that African peoples emphasise the community rather than the individual.

#### **5.4.2 The *mbàn*'s role as “a family church” and place of love, unity and harmony**

As discussed in chapter three, the *mbàn* has been described as “a family church”; it is also observed that both Christians and non-Christians form part of a *Meta*' family. These fellowship activities resonate with what some New Testament passages teach and encourage about fellowship. In Hebrews 10:25, the author admonishes the believers not to give up the habit of always meeting together. Some of these believers may have been keeping a distance perhaps for fear of the Jews or for fear of persecution, but everyone is encouraged to attend the meetings. Bruce (1990:258) articulates that the author intends the believers to use every opportunity to come together and enjoy fellowship in faith and hope as well as for mutual encouragement... because he knows of some who were withdrawing from the Christian fellowship. Ellingworth (1993:527) intimates that the mutual care the author of Hebrews has commended in verse 24 cannot be sustained unless members of the Christian community meet to encourage and exhort one another. In addition, Miller (1998) states that in community the welfare of each individual addressed. This means that the believers need to regard themselves as one – as a family – taking responsibility for each other. In Romans 16:5, Paul extends greetings to the church that meets in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. This is surely a reference to a home church.

The *mbàn* is a place where the welfare of the entire family is promoted in the same manner that the above-mentioned passages demonstrate that mutual edification is found in meeting together. As such, no one should exclude himself or herself or be excluded from such a prayer meeting. This receptive attitude of believers towards non-believers in the family may stir them to conversion, and to become followers of Christ.

Family members of the *Meta*' clan usually hold annual gatherings. At the end of the gathering, a blessing is usually said to all family members present before each departs to his/her home or house. Since prayer is

always said in the *mbàn*, I suggest that it is strategic to have a Christian *wèd mbàn* (family head) who will always use the name of the Lord to bless all family members, instead of invoking the presence of the “living dead”.

### **5.4.3 The *mbàn* and the practice of blessing family members**

The practice of an older person blessing a younger one is an ancient Near Eastern custom. In Genesis 27:2-4, Isaac, an old man whose eyes were getting dim so that he could no longer see, asked his eldest and well-beloved son Esau to catch game and prepare a savoury meal for him so that he, Isaac, would eat and bless Esau before he dies. Again in Genesis 28:1, Isaac invites Jacob and blesses him a second time, but warns him not to marry a Canaanite woman. In Genesis 48:12-22, Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and claims them as his. In Genesis 49:1-27, Jacob gathers all his children and blesses each one of them.

In *Meta'* tradition, the blessing of family members is an ancient practice. As was discussed in chapter two, various blessing rites are performed on certain individuals and on the entire family. Below; I propose how these can be contextualised.

#### **a. The handing over of a daughter in marriage**

In the *Meta'* culture, there has to be a very elaborate ceremony before a daughter is handed over in marriage. This practice is similar to what is noticed in the passages where Rebekah and Leah were handed over to be married (Genesis 24 and 28). Among the *Meta'* people there must be a request from the suitor's family. Bride payments are made and then there is the final day of handing over the daughter, where both parties prepare food and drink. At the end of it all, the girl is rubbed with cam wood, given the family cup to drink from and is handed over to the husband's family. While all this is done, they shower blessings on her. There has not been any occasion where a girl has refused to be rubbed with cam wood or to drink from the family cup - no matter the religious affiliation.

This practice can be maintained with a powerful prayer in the name of the Lord added to it at the beginning and at the end of the ceremony, and the daughter given water either in the family cup or in a glass as a sign of blessing.

#### **b. The blessing of a barren wife**

Barrenness is a huge concern for many wives across many cultures. Hannah is a classic example of what barrenness does to a wife (I Samuel 1:1-11). The High Priest, Eli, was mistaken when Hannah prayed with her lips moving and accused her of being drunk (I Samuel 1:12-16). At the end of the conversation between her and the High Priest, the High Priest asked that God may grant her the desire to bear a child or children (I Samuel 1:17).

Among the *Meta'* people, a barren wife returns to her home to receive blessing to conceive and bear children. *Meta'* people call the woman the daughter of the compound. She will then be taken to the *mbàn* to present her case to the *wèd mbàn*, who will in turn invite other family members to assemble in the *mbàn* and solicit God through the "living-dead" to hear her cry and grant her a child. After that, she will be asked to drink raffia palm wine or water from the family cup; as a sign of blessing cam wood is applied to her while blessings are being showered on her. Here again, we do not need to pray for intervention from God through the "living-dead". We need to call upon God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The case of the High Priest, Eli, telling Hannah that God would grant her her heart's desire (i.e. to conceive) is relevant. Since the use of tangible elements (signs and symbols) is very important to the *Meta'* people, she can be given the wine or water in a glass. If the one concerned does not drink wine, they should be given water.

#### **c. The blessing of a sick or misfortunate child**

A child who has an incurable disease or sickness is usually taken to the *mbàn* to be blessed. This is only done after efforts to take such a child to

prayer houses and to prayer warriors have yielded no results, which causes people to believe that such an individual has been cursed. When they arrive, the *wèd mbàn* pours water into the family cup and makes some incantations and prays to God to look into the child's misfortune. He then washes the face of the sick child with water from the cup. After that he will rub the child's chest with cam wood, while still making the incantations. After that those present will pray for the sick child.

This practice is similar to James' instruction that if anyone is sick, let him call on the elders of the church to pray for the person and anoint them with oil, and the prayer of faith will heal the sick person (James 5:13-16). As said earlier, nothing is done in the *mbàn* without prayers. For those who think that the family cup and cam wood should not be used, olive oil may be used; or a glass of water can serve both purposes, that is, washing the face and the chest. It is also appropriate to pray as instructed in James for any child who is experiencing some misfortune in life, in order to receive some breakthrough.

#### **d. The blessing of people after settling a dispute and the value of peace and reconciliation**

Conflict among family members is bad and causes much emotional pain. To avoid or to minimise pain caused by conflicts, *Meta'* people do not want conflicts between family members to be settled outside family circles. This is intended to promote peace and harmony among family members. The elders of the family usually resolve all family conflicts within the family. Once the conflict is resolved, all the parties involved will finally drink raffia palm wine from the family cup to show that they have been reconciled. Those family members who do not wish to drink raffia palm wine may drink water. This practice is similar to what Paul taught the Corinthian church about resolving disputes or conflicts (I Cor. 6:1-7). In addition, Jesus Christ taught his disciples and followers that those who make peace are blessed (Matt. 5:9). He also taught them to make peace with their enemies by being reconciled to their brother or sister (Matt. 5:23-26):

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny (NIV).

## **5.5 Tangible elements used in the *mbàn***

The *Meta'* people like to see, handle and to drink from the family cup and to be rubbed with cam wood. They want to remember that they have been blessed. After drinking from the family cup, family members leave the *mbàn* feeling happy; and the news will spread that they have been blessed. They also believe that the spirits of ancestors are invoked as the *wèd mbàn* holds the cup and calls the ancestors and God to bless them as they drink from the family cup. The same is said as the *wèd fibig* rubs family members with cam wood.

### **5.5.1 The family cup and the cam wood**

Drinking water or raffia wine from the family cup is like serving Holy Communion in church where the Christians drink the communion wine from one cup, although nowadays Christians drink from little glasses or plastic cups, filled from a single source. Drinking from the same cup among the *Meta'* people also fosters family unity and harmony. Thus everyone, in the family may drink from the family cup. Those who object to the use of the family cup may drink from a glass.

