

FROM SCRIPTURE ACCESS TO SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

**WHAT FACILITATES AND HINDERS SCRIPTURE
ENGAGEMENT IN THE MINYANKA CHURCHES OF MALI?**

By

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SYNOPSIS

The coming of the New Testament in 2006 heralded a new era of Scripture engagement for the Minyanka people of Mali. This paper evaluates the factors that have facilitated and hindered the process of interacting with God's Word. It includes an examination of the role of Bible understanding, literacy and methods of oral communication as well as the relationship between the Bible agency and the local churches.

The research takes an explorative approach in which a review of existing literature and initial interviews helped to formulate a research questionnaire which was carried out in Minyanka churches. The results of the survey became the subject of discussion in follow-up interviews with Malian Bible translators, pastors and expatriate colleagues in order to interpret the data. This was combined with documentary research into Scripture engagement in the history of the Minyanka church and in reports of recent activities.

The testimonies of change and transformation demonstrate that the translated Scriptures are making a difference. Scripture engagement is taking place as people read their New Testaments, listen to the audio Scriptures and tune into Minyanka radio programmes.

But this paper also shows that there is no room for complacency. There is an urgent call for basic Bible teaching and ongoing literacy classes. Pastors have an especially important role to play and need to be given encouragement, time, resources and training to more effectively facilitate Scripture engagement. Their choice of communication methods and their availability to answer questions from the Bible has a considerable influence on the way people interact with the Scriptures.

Spiritual transformation is a desired outcome of Scripture engagement, but it is not necessarily immediate and certainly not automatic. As Bible agencies have learnt in the West, it is possible to have access to Scripture and some of the best resources and programmes, but fail to be changed by God's Word. In this sense, Minyanka Christians are no different from Christians anywhere else in the world, facing the challenge of making Scripture engagement a priority amid the many distractions in life.

*To all those in churches and Bible agencies
who are working to facilitate
Scripture engagement in Mali, West Africa*

The views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author
and not necessarily those of the organisations with which he is associated.

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Soli Deo gloria

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lord, the moment we've been waiting for has arrived!
What we were longing for, our hands have touched!¹

These words of praise to God were spoken by Pastor Timothée Coulibaly at the launch of the New Testament in the Minyanka language of Mali, on 4 November 2006. Although the newly translated Scriptures were received enthusiastically by the crowd, Coulibaly was looking for something more than initial expressions of joy. He continued his prayer with two questions:

The food is ready. But who will eat it? Who will take their stand so that this book becomes light among the Minyanka people?²

Over two thousand copies were sold, but the Bible translation team knew that it was not enough to translate and distribute the Scriptures. They wanted this spiritual food to be eaten, and for this new book to enlighten the lives of the Minyanka people. In the words of the Forum Of Bible Agencies, their desire was “to see real Scripture Engagement: people encountering God’s Word in life-changing ways”.³

This paper will evaluate what has facilitated and hindered the realisation of this vision in the Minyanka churches of Mali.

1.1. Definition of Terms

Scripture Access is the availability of the Christian Scriptures in an appropriate language and media, at a place and a price that are within reach of the people.

Scripture Engagement is interaction with the text of the Bible, by reading or listening, in community or individually. The desired outcome is spiritual transformation as people

¹ Timothée Coulibaly, prayer at the Dedication of the Minyanka New Testament, Kimparana, Mali. November 4, 2006 (translated into English by author).

² Ibid.

³ Forum Of Bible Agencies International, “Scripture Engagement: Encountering God’s Word in Life-Changing Ways,” Scripture Engagement website, <http://www.scripture-engagement.org> (accessed August 19, 2013).

respond to God in obedience and faith. Chapter 2 includes an evaluation of existing definitions.

The *Minyanka* people live predominantly in south-eastern Mali. Their language, *Minyanka*, or more officially “Mamara”, is a member of the Senoufo language family.⁴ It is recognised by the Malian government as a “national language”.⁵

By *Minyanka churches* this paper means those churches situated in the majority Minyanka-speaking areas of Mali, where most members of the congregation speak Minyanka as their mother-tongue. Although Catholic churches are mentioned, the focus is on the Protestant evangelical churches, almost all of which belong to the *Eglise Chrétienne Evangélique* denomination.

By *Bible Agencies*, this paper refers to those Christian organisations that are involved in providing access to and encouraging engagement with the Bible. This includes the member organisations of the Forum Of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) such as the United Bible Societies, Scripture Union, SIL and Wycliffe Bible Translators.⁶ These agencies are not churches and are not normally engaged in church-planting activities. SIL, for example, “serves language communities worldwide, building their capacity for sustainable language development, by means of research, translation, training and materials development.”⁷

1.2. Motivation for Study

In October 2009, Scripture Engagement practitioners from a range of Bible agencies met together for a Worldwide Scripture Engagement Consultation in Malaysia. They recognised that there was still much to be learned “about how to enable and empower

⁴ M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2013). <http://www.ethnologue.com> (accessed July 18, 2013).

⁵ République du Mali, “Loi No. 96-049. Portant Modalités de Promotion des Langues Nationales,” August 2, 1996.

⁶ Forum Of Bible Agencies International, “Members,” Membership, Forum Of Bible Agencies International website. <http://www.forum-intl.net/membership> (accessed August 19, 2013).

⁷ SIL International, “Discover SIL,” SIL website. <http://www.sil.org/about/discover> (accessed August 30, 2013);

people to engage with Scripture”, acknowledging that “Bible translation has reached maturity compared to Scripture engagement, which is still in its infancy”⁸.

For years many Bible translators assumed that if we translated the Bible our intended recipients would gladly read it. This has turned out to be an erroneous assumption... We need an urgent, concerted effort to uncover the stumbling blocks that prevent people from engaging the Bible and then develop methods and theories that will help us overcome these obstacles.⁹

This paper responds to the need for more research in Scripture engagement. For the context of the Minyanka churches, its aim is to propose practical suggestions to assist the Bible translation team and churches in recalibrating their strategies and highlighting areas for attention.

On a personal level, having worked with the Minyanka team myself and now having responsibilities to consult with Bible translation teams across the region, the findings will be especially pertinent in advising on effective approaches to Scripture engagement.

1.3. Research Methodology

This paper will show that Scripture engagement in Minyanka churches is facilitated by multiple factors. It will evaluate what helps and hinders the understanding of the Scriptures, examining the role of orality and literacy in the Scripture engagement process as well as the task of the Bible agency in relation to the church.

The research methodology is illustrated in Figure 1-1. It takes an explorative approach in which an evaluation of existing literature and initial interviews help to formulate a research questionnaire to be carried out in Minyanka churches. The results of this survey then become the subject of discussion in follow-up interviews with Malian Bible translators, pastors and expatriate colleagues in order to interpret the data. This is combined with documentary research into Scripture engagement in the history of the Minyanka church and in reports of recent activities.

The questionnaires were carried out in person by Robert Goïta who is Literacy Coordinator in the Minyanka language team with a good knowledge of the churches in

⁸ Forum of Bible Agencies International, “Headlines from Listeners at WWSE”, Report from World Wide Scripture Engagement Consultation, Malaysia, 2009.

⁹ Ibid.

the region, as well as being an ordained pastor. The initial and follow-up interviews were by Skype and e-mail, between West Africa and the UK.

The aim of the participatory approach was to involve Minyanka pastors and translators in the process of research and discovery, rather than simply presenting them with the final analysis.

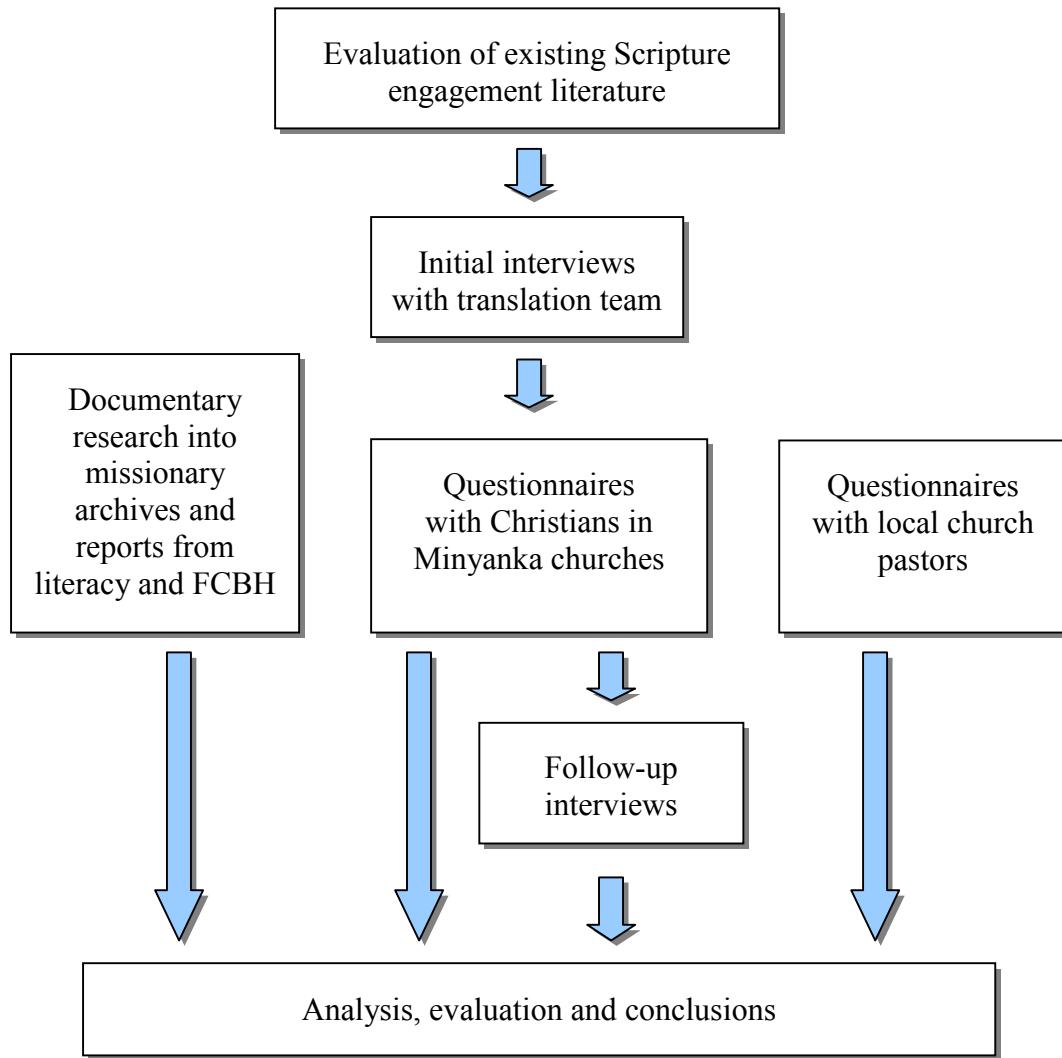


Figure 1-1. The research methodology

Chapter 2 of this paper interacts with existing Scripture engagement literature concerning biblical understanding, orality and literacy and the role of the Bible agency. Chapter 3 introduces the Minyanka church context from a historical perspective. Chapter 4 critically evaluates the results from the questionnaires and discusses their interpretation. Finally, Chapter 5 synthesises the research findings in order to identify those factors that facilitate and hinder Scripture engagement.