Across the river basin of Cameroon and Nigeria, camwood is used for different purposes, namely, cleansing and purification rites, rubbing on women during labour; rubbing on barren women (wives); on sick children,



on family members during a blessing activity; and on women being handed over to be married.

Those who want the *mbàn* to be maintained would love to be rubbed with cam wood because this is an indication that they are blessed. If people just pray in the family meeting house and disperse, they will not actually believe that they have been blessed. Without drinking from the family cup and being rubbed with cam wood, they will not be sure that their ancestors and God have heard their cry and are going to respond.

With this background in mind, I recommend the use of the name of the Lord when the *wèd mbàn* prays in the *mbàn* and applying olive oil on the chest and head of those who are reluctant to use the cam wood.

### **5.5.2 The raffia palm wine**

Some Christians believe that people should not consume alcohol and that the consumption of alcohol is a sin. The Scripture does not forbid Christians from drinking beer, wine, or any other drink containing alcohol. Alcohol is not, in and of itself, contaminated by sin, and alcohol itself is not sin. It is drunkenness and the addiction to alcohol that a Christian must absolutely refrain from. To accommodate those who object to drinking raffia wine, water may be drunk during the blessing practice.

### **5.5.3 The spot called the *əghəm***

The *əghəm* in the *mbàn* is a special place for invoking the ancestors. It contains pebbles that represent departed family heads. The *wèd mbàn* sits and performs the rituals at this spot. The *wèd fibig* also sits and performs his functions at this spot. The *wèd mbàn* sprinkles the raffia palm wine that is brought for any ritual in the *mbàn* into the *əghəm*. As he does this, he mentions the names of the ancestors and of God. After that he pours some of the wine into the family cup and gives those present to drink and bless

them while they are drinking. The significance of the ceremonies is that the people feel blessed and they go home satisfied that the ancestors have assisted in making God hear their prayers.

The controversy surrounding the *mbàn* is that, on the one hand, the *wèd mbàn* invokes the presence of the ancestors and, on the other hand, the *Meta'* people insist that they do not worship gods or worship ancestors. Any rites or rituals that the *Meta'* people perform in the *mbàn* are to communicate with God through the ancestors. They say they are not worshipping the ancestors or worshipping idols, just as Turaki (2018:8) indicates that some African theologians have argued that Africans do not worship their divinities nor their ancestors, but God. Thus prayers that are offered in the *mbàn* are not directed to the ancestors, as ends in themselves, but are directed through them to God. In other words, the *wèd mbàn* is in fact only venerating the ancestors (Fai, 2003).

As a word of caution, Williams (1991:300-301) declares that the Bible is uncompromising in its condemnation of ancestor worship and all the ceremonies that go with it. It is also noted that Jesus said people should worship only the Lord their God and serve only him (Matt. 4:10); Peter did not allow Cornelius to bow down and worship him (Acts 10:25-26); the angel did not allow John to worship him, but mentioned that only God should be worshipped (Rev. 22:8-9). I advocate that only God should be worshipped and be approached through Jesus Christ the mediator (I Tim. 2:3-5 and Heb. 1:1-2). This view suggests that instead of the *wèd mbàn* invoking the names of the ancestors, the *wèd mbàn* is encouraged to invoke the presence of God directly through the name of Jesus Christ. This is consistent with the above-mentioned passages which emphasise that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between mankind and God (I Tim. 2:3-5 and Heb. 1:1-2). The pebbles may point the people to the departed ancestors, but should not deter family members from focusing on God through Jesus Christ.

## 5.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the views of African theologians regarding the contextualisation of African culture and practices. They argue that African theologians should assist African Christians to be truly African and Christian, thereby formulating a genuine contextualised African theology.

I have engaged with this view by formulating a contextualised strategy aimed at assisting *Meta'* Christians (Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, and Protestants represented by Presbyterians and Baptists) in local churches situated in the North West Region of Cameroon to analyse and continue with the *mbàn* and related remembrance and blessing practices. A contextualised strategy advocates that the *mbàn* be kept, as it promotes the practice of the New Testament house church as a place of fellowship and edification; with its related practices promoting the following biblical values: peace, love, unity, harmony, and reconciliation.

Since prayer is an intrinsic part of the proceedings in the *mbàn*, I advocate that all prayer should be made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the Bible, is the only mediator between man and God, instead of the use and invocation of the names of the "living dead". All blessing activities conducted for the entire family or for a member of the family should also be made in the name of the Lord. I further advocate a modified use of the following elements found in the *mbàn*: *to' inəbi* (the family cup), the *əti əghəm* (the pebbles at the *əghəm*), *the fiɓig* (cam wood) that is rubbed on family members and the raffia palm wine. Those who do not wish to use *to' inəbi* (the family cup), may use a glass; those who object to using the *fiɓig* (cam wood) may use olive oil, and those who object to drinking raffia palm wine may drink water.

## Chapter 6

### Summary, conclusions and recommendations

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the preceding chapters. In it, I will give an overview of what has been discussed in the previous chapters. At the end, I will conclude and make some recommendations for further study.

#### 6.2 Summary of chapters

In chapter one, I discussed the background to the study which included the locality of the *Meta'* clan and the origin of the *mbàn*. There is also a brief discussion on the controversy Pentecostals caused, as to whether the *mbàn* is a shrine where idols or gods are worshipped. Next is the statement of the problem which leads to the main question: how can the *mbàn* practices be used as a contextualisation tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church? To respond to the question, four other subsidiary questions are asked.

- a. Historically, what do Cameroonians believe regarding the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals?
- b. How do contemporary *Meta'* Christians perceive the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals?
- c. What are some biblical teachings that are related to remembrance and blessing rituals?
- d. How can the *mbàn* (the *Meta'* family meeting house) and its practices be used as a contextualised tool for teaching remembrance and blessing in the local church?

The above research question and four subsidiary questions led to the objective of the study which was to use the gathered information about the *mbàn* to present a suitable and biblical position regarding the *mbàn* and its related practices of blessings and remembrance. The main purpose is to develop a contextualised theology for the *mbàn* and its related practices of blessings and remembrance in North West Cameroon.

To achieve this, I used the Osmer model of practical theology to analyse and critique the *mbàn*. This included the descriptive-empirical task which focused on the sources of information gathered; the interpretative task which discusses and analyses the existing views of African theologians about African culture and religious practices. Given that the *Meta'* people associate the *mbàn* with Old Testament passages (Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4) and New Testament passages (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; James 5:13-16), the normative task was applied to evaluate these passages in the light of the Bible by using various Bible commentaries.

Finally, the pragmatic task, in which practical options are provided on how the *mbàn* and its practices could be contextualised for teaching remembrance and blessing practices in the local church, was applied.

Furthermore, I discussed the research tools which included questionnaires and interviews. I also discussed the sample groups made up of clergy, university lecturers, teachers, traditional rulers, family heads and Christians from various denominations found among the *Meta'* people. Next to be discussed was research ethics, data analysis and interpretation of the data. Then I followed with the hypothesis that the *mbàn* and its related practices of remembrance and blessing may be contextualised to suit *Meta'* Christians. The definition of terms and the outline were discussed last in this chapter.

In chapter two, I looked at the historical survey of what Cameroonians in North West Cameroon believe regarding the *mbàn* and its blessing rituals. The chapter provides a historical background to the *mbàn* as gathered from participants in the research. It covers the origin of the *mbàn*, tangible

elements found and used in it, those who function in it, and the remembrance and blessing rituals that are associated with it.