1.4. Scope and Limitations

The study was focussed on the Minyanka-majority Protestant evangelical churches, located primarily in the rural areas. All of the respondents identified themselves as Christian believers. Although mention is made of the Scriptures being used to share God’s Word with friends and neighbours, a survey of non-Christian engagement with the Bible is out of the scope of this paper.

The timing of the research coincided with the rainy season which made data collection more difficult. Most Christians were occupied in their fields during long hours of the day and could not be found at home. On several occasions, the interviewer went with the local pastor to the marketplace to see if they could find potential respondents.¹⁰ This was not entirely a disadvantage since it meant that the pastor could not simply direct the interviewer to the homes of the most devoted users of the Minyanka Scriptures. Another problem with the rainy season is that travel by motorbike is made hazardous on the water-logged roads between villages. Research visits had to be postponed a day or two because of heavy rainfall.

Mali suffered a period of instability in the years 2012 and 2013 but the areas most affected were in the north of the country, far from the Minyanka-speaking region.

1.5. Ethics and Permission

When visiting the local churches the interviewer sought out the pastor for permission before approaching potential interviewees. Respondents were assured that their name would not be recorded on the questionnaire and that this was not an “exam”. They could choose not to answer any question and were encouraged to ask if they needed clarification. Two of the questions concerned opinions on aspects of the pastor’s work. The interviewer ensured that the pastor was not present and the respondents were assured that he would not be told how they replied.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert Goïta, interview (Skype) with author, August 27, 2013.

¹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

2.1. The Definition and Aims of Scripture Engagement

The term ‘Scripture Engagement’ is a recent addition to the vocabulary of Bible agencies around the world.¹² Several definitions have been proposed, for example by FOBAI in 2007:

Scripture Engagement describes the intersection of three elements...: a *process* by which individuals and communities gain access to the Word of God (in the most appropriate language(s) and media), an ongoing set of *meaningful individual and group encounters* with God through his Word, and an intended *outcome* – people becoming followers of Jesus in the expectation that this will lead to their transformation as individuals and communities.¹³

The Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement (TUCSE), Indiana, proposes the following:

Scripture engagement is interaction with the biblical text in a way that provides sufficient opportunity for the text to speak for itself by the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling readers and listeners to hear the voice of God and discover for themselves the unique claim Jesus Christ is making upon them.¹⁴

Bettina Gottschlich, working with Bible translation teams and churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, suggests a further definition, putting the focus on transformation:

Scripture engagement is the process of knowing God and interacting with his Word in creative and appropriate ways that profoundly transforms us and draws us into living a personal and communal Kingdom lifestyle, through Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

¹² Fergus Macdonald, “The Psalms and Spirituality: A study of meditative engagement with selected psalms amongst Edinburgh students” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2008), 3. <http://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/2615> (accessed April 18, 2013).

¹³ Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Edinburgh 2010, Volume II: Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 257.

¹⁴ Center for Scripture Engagement, “What is Scripture Engagement?” Taylor University. <http://tucse.taylor.edu/what> (accessed August 21, 2013).

¹⁵ Bettina Gottschlich, “Transformational Scripture Engagement Among the Budu of Congo-Kinshasa” (Doctor of Intercultural Studies diss., Fuller Graduate Schools, 2012), 15.

What these definitions have in common is their emphasis on encountering God through the words of Scripture. As people read or hear the biblical text, they become conscious that God is speaking to them. The second two definitions make the trinitarian dimension of Scripture engagement explicit, emphasising the role of the Holy Spirit. In the Taylor definition, the Spirit's power provides the opportunity for the “text to speak for itself”. In Gottschlich's definition, the Spirit's power is linked with the whole process, including the profound lifestyle transformation that takes place.

There is some debate as to the place of *transformation* in the Scripture engagement process. The FOBAI definition refers to it as an “intended outcome”. Gottschlich puts it at the heart of what Scripture engagement is about and titles her doctoral thesis “Transformational Scripture Engagement”. The Taylor definition does not go further than the discovery of the “unique claim Jesus Christ is making”.¹⁶

These differences can be explained by the starting point of each. Gottschlich is working in a sub-Saharan African context where most people would call themselves Christians but where availability of Scripture was not leading to their use, understanding or transformation.¹⁷ TUSCE is working in a more secular context in which the Scriptures are seen as less sacred than in the past.¹⁸

An insight into the thinking behind the Taylor definition can be found in the doctoral thesis of Fergus Macdonald, the International Director of TUCSE, and formerly General Secretary of the United Bible Societies.¹⁹ He takes a group of university students in Edinburgh on a “Psalm Journey”, a meditative engagement in the Book of Psalms. The participants chosen were “on or beyond the fringes of the churches”.²⁰

Macdonald identifies five facets of Scripture engagement: (1) it is *interaction* with the Word of God; (2) it is *deference* shown towards the text; (3) it is *transformational*; (4) it is *transcendental*, enabling people to encounter God; and finally (5) it is *missional*, with

¹⁶ Center for Scripture Engagement, “What is Scripture Engagement?” Taylor University.