In the *Meta'* culture, the *mbàn* is usually a single room house the family use to meet and to discuss family matters, and to perform remembrance and blessing rituals. Some participants in the research refer to the house as the most important house in the compound. Others refer to it as a house of peace and reconciliation. Others see it as a house of prayer, peace, blessing and the award of traditional titles. Yet others refer to it as a “family church”, a sentiment which upheld the perception that the *mbàn* is central to the life and fellowship of the *Meta'* people.

The origin of the *mbàn* is traced from the time the *Meta'* people migrated from Widikum to the present location. The elements found and used in the *mbàn*, are: the *to' inəbi* (family cup), the *fibig* (cam wood), the *əti əghəm* (pebbles in the place with pebbles). The pebbles were added as the family heads passed on and new ones were enthroned. The *iti ibig* (stone on which cam wood is mixed with water) could be any flat stone that was just big enough to cover the *əghəm*. The stone has dual functions: (a) it is used to cover the *əghəm* and (b) it is used for the mixing of cam wood. Where a flat stone is not available, a fresh plantain leaf can be used to accomplish the same purpose.

Those who function in the *mbàn* include (a) the *wəd mbàn* (the family head) who is the most important person in the family and in the *mbàn*. He presides over all the activities and rituals that are celebrated in the *mbàn*; (b) the *wəd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood) is the assistant to the *wəd mbàn*. His role is to rub others with cam wood after the *wəd mbàn* has blessed it, and give people raffia palm wine or water from the family cup. The *wəd fibig* also pronounces blessings as he rubs family members with cam wood. In some instances, the *wəd mbàn* plays both his role and that of the *wəd fibig*.

Some of the blessing rituals associated with the *mbàn* include: (a) the handing over of a daughter in marriage, (b) the blessing of a barren wife, (c) the blessing of a child born to a daughter of the compound, (d) the blessing

of people after resolving a dispute, and (e) the blessing of all family members after a family meeting or reunion.

The third chapter is an empirical survey on how the contemporary *Meta'* Christian perceives the *mbàn* and its remembrance and blessing rituals. It begins by describing the Christian population in the *Meta'* clan in North West Cameroon. It also provides a breakdown among the clan, namely Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and Protestants (Presbyterians and Baptists). Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religions constitute a small percentage of the population. The Presbyterians and Baptists are the largest, followed by the Roman Catholics and the Pentecostals.

Respondents in the study presented different views about the *mbàn*. Pentecostals insist that anything related to tradition and culture should not be practiced by Christians. They refer to the *mbàn* as a house for evil rituals and for the worship of idols. They regard the *əghəm* as the god the *Meta'* people worship. They wish this place to be destroyed and the remembrance and blessing elements in them to be discarded. They also condemn the libations that are made at the *əghəm* in the *mbàn*. With regards the *to' inəbi*, some of them agree that it can be used for blessings, but they equally intimate that it can also be used for cursing. As such it should not be used at all.

Presbyterians and Baptists accuse Pentecostals of double standards. Roman Catholics Christians favour the continuity of the *mbàn*. Two Roman Catholic priests expressed two different views. One priest admits that blessings can be received in the *mbàn* and in the church, but the blessings in the church supersedes that in the *mbàn*. He recognises that the *mbàn* is an important place for settling family disputes, for fostering family unity, and for making people know those family members that they did not know before. He says that where these meetings show a sense of peace, unity and justice, it can be continued, but where these are absent, then it should be discontinued. The other priest felt that the *mbàn* should be called a family hall. The *əghəm* should be removed because the rituals that are performed there look fetish-like. He further insisted that he does not have a

convincing explanation concerning the origin of the pebbles in the *əghəm*, although it is generally believed that they originated from the twelve stones God commanded Joshua to pick out of the River Jordan (cf Jos. 4:1ff).

Roman Catholic Christians in the study refer to the *mbàn* as a house where members of a family meet to discuss family matters (good or bad). Another one refers to it as a meeting and prayer house. It is interesting to note that one of them mentions that the *mbàn* was the original church before the advent of Christianity. The majority of Roman Catholics in the study felt that the *mbàn* and all the rituals performed and the elements in them should be maintained and used.

Some of the Presbyterians and Baptists, who constitute a large part of the study, hold that the *mbàn*, the elements found in it, and its related rituals, should be maintained. They describe the *mbàn* as a house of peace, of love, of unity, of harmony, of reconciliation and of blessings in the same way Christianity promotes these values. They hold that since a majority of people in *Meta'* are Christians, there is a need that a Christian be made a *wəd mbàn*.

Chapter four discusses Old Testament passages (Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Exodus 3:6; Joshua 4) and New Testament passages (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27; James 5:13-16) which the *Meta'* Christians associate with the *mbàn*. It shows the similarities and differences between the beliefs about the *mbàn* and what the Bible teaches in these passages.

Following from the above-mentioned chapters, I designed a strategy to empower and assist *Meta'* Christians in North West Cameroon to implement a contextualised and biblical practice of the *mbàn* and its related blessing and memorial practices. This strategy could also be promoted among non-Christians in North West Cameroon.

This contextualised strategy advocates the following about the *mbàn* and its related blessing and memorial practices among *Meta'* Christians in North West Cameroon: encourage the view of “a family church” associated with New Testament home church meetings. Since prayer is an intrinsic part of the proceedings in the *mbàn*, I advocate that all prayer in the *mbàn* should



be made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to the Bible, is the only mediator between man and God. The use and invocation of the names of the “living dead” should be discouraged. All blessings and activities conducted for the entire family or a member of the family should also be made in the name of the Lord. I further advocate a modified use of the following elements found in the *mbàn*: *to' inəbi* (the family cup), the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles), the *fibig* (cam wood) that is rubbed on the family members and the raffia palm wine. Those who do not wish to use *to' inəbi* (the family cup), may use a glass; those who object to using the *fibig* (cam wood) may use olive oil, and those who object to drinking raffia palm wine may drink water.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The findings of this research form an important step in helping the local church in North West Cameroon to challenge unfounded misunderstandings about the *mbàn* among Christians; and to educate them, particularly Pentecostals in North West Cameroon, about the origin, purpose and practices identified in the *mbàn*. The findings will also enable the local church to show (a) the interesting similarities identified in the blessing and remembrance practices in the *mbàn* and some Bible passages about remembrance and blessings; and (b) the fact that some *Meta'* Christians associate these practices with some Bible passages. The greatest contribution made by this research is that it has provided a written record of the oral tradition of the the *mbàn* and its related blessing and remembrance practices. In addition, it has shown that the *mbàn* and its related practices promote the values of peace, love, unity, harmony, reconciliation. The Bible also promotes these values. To that end the hypothesis that it is possible to contextualise these practices for teaching remembrance and blessing practices in the local church was upheld.

Consequently, these points of convergence formed the basis for the design of a contextualised strategy for teaching remembrance and blessing practices in the local church.

## 6.4 Recommendations

This mini-thesis follows on the work of Dillon (1985:3) which did not provide much detail about the practices in the *mbàn*. It is also one of contributions aimed at making the message of the gospel relevant to African contexts, in this case that of the *Meta'* people, without losing the core message of the Gospel. Since the *Meta'* people are part of *Widikum* tribes in and around Cameroon, the following areas may be studied:

- 1) Explore a similar study about the *mbàn* among other clans of the *Widikum* tribe, namely, *Moghamo*, *Ngie*, and *Oshie* clans in and around Cameroon.

Since this mini-thesis did not engage in a thorough exegesis of the passages some *Meta'* Christians associate with some practices in the Old and New Testaments, it is recommended that:

- 2) An in-depth study to associate the blessing rituals in the *mbàn* with passages of the Old Testament and New Testament be undertaken.