¹⁷ Gottschlich, “Transformational Scripture Engagement Among the Budu of Congo-Kinshasa”, 4.

¹⁸ Center for Scripture Engagement, “Why a Center for Scripture Engagement” Taylor University. <http://tucse.taylor.edu/why> (accessed August 21, 2013).

¹⁹ Center for Scripture Engagement, “Center Directors’ Bios” Taylor University. <http://tucse.taylor.edu/center-directors-bios> (accessed August 21, 2013).

²⁰ Macdonald, “The Psalms and Spirituality”, iii.

the aim that people come to faith and grow in maturity.²¹ In the analysis of his research data, Macdonald observes that (1) and (2) are “essential components of Scripture engagement”, since without them Scripture engagement does not take place.²² But he classifies (3) and (4) as “desirable outcomes”, along with (5). In other words, he is arguing that Scripture engagement can take place without divine encounter and without life transformation. He found that although the participants in the Psalm Journey were engaged in a genuine conversation with the text of Scripture, none of them claimed explicitly to have encountered God through it and none of the non-Christians came to faith in Jesus Christ. Although the more religiously active respondents saw their faith confirmed, there was little or no indication of transformation among the less religiously active.²³

The implication of Macdonald’s research is that Bible agencies and churches can facilitate Scripture engagement by helping people to interact with the Bible text, but that the desired outcomes will be neither automatic nor immediate. This is presumably why the “power of the Holy Spirit” is mentioned in the definitions since encounter with God and spiritual transformation is something that necessarily requires a divine agent.²⁴

Although Scripture engagement does not automatically lead to transformation and growth in spiritual maturity, there is evidence to suggest that there is a strong link between them.²⁵ In the United States, the REVEAL survey was carried out in a thousand churches with 250,000 church-goers over a four year period. It found that “the most effective strategy for moving people forward in their journey of faith is biblical engagement”²⁶ and that “nothing had a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture”:²⁷

²¹ Ibid., 187.

²² Ibid., 188.

²³ Ibid., 200.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:14; Matthew 11:25-27.

²⁵ Bible Society, “Taking the pulse: Is the Bible alive and well in the Church today?” Survey commissioned by the Bible Society (UK, 2008), 9. <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/taking-the-pulse> (accessed July 24, 2013).

²⁶ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

2.2. The Scripture Engagement Process

Both the FOBAI and Gottschlich definitions describe Scripture engagement as a *process*. Harriet Hill, formerly International Scripture Use Coordinator for SIL International and now with the American Bible Society, develops this concept in a paper submitted to the Lausanne Global Conversation.²⁸ She describes Scripture Engagement as a five-step process from Bible Availability to Bible Engagement which can be arrested at any point along the way.²⁹

BIBLE AVAILABILITY

Do people have access to the Bible in a language and media that they are able to use?



BIBLE AWARENESS

Are people aware of the Bibles that are available? Are they exposed to them?



BIBLE USE

Do people choose to read or listen to the Bible?



BIBLE UNDERSTANDING

Do people understand what they read?



BIBLE ENGAGEMENT

Through interaction with the written word,
do people encounter the Living Word (Christ)?

Figure 2-1. The Bible Engagement Process

Any model is necessarily a simplification of the reality, but the first three steps of the process certainly make sense. Someone cannot use something they are unaware of, and they cannot be aware of the availability of something that is not yet available. It is also true that at each stage there are potential obstacles that can prevent people from moving

²⁸ Harriet Hill, “Bible Engagement: A Process,” Scripture Engagement, The Lausanne Global Conversation website. <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10154> (accessed August 21, 2013).

²⁹ Ibid.

to the next step. For example, if there is a complete lack of Bible understanding, it will be hard to move on to Bible engagement, interacting with the Word and encountering its divine author.

The weakness of the model is that Bible use leading to Bible understanding and Bible engagement is not simply a linear process. It can be better diagrammed as a cyclical process, where repeated use leads to deepened understanding and ongoing engagement. Joseph Crockett observes a cyclical behaviour in his analysis of the psychological and social processes at work when people engage with Scripture:

Individuals' Scripture use contribute [sic] to their views and use of Scripture, and in turn, their use of Scripture produces and reproduces interpretive regularities that generate and sustain their meanings.³⁰

The process can also move in the opposite direction. Bible engagement can lead to increased Bible understanding and the desire to read or listen to the Bible more.