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**APPENDIX A:**

**Questionnaire**

**Questionnaire in Meta'**



1. Ɖton ɛni ɛ mbàn ɛ ki ni ye?
1. Mbàn nya'a be kɔ ri ye?
2. Mbi kiɛ chɔ'ɔ wɛd mbàn ri ye?
3. ƚnũ mbe ni mbiɛ ghi ɛni ɛhgɛm ki mi ye?
4. À mi ye' ni chɛi mbàn, ti mbi wa tɔŋ nɛb ni à yiɛ mbàn?
5. Wɛd mbàn wiɛ yimɛ to'. Ɖton ɛni ɛ to' ze ɛ ki ni ye?
6. Ti mbi fà' mbiɛ to' chere iŋga mbàn?
7. Wɛd fibig wi ɛŋgu. Mbi kiɛ chɔ'ɛmɛd ri ye?
8. Ɖfà'ì ɛmɛd iŋga mbàn fɔri iŋga inɛbi ki ɛ ye?
9. ƚchĩ ni ɛnũ ɛ Dwiè ɛ fɛ ye'e, ti wa kiri kɛb mbàn? Na' ɛton.
10. Ti mbi nuŋ wɛd Kristo ɛni ɛ wɛd mbàn? Na' ɛton.
11. Bêd Kristo mɔ'ɔ mbiɛ kɔndiɛ ni mbi nimni mbàn. E ikɔndi ki ni ye?

### Questionnaire in English

I, Fokwa John Nji, am a Masters student of the South African Theological Seminary. I intend to do a research on the **“Continuity or discontinuity of blessing rituals in African Traditional Religion: Towards a contextual theology of the Christian faith among the Meta people in North West Cameroon”**.

Many Meta people are very familiar with the *mbàn* which is the family meeting house. I wish to plead with you to assist me to discover more about this house and to come out with some suggestions that may change our understanding of the *mbàn* and the blessing ritual that take place in it. Thanks very much for assisting me in this.

Name:

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Age:

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Sex (optional):

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Occupation (optional):

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Date:

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Questions: (You can write overleaf if space is small)

1. What is your understanding of Mbàn?
2. What is the origin of mbàn?
3. How is the Wəd Mbàn (family head) chosen?
4. What is the use of the əghəm (place with pebbles) in the mbàn?
5. Minus the əghəm, can a house still be called a mbàn?
6. The wəd mbàn usually has and uses the family cup. What is the use of this cup?
7. Can any other cup be used in the mbàn apart from this cup?
8. There is a man called the wəd fìbig (person of camwood). How is he chosen?
9. What is his role in the mbàn and in the family?
10. With the advent of Christianity, is the mbàn still necessary? Give reasons.
11. Should a Christian be made a wəd mbàn? Give reasons for or against.
12. Some Christians think that we should completely do away with the mbàn. What is your opinion? Give reasons for your opinion.

Thanks for cooperation and understanding.

## **APPENDIX B:**

### **The names of the participants who were either interviewed or responded to the questionnaire**

Akum PT (2017) Recorded and transcribed interview on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon.

Atoh JN (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Awazi MC (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Azah V (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Bamenda, North West Region, Cameroon

Bah MF (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Cho'o JA (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview in Mbengwi, North west Region, Cameroon on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017

Chunga PN (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview in Mbengwi, North west Region, Cameroon on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017

Fogwe ZN (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Njinibi – Mbengwi, North West Region

Fokam EM (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Fokum FT (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fokwa LS (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fokwa MM (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Forkwa IA (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fombad J (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fominyen N II. Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Nyen, Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fomukong EF (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Fomukong M (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Fonangoh PF (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fondeh O (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fonong III JA (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Fonong ET (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Massa PN (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Mobit ET (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June 2017

Mobit RM (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Mokom TN (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Monong RM (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Muki DM (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Muki GT (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Munoh JT (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Njee NJ (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Nji JF (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Njokom TT III (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Soh SF (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

Tada MG (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 in Benakuma, North West Region, Cameroon

Tah EG (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tah PA (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2017

Tangoh CA (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tangwan PM (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tanifum EF II (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tata EF (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tata EM (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tatazoh MK (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tarke RM (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tewidikum ST (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2017 at Nyen - Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Tenung JT (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

Teghen RM (2017). Respondent to a questionnaire. Received on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April

Tinyama PA (2017). Recorded and transcribed interview on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2017 in Mbengwi, North West Region, Cameroon

## APPENDIX C:

### A detailed summary of the answers to the interview and the questionnaire

#### 1. What is your understanding of *mbàn*?

*Mbàn* is the most important house in the compound that if anything happens, people go and meet inside. It may be that someone is sick or there may be an epidemic or they wish to give a daughter in marriage or they bless the grandchildren from the daughter, they do it inside. Whatever happens in the family, be it good or bad, people must go and meet in it. It is a house of blessings and peace. One of the participants refers to this as a “meeting and prayer house” which existed long ago before the coming of the missionaries to establish churches. It is a house to resolve disputes, bless marriages and for sending daughters out for marriage. This house is usually located in the most strategic position in the compound.

This house is only a single room of about 3 metres square with little or no furniture in it. This makes space for many people to sit in it comfortably. In some instances, rooms may be attached to it particularly for guests.

One of the Meta’ people refers to this house as “the original church”. He says it is the original church that existed in Meta’ before the coming of Christianity. He also calls it “a house of prayers to God”. He insists that nothing is done in this house without prayers. One other person adds that the *mbàn* was instituted because our forefathers were looking for a way to get into contact with God. He says the Meta’ people had thought that God was very far from the people; as such they looked for a way to draw him nearer. They did not know how to do this. That is why they originated the *mbàn*. That is why they called on their forefathers to intercede to God Almighty on their behalf. There is no fighting in the *mbàn*. There is no quarrelling in the *mbàn*. No one can point a finger to anyone in the *mbàn*. If anyone is being chased and he runs into the *mbàn*, no one can fetch him out. As one of the participants declares, the ancestors of the Meta’ people knew God Almighty, that is why they rose up in the morning at sunrise and prayed to him, and did so again at sunset. Each time anyone has a problem; he will go outside, look up to the sky and ask God why he has permitted such as these to happen to him. This is especially when he knows that he has not wronged anyone.

## 2. What is the origin of *mbàn*?

Many people cannot recount the origin of the *mbàn*. Even in Moghamo which the Meta' people left to come to the present area, they do not know its origin with certitude. Most of them just know and acclaim that the *mbàn* started with our ancestors many generations ago and extends as the family increases.

There are two oral traditions about the origin of the *mbàn*. One of them is that before the Meta' people left Tadkon in Gukah Moghamo, as they sojourned from Widikum, they traveled with the elements of the *mbàn* which include: the family cup, the cam wood, the stool for the family head and the pebbles. They put all these things in the first *mbàn* at Zang Mbeng and as the families multiplied and dispersed, they were given the same. As such the *mbàn* keeps multiplying as the families increase.

The other oral tradition is that as the Meta' people left Tadkon in Moghamo and settled at Zang Mbeng, they thought it wise that they should do something to foster family unity. As such the idea of *mbàn* was introduced. As the various families dispersed from there, the chief gave them the elements that constitute the *mbàn*. As other families multiply and grow, it necessitates the creation of other *mbàns*. That is how the *mbàns* are scattered all over Meta'.

The new *mbàn* is created in stages. The first stage is that the person who intends to establish a new *mbàn* communicates the intention to the *wèd mbàn* of the mother *mbàn*. Once the permission is granted, the *wèd mbàn* of the mother *mbàn* sets requirements which must be fulfilled before the ceremony is carried out. What should be done should include preparing a goat and a chicken, cooking food and providing drinks and money to give to the important personalities that will attend the ceremony. The date of the ceremony would then be fixed. The initiator would then construct the new *mbàn*, obtain a drinking cup probably from the horn of an ox or a cow and some pebbles from the river. During the transfer ceremony, the *wèd mbàn* from the mother *mbàn* holds the old horn (cup) with his left hand and places the new horn (cup) by it. He places them on a plantain leaf side by side. The next thing is that he places the new pebbles in the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) in the old *mbàn*. As he is doing all the above, he makes some incantations showing and telling the ancestors that the family is

growing larger and larger and that this warrants the establishment of another *mbàn*. Therefore, the ceremonies that are being performed in this *mbàn* will henceforth be performed there also. He adds one pebble from the old *mbàn* to those that were brought by the person that intends to establish the new *mbàn*. There is no need for the new family to come to the old *mbàn* for such rites.

Thereafter, the ceremony proceeds to the new *mbàn* where the pebbles are put in place and the horn (cup) is handed to the new family head. The entire process is then followed by prayers and feasting.

3. How is the *Wèd Mbàn* (family head) chosen?

He is chosen from among the children of the previous *wèd mbàn*. The previous *wèd mbàn* declares his successor to his brothers upon his death. If he is suspicious of the brothers, he can declare it to a very close friend. The one chosen must be of good character, amicable, honest, eloquent, sociable both within and outside the family, sharp in the brains and capable of handling a family.

When the previous *wèd mbàn* does not have a son of his own, he chooses one from among his brothers' children. If the new *wèd mbàn* is still too young, an elderly person will rule until he comes of age.

4. What is the use of the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) in the *mbàn*?

The *əghəm* is the circular place in the *mbàn* in which most of the rituals are performed. It is also where rafia palm wine or water is sprinkled whenever there is an occasion in the family. It is usually close to the door. It is by the *əghəm* that the *wèd mbàn* and *wèd fibig* sit. The *wèd mbàn* never sprinkles raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm* with the left hand. He must only do so with the right hand or with both hands while interceding or invoking the blessings from God on the family or an individual.

Some people believe that the spirits of the ancestors live in the *əghəm*, while others believe that these ancestors and God are present in it when they are called upon.

These pebbles are taken out of a river or stream and they represent departed family heads. The stones may not be twelve as in Joshua chapter four, but they are very significant. Stones play a very vital



role among the Meta' people. They serve as burial stones, oath swearing stones, boundary stones, stones that represent the clan, stones that represent king makers amongst many others.

If a *wəd mbàn* dies and another one is enthroned, a new pebble is added to the old stock. That is why some people call this "the family tree". When any ceremony is to be carried on here, the *wəd mbàn* calls the names of the departed ancestors he can remember and associates them with God who led them to the present site, such as "the God of A..., the God of B..., the God of C .... The Meta' people associate *əghəm* with blessings because from here, the *wəd mbàn* invokes blessings on the people.

Another important fact is that the Meta' people associate the pebbles in the *əghəm* with the memorial stones in Genesis 28:13; 28:18-22; Joshua 4. They relate them to the memory of the departed ancestors who brought them to the present site. The concept of God of ... is also said to be biblically based. The rubbing with cam wood is said to be as James 5:13-14 says, that the elders anoint anyone that is sick or has any type of problem. When the Meta' people eat and drink in the *mbàn*, they say they are sharing communion as found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 and Luke 22:17.

5. Minus the *əghəm*, can a house still be called a *mbàn*?

Many people think that it is the *əghəm* that makes the *mbàn* important because it is there that most of the rituals are done. They say that a house without the *əghəm* cannot be termed a *mbàn*. Some others, particularly those who are against the *mbàn*, think that blessings can still be done without sprinkling raffia palm wine or water into the *əghəm*. Some others are of the opinion that even the *mbàn* should be destroyed including the *əghəm*. Others think that the parlour of the house can be used instead of the *mbàn*. One of the participants insists that any house in which the family meets for any type of deliberation can be called a *mbàn*.

6. The *wəd mbàn* usually has and uses the family cup. What is the use of this cup?

The family cup (*to' inəbi*) is used to sprinkle water into the *əghəm*. It is used to give raffia palm wine to family members to drink from as a sign of blessing.

There are five individuals or groups of individuals who benefit from these blessings. The first to receive blessings from this cup are daughters to be given in marriage. This is a long process and begins with demanding the daughter's hand in marriage and continues until the day that she is blessed and sent to her husband's house. When a girl child has grown up and is ready for marriage, the parents of the suitor, who is often absent, visit the girl's home to convey their intention to have the girl as their son's wife. Should he be part of the delegation, he has to remain quiet and just observe the proceedings taking place in the *mbàn*. The parents of the suitor bring food and drinks—usually ten litres of raffia palm wine corked in a special way with the raffia palm leaves. The host family usually serve the visitors with a meal called “*əzwiiri əchw*” meaning “cool down”. After feasting, an interesting process will begin by the *wəd mbàn* (family head) asking the visitors why they have come. The visitors usually respond by saying, “We have come to uproot a plantain sucker from here and to plant it in our compound.” In response, the *wəd mbàn* will first uncork the wine the visitors brought and stretch the raffia leaves placed next to the *əghəm* (place with pebbles). Second, he will then sprinkle some of the wine on the leaves and pours some of it into *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and give it to the girl to take a sip it and return the rest to the leader of the visitors. If the girl wishes to marry the man, she will first respond by kneeling and taking the *to' inəbi* from the *wəd mbàn*. Her second action is sipping and returning the rest of the wine to the prospective father-in-law to confirm that she is willing to be married into his family. Once she does that, there will be general applause from those present, particularly from the prospective in-laws because this is a sign to show that she has accepted to marry into their family. Such jubilation is followed by the prospective father-in-law drinking the remaining wine in the *to' inəbi* and returning the *to' inəbi* with a sum of money that is between ten thousand CFA and twenty-five thousand CFA. This sum of money is called *izin mino'* (cork of the wine) or *ibiiri* (ask). In response, she will take the empty *to' inəbi* and the money and hand them to the *wəd mbàn*. After these events, the entire assembly will be served with the food that was brought by the suitor's parent and consume the remaining wine. At the end, the total figure of the bride price is determined and the dates of payments agreed. The visitors will return several times to pay the bride-price and to give food as well as tokens to some of the family members of the bride-to-be. She is taken away as the *igən* (bride) on the day of the last payment after a grand feasting ceremony involving both families held during the day. The blessing ceremony is held on that day, at about midnight. She is taken to the *mbàn* where her family members, particularly the

elderly, provide marriage counselling. After the counselling session, the *wəd mbàn* takes the *to' inəbi*, pours some wine into it and gives her to drink. Those present will pronounce blessing on her as she drinks. After that the *wəd fibig* (person who rubs cam wood) sprinkles some water on the *fibig* (cam wood) placed on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) at the *əghəm* (place with pebbles), and mixes it. He rubs the mixture on her chest, hands and feet. This action symbolises blessings, child bearing and being light in her home. In some instances, she is anointed with palm oil and rubbed with the cam wood. Prayer always follows all these procedures in the *mbàn*. After prayer she is presented with various gifts and handed to her husband's family who then take her that night to their home amidst joyous singing and dancing. It is believed even by the mainline churches and by the government that no marriage can be solemnised in these places without it having been done traditionally. A clergy participant declares that this is because a man can steal someone's daughter and do a wedding in court or in the church without the parents' consent. He adds that care must be taken before the church solemnises a wedding or the court declares a marriage. Some other participants feel that when a wedding has been done traditionally, it is believed that no ill-luck can follow the couple, since it is the entire family that has sat down and sent out the lady and showered blessings on the couple and given them gifts to start their home.