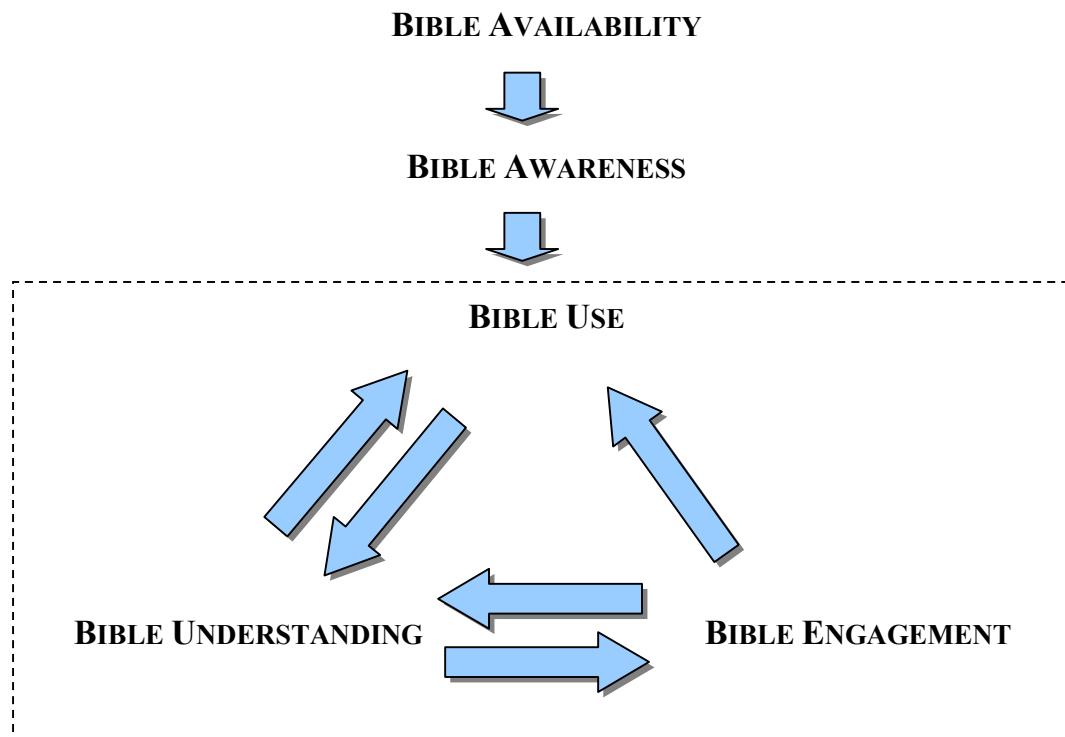


Figure 2-2. The Bible Engagement Process Revised

³⁰ Joseph V. Crockett, "Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as They Engage Scripture Texts," *Black Theology* 3, no. 1 (2005), 113.

In the revised process diagram, there is no direct arrow leading from Bible use to Bible engagement. The implication is that for Bible engagement to take place, it must include the necessary step of Bible understanding.

2.3. The Role of Understanding in the Scripture Engagement Process

The clarity of the Bible

In his research into language use in Kenyan churches, John Ommani Luchivia found that “understanding” was a recurring objective:

Preachers want all the people who come to church to understand the message. The people also want to understand and be understood. In my analysis of texts, the idea of understanding and the word “understand” appeared more than any other word.³¹

The Bible itself stresses the importance of understanding its words. When the evangelist Philip met the Ethiopian Eunuch, he found him reading the book of Isaiah. Philip’s first question was “Do you understand what you are reading?”³² Jesus emphasised understanding in the Parable of the Sower:

When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not *understand* it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart... But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and *understands* it. (Matthew 13:19, 23)

The implication is that Jesus believed that the Scriptures are able to be understood, and not only by their original audience. He chided his disciples for their slowness to understand what had been written centuries beforehand.³³ At the same time, however, the Bible points to the need for a spiritual awakening, an opening of minds in order to understand.³⁴

Wayne Grudem defends the doctrine of the *perspicuity* or *clarity of Scripture*, but cites some necessary qualifications:

Scripture affirms that it is able to be understood but (1) not all at once, (2) not without effort, (3) not without means, (4) not without the reader’s

³¹ John Ommani Luchivia, “Contextualised Language Choice in the Church in Kenya” (Doctor of Intercultural Studies diss., Fuller Graduate Schools, 2012), 58-59.

³² Acts 8:30.

³³ Luke 24:25-27.

³⁴ Luke 24:45; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14.

willingness to obey it, (5) not without the help of the Holy Spirit, (6) not without human misunderstanding, and (7) never completely.³⁵

In the process of understanding, there will always be room for deeper understanding:

We might say, then, that *we do understand Scripture* because it is able to be understood, and *we are always seeking to understand Scripture more fully* because it is always able to be understood more fully.³⁶

Understanding is sometimes presented as if it is a binary question: a hearer either understands a passage of Scripture or they do not understand it. But for much of Scripture, there are *degrees* of biblical understanding and it can take a lifetime of Christian experience and learning, as well as the help of the Holy Spirit, to grasp the depths of God's Word. This is what some describe as a 'hermeneutical spiral' where the interpreter "spirals in" on the meaning of the text,³⁷ moving ever closer to its significance for today.³⁸

The clarity of Bible translations

Bible translators seek to produce translations that are *accurate* (conveying the same meaning as the original), *natural* (not sounding foreign) and *clear* (communicating in a way that readers will understand).³⁹ There has been much debate regarding what it means for a translation to be *clear* and translators have begun to apply lessons from *Relevance Theory*. Advocates of this theory contend that translations in the past had been built on a *code model* of communication,⁴⁰ where the "communicator encodes her intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code."⁴¹ In other words, the meaning is contained in the text itself and

³⁵ Wayne Grudem, "The Perspicuity of Scripture," *Themelios* 34, no. 3 (November 2009), 301.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 301.

³⁷ D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 39.

³⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: a Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 23; cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading*. (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 221; D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism, 15th Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 121.