The role of the *mbàn* during marriage and its related blessings cause the *Meta'* people to call it "*nəb bən məy'*" meaning "the house of girls" or "the house of daughters". Hence, they are the only people to repair the *mbàn* when it needs to be repaired. It is important to explain that no marriage can be discussed if the woman refuses to take the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) from the *wəd mbàn* (family head) to the leader of the visiting team. *Meta'* people believe in woman's reproductive ability, hence the blessing and reproductive ability are pronounced in the *mbàn*. A barren wife must come back to the *mbàn* and another blessing ceremony will take place.

The second group to benefit from the blessings are daughters who have not had a child. These need to go back to the father's compound for another blessing ceremony to be done. The entire family may not be gathered as when she was first blessed and sent off. When she has been blessed, she is prayed for and given a pat on the back. If after all these, she remains barren, they consult sorcerers. Barrenness creates anxiety and stress among the bride's family. According to participants she is required to return to her home and another ceremony to bless her will be held in the *mbàn* in

the presence of the *wèd mbàn* (family head), parents and a few family members. The *wèd mbàn* (family head) will pour wine into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and give her to drink. The *wèd mbàn* will call on the ancestors, one by one, to look at their daughter, who is married but who has come back because she is barren, while she drinks. He requests them look at her and intercede to God, on her behalf, so that she bear children. After this the *wèd fibig* (the person who rubs cam wood) or the *wèd mbàn* (family head), then sprinkles some cam wood on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) at the place of pebbles. He sprinkles some water onto it, mixes it and rubs it on her chest, mentioning that whatever has caused her to be barren should be removed. Prayer follows and a pat on her back to close this ceremony. Two outcomes can be expected from this ceremony, namely, she either conceives and bear children or continues to be barren. In the case of the latter, the family will have to turn to traditional healers since this ceremony cannot be repeated. In the event of the former, the family will perceive it as an answer from God, and will thank the ancestors for interceding on behalf of their daughter.

The third group to benefit are children born to daughters of the compound. When these have serious illnesses or any misfortune or cannot make it in life, they have to go for blessings from the compound where their mothers originated. The child or children will be taken to the *mbàn*. When they are in the *mbàn*, the *wèd mbàn* does some rituals. First, he pours raffia palm wine or water into the *to' inəbi* (the family cup). Next he sprinkles some into the *əghəm* (the place with pebbles) calling on the ancestors and asking for health or for blessings on the children or on the child. Thirdly, he pours some of the raffia palm wine or water into the *to' inəbi* (family cup) and gives it to the child to drink. If there are more than one, they will drink according to their ages. Before he does this, there must first be prayers calling upon God to answer their prayers for the children and even for those that are far off and facing the same or similar challenges. These prayers are carried on by the elderly members of the family. The mother may drink first before the children. Lastly he tells them that they should have *əfù'ù* meaning “good luck” and that any stumbling block on their way should be removed.

Participants further mention an additional process. They mention that the *wèd fibig* (person who rubs cam wood) pinches a little bit of the dried *fibig* (cam wood), spreads it on the *iti ibig* (cam wood stone) by the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) and sprinkles water on the *fibig* (cam wood). When he has mixes this up, he rubs the children or the child

on the forehead or on the chest. As he does this he pronounces the following blessings: that their faces should shine like the cam wood and that any obstacle on their way should be removed; if they hit their feet against a stone, the stone should be broken and not the feet; if someone looks at them with evil intentions, the man should be blinded; if anyone wants to give them something, they should do so generously. Many other such blessing and strong words are showered on the children. As the cam wood is applied, they go out one after the other. At the end of the blessings, they will give some of the *fibig* (cam wood) to the mother to go and rub on the other children back at home.

The fourth group to benefit are family members after reconciliation. These drink from the family cup to show that they have been reconciled. Mention is made of the fact that after the matter has been resolved; all the parties will be made to drink from the *to' inəbi* (family cup) to show that everything is over and that anyone who talks again about the matter, or restarts the quarrel, or fights, will meet his doom. While they drink, the *wəd mbàn* (family head) says something like, "I do not know why brothers should be quarrelling or fighting. As we have discussed here in the presence of the spirits of our ancestors, I know that whatever evil must have come upon us to divide us must disappear. What we want now is '*əbərəbəd, əbərəbəd, əbərəbəd*' meaning 'peace, peace, peace'. Anybody who quarrels again will carry *ndòn* (a curse or ill-luck). We do not want anyone to have *ndòn*." Each person then greets the other and they leave. According to some participants, if disputes are not settled in the family, they can be taken to the traditional council, to the church or to the court. This depends upon whether the disputing parties are Christians or not. According to a retired church leader, the church requires that disputes be settled amicably in the family, thus they usually ask if the matter had been tried at home before proceeding to resolve the matter. The church does not desire its Christians to be quarrelling. And if any quarrel arises, it desires to see it resolved.

The fifth group that receives blessings in the *mbàn* are family members after the yearly family meeting. After the resolution of an inter-family or inter-tribal dispute, the parties end up drinking from the family cup as a sign of peace and reconciliation. The welfare of the entire family is addressed at these meetings. On the day of departure, everyone assembles in the *mbàn* (family meeting house) where each one drinks from the *to' inəbi* (the family cup) and each one is rubbed with *fibig* (cam wood). Some blessings are

pronounced. Just two are mentioned here. The first blessing says: “*əfù’ù, əfù’ù. tsi zen, mbə wo kəb ighi ye’e na’ mba*” which translates “good luck, good luck. Your faces should be bright; you look for things and bring our own”. The second blessing says: “*əbərəbəd, əbərəbəd. Mbə mi kəb ighi mbə zə,*” which translates “peace, peace” or “blessing, blessing. If you look for anything, you should find it.” Many more such blessings could be pronounced. There is the general belief that when people are blessed in this way they will prosper in all they do. All the family members will then return to their respective places of residence and return the next year to observe the same ceremony.

7. Can any other cup be used in the *p* apart from this cup?

While some people feel that only this cup can be used in the *mbàn*, some others think that blessings can still be done with any cup other than the family cup. Two of the Pentecostals accept that the cup is used for blessings, but they also say that it is used for cursing. They insist that when some family heads are in want, they use the *to’ inəbi* to sprinkle wine or water into the *əghəm* and invoke curses on family members so that they can be sick and as a result give them money or food. One of Pentecostal leaders says that the cup has been dedicated to gods and whatever is done with it is evil. One Roman Catholic Christian feels that another cup can be used if the *wəd mbàn* is unavailable and the *to’ inəbi* is not also available. This is in the case where there is an emergency like a serious illness and an elderly person in the family has to officiate in the place of the *wəd mbàn*. This other cup is used in the name of the *wəd mbàn*. To the other six participants, no other cup can be used except the *to’ inəbi*.

One of the participants proposes that a glass can be used since using this cup often and not washing it makes it unhealthy. He is also of the opinion that water instead of wine could be used for blessings since not everyone drinks raffia palm wine. One of the participants responds that for those who do not drink raffia palm wine, water could be used, saying that the meaning of the blessing is in the ceremony and not necessarily in the material used. Two other Pentecostals think that if someone does not wish to drink from the cup, he or she can touch it and pass it over.