³⁹ Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), xiii.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴¹ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, "Relevance Theory," *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 14 (2002), 249. http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/PUB/WPL/02papers/wilson_sperber.pdf (accessed August 22, 2013).

understanding will come if the receptor can successfully decode its contents. Relevance Theory, however, points to an *inferential model* of communication, where the communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided”⁴² In this model, meaning is seen to come from text *in context*, where the context might contain a lot more information than the text itself.

This theory had led Bible agencies to pay more attention to issues of biblical context. The United Bible Societies have moved from their policy of publishing Scriptures “without note or comment”⁴³ and are actively promoting the production of study Bibles.⁴⁴ Harriet Hill and Margaret Hill in their popular Scripture engagement guide, *Translating the Bible into Action*, consecrate a chapter to the importance of “Providing Necessary Background Information”:

People may have the Bible in their language, but they can still have trouble understanding Scripture if they don’t know the background information the biblical author assumed his audience would know.⁴⁵

Harriet Hill carried out research in Côte d’Ivoire on this issue, finding that “when background information is supplied, people’s understanding of Scripture increased dramatically”.⁴⁶ Wayne Dye cites “Background Knowledge” as one of his eight conditions of Scripture engagement.⁴⁷

Facilitating Bible understanding

The recognition of the role of contextual information in Bible understanding is certainly to be welcomed, but it does provoke additional questions for reflection.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1991), 64.

⁴⁴ Youssouf Dembélé, “L’impact des traductions bibliques sur la vie chrétienne,” in *Théologie et Vie Chrétienne en Afrique* ed. by Michel Kenmogne and Rubin Pohor (Yaoundé, Cameroon: ADG/Cotonou, Benin: Editions PBA, 2012), 103.

⁴⁵ Harriet Hill and Margaret Hill, *Translating the Bible into Action: How the Bible can be Relevant in all Languages and Cultures* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2008), 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁷ T. Wayne Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 93.

Firstly, there is the question of *how to provide this information*. Bible agencies focussed on translation tend to have a publishing mindset, seeing the most obvious place in footnotes, glossaries and study Bible notes. Indeed, some people may prefer or need to get their understanding in this way, but the vital role of the church must not be forgotten. Both *pastor-teachers* and *community* within the church are key sources of information and catalysts for growth in Bible understanding. Gottschlich has rightly emphasised the role of “people as Scripture resources”.⁴⁸ The New Testament teaches that God has gifted people as teachers to equip and build up the “body”.⁴⁹ Both the Ethiopian Eunuch⁵⁰ and Apollos⁵¹ are cited as examples of people who had access to the Scriptures but who needed someone to explain it to them.⁵² There is also the instruction to “teach and admonish one another”,⁵³ as Pauline Hoggarth from Scripture Union observes:

It’s important that we balance our personal engagement with God’s word with regular engagement *in community* so that our prejudices are questioned and our blind spots revealed.⁵⁴

Secondly, there is the deeper question as to *what Bible understanding actually means*. Hill’s research in Côte d’Ivoire focussed on providing relevant helps to understanding elements of biblical and cultural context.⁵⁵ But the Bible’s concept of understanding goes beyond a cognitive grasp of its meaning. The Old Testament psalmists claim that it is possible for someone to understand the Scriptures better than their intellectual superiors by demonstrating their understanding through their response. Interpretation is tightly connected with application:

I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.

I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts. (Psalm 119:99-100)

⁴⁸ Gottschlich, “Transformational Scripture Engagement Among the Budu of Congo-Kinshasa”, 128.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 4:13.

⁵⁰ Acts 8:30-35.

⁵¹ Acts 18:24-26.

⁵² Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 105.

⁵³ Colossians 3:16.

⁵⁴ Pauline Hoggarth, *The Seed and the Soil: Engaging with the Word of God* (Carlisle: Global Christian Library, Langham Creative Projects, 2011), 35.

⁵⁵ Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 62.

Jesus too observed that it was possible for the Bible scholars of his day to miss the point of the Scriptures and refuse to come to him to have life.⁵⁶

So Bible understanding does not come simply through contextual information. There is need for meditation, obedience and spiritual insight.⁵⁷ As Moonjang Lee explains, the purpose of “reading a sacred text is to gain personal knowledge and insight, not simply to amass objective knowledge.”⁵⁸ Publishers of study Bibles are recognising this, and there is a move to emphasise more issues of life application.⁵⁹

The steps of Bible understanding and Bible engagement coalesce as Scripture is brought to speak into contemporary life situations. A deepening sense of Bible understanding comes from a lifelong interaction between Scripture and context. This process is helpfully articulated in the Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture:

As we address Scripture, Scripture addresses us. We find that our culturally conditioned presuppositions are being challenged and our questions corrected. In fact, we are compelled to reformulate our previous questions and to ask fresh ones. So the living interaction proceeds.⁶⁰

Facilitating Scripture engagement, therefore, will mean encouraging people to enter into this dynamic encounter, growing in their understanding of the text in its original context and understanding its relevance in the context in which they live.

⁵⁶ John 5:39-40.

⁵⁷ See Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21.

⁵⁸ Moonjang Lee, “Reading the Bible in the Non-Western Church: An Asian Dimension,” in *Mission in the 21st Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* ed. Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 151.

⁵⁹ See *Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2007); *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁶⁰ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, “The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture”, 4.B. <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/73-lop-2.html> (accessed August 22, 2013).