8. There is a man called the *wəd fibig* (person who rubs camwood). How is he chosen?

He is chosen the same way as the *wəd mbàn* is chosen. In his case, he can be from the same mother as the *wəd mbàn* or he can be from another woman if his father had many wives. He must possess the same characteristics as the *wəd mbàn*. Unfortunately, not all families have the *wəd fibìg*. In this case the *wəd mbàn* handles the cup and rubs the cam wood.

The cam wood that the *wəd fibìg* uses is harvested from the cam wood tree, dried, ground or pounded, mixed with some water and dried and preserved. If this needs to be used, a piece of it is cut off and mixed on the *iti əghəm* (flat stone used to cover the *əghəm*) and applied to the one concerned. As he does this he pronounces the following blessings: that their faces should shine like the cam wood and that any obstacle on their way should be removed; if they hit their feet against a stone, the stone should be broken and not the feet; if someone looks at them with evil intentions, the man should be blinded; if anyone wants to give them something, they should do so generously.

9. What is his role in the *mbàn* and in the family?

He is the assistant to the *wəd mbàn*. He rubs family members with cam wood and utters blessings. Some families do not have the *wəd fibìg*.

10. With the advent of Christianity, is the *mbàn* still necessary? Give reasons.

For the proponents of the *mbàn*, the *mbàn* and all the elements for blessing including the *əghəm* should be maintained. Those who need it will come for it and those who do not need it should stay away from it. It should be kept as a monument for historic purposes and for research into the customs and culture of the Meta' people, even if there is no one to use it. An informant cites a case of someone who removed the *əghəm* from the *mbàn* and threw away the family cup and stool. After some time, he realised that he had done something wrong and went in search of them, but they were no more to be found. He had to pay very highly before another one was installed.

All the Protestants are agreed on the fact that the *mbàn* was and is still very necessary for the holding of family meetings, for discussions and for the performance of remembrance and rituals blessings. Some people intimate that the family meetings and

discussions will have little impact if the family members do not drink from the family cup and if they do not have cam wood applied. As they drink, many blessings are pronounced on them. The meal they eat and the wine they drink is compared to the Lord's Supper in church. In fact, the name of the Lord's Supper is derived from this common fellowship meal (*i tari bêd*). To one of these Protestants, people can still talk to God even without using the *to' inəbi* (family cup) or the *əghəm* (place with pebbles), while others are of the opinion that when the cup is used, the prayer becomes effective. To them all that matters are the words that come out of the mouth of the family head and not the wine in the cup.

The application of the cam wood finalises every family meeting and is memorable in the individual member's life as the *wəd fibig* or the *wəd mbàn* pronounces many other blessings. One of the elderly participant intimates that at the end of it all, they will leave but wish to come again, particularly if they prosper in what they are doing. To this participant, the family meeting house is a house many will want to visit time and again. During such meetings and discussions, the family members usually eat and drink very well. This food and drink is usually provided by the *wəd mbàn* in collaboration with others. Some of the people carry parcels of food home to their families who were not present.

For those against the *mbàn*, they should be destroyed. Two of them suggest that the house be maintained, but the cup and the cam wood should not be used. One of the leaders and one other Christian feel that these elements have been dedicated to false gods or are gods in themselves. All of the participants of the Pentecostal block consider the cup and the cam wood to be idols. One of the leaders and two other Christians say that people worship these gods unconsciously. Some family heads, particularly those of the Pentecostal block, have thrown these things away as not necessary. Many Protestants are against this and say they could be kept for posterity to know and learn about Meta' traditions and customs or that they could be kept as monuments or artifacts. When people meet something that has been there for generations, they should not throw it away. If they do not need it, they should let it be.

11. Should a Christian be made a *wəd mbàn*? Give reasons for or against.

The proponents of the *mbàn* hold that a Christian should be made a *wəd mbàn*. To one of them, the *mbàn* is like the family church, to another, the *mbàn* was the original church before the advent of



Christianity. The ancestors of the Meta' people wanted a way to be near, that is why they initiated the *mbàn*. Some are of the opinion that pastors should be made *bêd mbàn* because they act like family priests or pastors. When a pastor comes into a compound, he can enter and be entertained in the *mbàn*. They see nothing wrong with that because no evil exists in the *mbàn* and no one should fear to enter it or be exempt from entering it. One of them refers to a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon that was his village chief and Moderator at the same time. This indicates that the church and tradition can go together. All families are known by God and God works for their good. There is actually nothing negative with the *mbàn*, despite the fact that a few persons see the sanitary condition of the cup as a serious health matter. Some others think that some family heads can be wicked and wish illness on others so that they can bring him food and drinks, but such cases can be isolated. People go in and receive blessings as they receive it in church. God is present in the *mbàn* when the people pray and call on him. Thus it is a holy place. Some say that it is good for a Christian to be made a *wèd mbàn* because he is already a peace maker and should be there to make the family know more about God. Some of them add that the *wèd mbàn*, as the position describes, is already the family pastor. He presides in the family as the pastor presides in church. He leads the people into what is good and beneficial for the family. Therefore, the *mbàn* is not a bad place as the Pentecostals claim. It is there for the good of the people. One of the Protestants says that there is much more hatred, division, suspicion, occultism, and the manifestation of evil in the church, which is what can never happen and could never have happened in the *mbàn*.

To some of these Protestants, the Meta' people have a God-given culture and tradition that must be preserved. Meta' should not be like one of the lost cultures in the world. They say that God has various ways of revealing himself to people, and the *mbàn* is certainly one of them. Thus, the church cannot represent Meta' culture. The very name for temple in Meta' is *mbàn Dwià*, which means "the family meeting house of God". This name ties with the functionality of the *mbàn* because before the Meta' people made the choice of this term, they had thought very hard about it. Many Meta' people see a big similarity between the temple in Israel and the *mbàn*. The principal difference between the temple and the *mbàn* is that no sacrifices of any nature are carried out in the *mbàn*. One of the other differences between the temple and the *mbàn* is that the Meta' people share wine from the family cup and rub cam wood as signs of blessing. To some of these Protestants, people can still talk to God even without

using the *to' inəbi* (family cup) or the *əghəm* (place with pebbles), others are of the opinion that when the cup is used, the prayer becomes effective. This is so because to them, they have shared communion, and that communion means oneness and love. To them, cup or no cup, it is the words that come from the mouth of the *wəd mbàn* that matter, and the drinking from the cup is only like a covenant that seals what has been said.

12. Some Christians think that we should completely do away with the *mbàn*. What is your opinion? Give reasons for your opinion.

Those who wish to maintain the *mbàn* say that no harm is done in the *mbàn*. Many people insist that no negative things can be done in the *mbàn* when the family is assembled. They further insist that no one has ever seen any evil in the *mbàn*, for if there was, no one would ever enter that *mbàn* again. If anyone is escaping from danger and enters the *mbàn*, no one can go in there and get him; no harsh words are ever used in the *mbàn*; if anyone abuses another person or fights in the *mbàn*, that one is fined heavily; no one bows down to or worships anything or anyone in the *mbàn*; no animal is ever slaughtered or sacrificed in this house. Concerning sacrifices in the *mbàn*, many note that nothing is ever slaughtered in this house, and nothing is ever offered as a sacrifice to the gods or a god. To many others, the Meta' people have no gods, either on the mountains or in the rivers or behind the house or anywhere else. If they want to slaughter an animal for any purpose, it is done outside and there is no particular spot for this. The *mbàn* is a house for blessings, fellowship, communion, family unity, peace, justice, reconciliation and the grantings of traditional titles. These titles are only offered in the palace *mbàn* when someone has done an outstanding activity. At first it was conferred on those who returned from inter-tribal wars with human heads or with loot. No one is forced to go in or come out of it. No particular dress is required in the *mbàn*. No one is forced to drink from the family cup. Some may just touch the cup and leave it at that. Those who don't drink alcohol may be given water or they do not drink at all.