2.4. The Role of Orality and Literacy in the Scripture Engagement Process

Literacy used to be seen as an essential key to unlock the Bible and facilitate Scripture engagement.⁶¹ Early missionaries in West Africa founded schools, opened Bible colleges and introduced literacy classes for new converts. As Herbert Klem observes, the missions held that a self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting church would need the foundation of “the written Word of God and the ability of the church members to read and interpret it for themselves”.⁶² In some cases, literacy became a formal or informal requirement for baptism and church membership.⁶³ For Bible agencies too, the printed Word was seen as “the ultimate objective”.⁶⁴ From the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, which made personal copies of the Scriptures accessible, Christianity “has walked on literate feet”.⁶⁵

The past twenty years have seen an increasing awareness of the role of oral methods of communication. The orality movement has promoted interest in chronological Bible storytelling⁶⁶, ethnomusicology, audio Scriptures and audiovisual media.⁶⁷ Giving motivation to this movement is the realisation that most of the world’s population rely on or prefer oral forms of communication, and this is especially the case among peoples unreached by the gospel. Grant Lovejoy, Director of Orality Strategies for IMB, estimates that 5.7 billion adults and children are oral communicators, “because either they are illiterate or their reading comprehension is inadequate”.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Michel Kenmogne, *La Traduction de la Bible et l’Eglise: Enjeux et défis pour l’Afrique francophone [The Translation of the Bible and the Church: Challenges for Francophone Africa]*. (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions CLE, 2009), 234; Grace Adjekum, “Beyond Literacy: Function Equivalence for Scripture Use in Ghana” (MA diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 36.

⁶² Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1982), 179.

⁶³ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁴ Gilbert Ansre, “The Crucial Role of Oral-Scripture: Focus Africa,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 2 (Apr-Jun 1995): 65.

⁶⁵ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *Making Disciples of Oral Learners* (Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 54, 2005), 7. http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP54_IG25.pdf (accessed August 22, 2013).

⁶⁶ International Mission Board, “Chronological Bible Storying,” Orality Strategies website. <https://www.oralitystrategies.org/strategies.cfm?id=1> (accessed August 27, 2013).

⁶⁷ Viggo Søgaard, *Communicating Scriptures: The Bible in Audio and Video Formats* (Reading, UK: United Bible Societies, 2001), 1; International Orality Network, <http://orality.net> (accessed August 27, 2013).

⁶⁸ Grant Lovejoy, “The Extent of Orality: 2012 Update,” *Orality Journal* 1, no. 1 (2012), 29. <http://www.orality.net/sites/default/files/Grant%20Lovejoy%20OJ082012v1n1.pdf> (accessed August 23, 2013).

It is recognised today that the concept of literacy is more complex than simply identifying whether someone can read or not.⁶⁹ Gilbert Ansre, a UBS translation consultant, relates this reality to Bible reading in five helpful statements:

1. Not all people who claim they can read actually can do so.
2. Not all who can read actually do read.
3. Not all who actually read do read well.
4. Not all who read well do actually read Scripture.
5. Not all who read the Scripture do so regularly.⁷⁰

It makes sense, therefore, to find ways of communicating the Scriptures orally to facilitate Scripture engagement. However, a word of caution is appropriate. There is a tendency for new movements in mission to so stress the necessary correctives to past methods of communication that they can push the pendulum too far in the other direction. It can lead to polarised thinking, where oral communication is idealised and the value of literacy minimised.

In his research into the relation between literacy and spiritual growth in India, Don Edwards recognises the value of the orality movement in emphasising oral teaching methods for illiterate peoples, but he argues that it “does not adequately address the implications of illiteracy on all of life”.⁷¹ Walter Ong, who is often cited as an authority on orality, rightly admits the advantages of literacy:

Orality is not an ideal, and never was. To approach it positively is not to advocate it as a permanent state for any culture. Literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing. Oral cultures today value their oral traditions and agonize over the loss of these traditions, but I have never encountered or heard of an oral culture that does not want to achieve literacy as soon as possible.⁷²

Edwards compares access to memorised oral Bible stories with the ability to read the printed Scriptures, but he does not address the subject of audio Scriptures. These are different, of course, to Bible storying, in that with audio Scriptures listeners are able to access the whole Bible text in a form that does not run the risk of being deformed or

⁶⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁰ Ansre, “The Crucial Role of Oral-Scripture”, 66.

⁷¹ Don Edwards, *Is Hearing Enough? Literacy and the Great Commandments* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2010), 2.

⁷² Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. 30th Anniversary ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 171.

forgotten over time. In this sense, listeners are not missing out on anything a Bible reader could find. Edwards asserts that oral disciples “are limited in their ability to retain the basic biblical foundations for enduring discipleship”⁷³ but with access to all the translated Scriptures in audio form this limitation can be significantly reduced. Research has shown that the style of audio recording does matter, however, with non-literate people preferring recordings based on translations that take into account oral forms of communication, rather than single-voice readings of literary style texts.⁷⁴

Gospel Recordings made an early start in distributing gospel messages,⁷⁵ but Bible agencies were slow to seize the potential of audio for the diffusion of the translated Scriptures.⁷⁶ It took visionary innovators outside of the larger organisations such as Harvey Hoekstra (Audio Scriptures International)⁷⁷ and Jerry Jackson (Hosanna)⁷⁸ to move things forward. In pilot projects in Ghana, Ansre saw that “enthusiasm and interest for oral-Scripture is extremely high”.⁷⁹

The widespread availability of digital technology in the twenty-first century has accelerated the pace of change. The largest Audio Scriptures organisation, Faith Comes By Hearing (Hosanna), has now recorded New Testaments in 737 languages in 189 countries.⁸⁰ These are distributed on solar-powered digital audio players called Proclaimers as well as on the Internet and via smartphone apps.⁸¹

As well as giving access to non-readers, audio Scriptures have other advantages over the printed page. It can be a lot easier to listen to large portions of the Scriptures than to

⁷³ Edwards, *Is Hearing Enough?*, 57.