Most Roman Catholics feel that the *mbàn* is still very necessary and the blessings in it are good, but that it is better done in the church. They admit that some aspects of African Traditional Religions are good and should be maintained but the bad ones should be discarded. One of the Roman Catholics, a clergyman, sees the *mbàn* as still necessary even with the advent of Christianity. The difference

he brings in is that the family can still have blessings in the church and this, he thinks, supersedes all other blessings. Yet he admits that each religion has its merits and that some aspects of the African Traditional Religions are good and must be maintained. He describes the blessing of family members as not bad provided that it is done with a good mind. Many others like him believe that a true Christian stands for peace and justice and the *mbàn* equally stands for peace and justice. According to this clergyman, disputes are settled in the *mbàn* which is very good and it is equally important that the family assembles together. Where this is not done, family members do not know each other and cousins could marry each other, thus committing incest without knowing: and this is taboo in the Meta' culture. As to the question of completely doing away with the *mbàn*, most of the Roman Catholics believe that the *mbàn* unites the family and brings peace amongst them. They also show a sense of belonging, but where there is no peace, justice, and blessings, the *mbàn* can be done away with.

Another of them, also a clergyman, thinks that the *mbàn* should be given a different name such as a "family hall" and the place with pebbles should not be there, since no one has been able to give a satisfactory explanation as to the pebbles found there. He describes the blessing of family members as not bad provided that it is done with a good mind. He tells the story of Joshua, how he was asked by God to pick stones out of the River Jordan, as the foundation of how the Meta' people claim stones as from the time of Joshua. These stone were to remind the Israelites of what God had done for them. Since neither his father nor his grandfather's father gave him a satisfactory reason for the stones, the *mbàn* and the *əghəm* should be discarded. As to the question of completely doing away with the *mbàn*, most of the Roman Catholics believe that the *mbàn* unites the family and bring peace amongst them. They also show a sense of belonging, but where there is no peace, justice, and blessings, the *mbàn* can be dealt away with.

One of the elderly respondents declares that no one in Meta' land has ever picked up a pebble and said that it is a god. He insists that from the time the *mbàn* and the *əghəm* were instituted, he has not seen anything bad come from there. He has not seen an illness inflicted on someone in the *mbàn*. No one has died because he went into the *mbàn*. He says that when in the family meeting house, the Meta' people pray to God Almighty and to no one or to anything else. Before deliberations in this house begin, there is prayer. After the deliberations, there is a prayer.

Those who are against the *mbàn*, particularly the Pentecostals, say that it is a place to worship idols; that libations are done there which the Bible is against; that the cup and the cam wood have been dedicated to the devil; that even if God's name is pronounced in the *mbàn*, it does not mean that the *mbàn* is holy. Most of the non-Pentecostal participants in the research insist that the Pentecostals are generally not in support of anything that is related to tradition or that is regarded as traditional. One of the respondent claims that the *mbàn* is a place of sacrifice and that Christ had made one sacrifice and that is final and so no other sacrifice is necessary. When those who say that there are gods on the mountains are questioned as to those who worship the gods, the exact spot on the hills or in the rivers of the worship, the elements used in the worship and the presiding priest or priests, they cannot point a finger at the exact spot on the hills or in the rivers of the worship, the presiding priest or priests and they cannot name the items used for the sacrifice. One of the Pentecostal leaders as well as some others see the *əghəm* (place with pebbles) as the god the Meta' people worship. The Pentecostal leaders and some others see the sprinkling of raffia palm wine or water and the mixing and rubbing of people with cam wood as sacrifice and as a non-Christian practice. As to the question of the god to which the sacrifices are made, some defend their position by asking how sacrifices could be made where there is no god. One of them says that the names of the gods were known to the ancestors but the generation of today cannot remember the names and that people could be talking to demons but feel that they are talking to God.

One of the Pentecostals accepts that the ceremony in the *mbàn* is for ancestor veneration, but since libation and incantations are done there, it becomes a form of worship. To answer the question as to the words uttered during the libation, he says the words do not matter: someone can be speaking to the devil and make people believe that he is talking to God. Two of the participants insist that Meta' Christians have a song which say there are gods on the hills, valleys, rivers and so on, which means the gods actually exist. The song goes thus: "the gods of the mountains are no gods, the gods of the *əghəm* are no gods, and the gods of the rivers are no gods ...." The Pentecostals do not want to associate with those who wish to carry out traditional rites of any nature, whether they are for the good of the people or not. One of the leaders insists that tradition and Christianity cannot go together. According to all of the participants from the Pentecostal brethren, the *mbàn* should be destroyed and in its place, people can use ordinary parlours for meetings and for

prayers and the idea of *to' inəbi* and the *əghəm* should be discarded. One leader and one of the Christians are of the opinion that if the *mbàn* is the parlour of a house, then a Christian can be conveniently made the *wəd mbàn* (family head) because he will use scripture and not a cup to guide and direct the people. It is the general view of many that Pentecostals condemn things openly but practice them secretly. According to many of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, some Pentecostals exhibit double standards. They pretend to be very pious when among other Pentecostals, but when they turn their backs, they are something else.

To buttress this fact, one of my informants cites a case of his uncle who is a Pentecostal but continues to do the rituals at the *mbàn*. He went to him with a goat but he did not refuse to receive the goat. He went ahead and rubbed cam wood on the goat and on my informant and gave him some to take home. My informant doubted why someone who has outwardly professed to be a born-again Christian should still continue to carry on "pagan practices". He questioned what his uncle as a professed born-again Christian was doing with the *to' inəbi* and *fibig*.

Most Protestants think that the *mbàn* should be maintained, either as it is, or as an antiquity, or as an artefact, or even as a memoire. Some of them are very convinced that the rejection of the *mbàn* is only found in Pentecostal churches and the things they say influence people with little minds and with no deep Christian background to think that the *mbàn* is bad, and they have not done any studies to prove it. There could be a few negative issues about the *mbàn* such as the sanitary condition of the family cup, where many people drink from the same cup without cleaning it, or some of the family heads could in turn be wicked, but this cannot cancel the overall good of the *mbàn*. The most interesting thing about this is that they cannot point a finger at the particular group of people that worship these gods, the exact spot where the gods are worshipped, and the items used for the worship. They also cannot point a finger at the presiding priest(s) that do the sacrifices or the items or articles that are used for the sacrifices. The Protestants also think that many of the Pentecostals pretend while in the midst of other Pentecostals but while in their homes they do just what all other Christians and even non-Christians are doing. Some have been known to ask other family members to perform rituals on their behalf. Some Protestants think that even with the proliferation of churches evil is rampant. They say this is worse than what happened in the time of Noah.

Some of the Protestant clergy castigate them by saying that they still want to bring in colonial theology today, and are still looking at things with the eyes of the colonialist white man. In their opinion those who refuse the *mbàn* will one day come back to their senses and see the usefulness of it. People cannot hand something over to you in good faith, and then you take it and throw it away or destroy it instead of handing it to someone else if you do not have need of it. It is disheartening to hear that things that have been handed down from generation to generation have been destroyed in the twinkling of an eye.