⁷⁴ Julian Sundarsingh, “Toward a Media-Based Translation: Communicating Biblical Scriptures to Non-Literates in Rural Tamilnadu, India” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 267.

⁷⁵ Global Recordings Network, “The History of GRN,” GRN website. <http://globalrecordings.net/en/history> (accessed September 7, 2013).

⁷⁶ Viggo Søgaard, “The Emergence of Audio-Scriptures in Church and Mission,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 2 (Apr-Jun 1995), 71.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁸ Faith Comes By Hearing, “History,” FCBH website. <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/history> (accessed August 22, 2013).

⁷⁹ Ansre, “The Crucial Role of Oral-Scripture”, 67.

⁸⁰ Faith Comes By Hearing, “Faith Comes By Hearing now has Scripture Recordings in 737 Languages,” FCBH website, entry posted August 9, 2013. <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/faith-comes-hearing-now-has-scripture-recordings-737-languages> (accessed August 23, 2013).

⁸¹ Richard Margetts, “Which Audio Player?: Listening to the Translated Scriptures, A Review of Today’s Digital Audio Players,” Scripture Engagement website, entry posted May 16, 2011. <http://scripture-engagement.org/content/which-audio-player> (accessed August 27, 2013).

read them, especially for hesitant readers. They also enable people to listen while they are doing other things. But there are disadvantages in that audio players can get broken, rechargeable batteries wear out, and navigation tends to be by chapter, meaning that someone cannot easily go to a specific verse in the middle of a chapter or spend more time meditating on a particular passage. A more comprehensive comparison can be found in Appendix B.

In today's world, it should be unnecessary to choose between reading and listening to Scripture. They can reinforce each other, as Macdonald found in his Psalm Journey research.⁸² Literacy should be encouraged as well as oral teaching methods. This paper will investigate the extent to which this is the case in the Minyanka churches.

2.5. The Role of Bible Agencies in the Scripture Engagement Process

Bible translation in Africa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was largely the work of church-planting missionary societies, with the Bible Societies taking responsibility for publication.⁸³ Because of comity agreements between missionary societies, which assigned different geographical areas to each, there was less need for collaboration across multiple denominations. A Bible translation project in a local language could be the work of a single church or mission. As portions of the Scriptures became available, they were tested, put to use and refined in the day-to-day evangelistic, discipling and Bible teaching ministries of the church.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the task of Bible translation moving into the hands of specialist Bible agencies. Although translation work was faster and of better quality, the link between the churches and Bible translation was considerably weaker. Harriet Hill identifies the unintended consequences of such a separation:

Translations in the nineteenth century of an inferior quality were used widely in the churches. Translations of superior quality in the twentieth century often sat in storehouses, rejected by those for whom they were intended.⁸⁴

⁸² Macdonald, "The Psalms and Spirituality", 219.

⁸³ Ype Schaaf, *On Their Way Rejoicing: The History and Role of the Bible in Africa*. Revised ed. (Oxford: Regnum Africa, 2002), 114.

⁸⁴ Harriet Hill, "The Vernacular Treasure: A Century of Mother-Tongue Bible Translation," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 30.2 (April 2006), 83.

Although there have been many successful translations in the twentieth-century, Hill's assessment is shown to be accurate in those projects where church and mission leaders were unsupportive of vernacular language use and where it appears that translation teams worked separately from the church.⁸⁵

William Cameron Townsend, who founded SIL in 1934 and Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1942, was specific about the limits to which translators should get involved with the local church. He promoted a minimalist approach which consisted of linguistic research and three other priorities:

first, to produce first-time translations of portions of the Scriptures...; two, to teach some of the local language group to read the Scriptures; and third, to lead at least some of them to the saving knowledge of Christ.⁸⁶

After these objectives had been attained, the team was urged to move on to another Bible-less group, with the confidence that a "handful of believers with God's Word to feed upon and the Holy Spirit in their hearts to strengthen and lead them are safe."⁸⁷ Fredrick Aldridge identifies the influence of "evangelical biblicism" in Townsend's thinking. For the founder of Wycliffe, giving access to the printed Scriptures would be enough, since the "perspicuity of Scripture" would render its truths readily apparent. God would gift leaders from among the people as he had promised.⁸⁸

Interestingly, Townsend admits that the Cakchiquel New Testament on which he worked had "never been used a great deal in the pulpits of the native churches." He suspected that if he had stayed among the people "it would have been introduced with great advantage into the public life of the church".⁸⁹ Ongoing Scripture engagement was not quite as automatic as he had predicted.

Facilitating Scripture engagement in the twenty-first century

Bible agencies have a key role to play in facilitating Scripture engagement. The recognition of this fact is influencing current strategy. For example, Bible Societies in

⁸⁵ David J. Landin, "Some Factors Which Influence Acceptance of Vernacular Scriptures," *Notes on Scripture in Use and Language Programs* 24 (1990), 17.

⁸⁶ William Cameron Townsend (1977), quoted in Fredrick A. Aldridge Jr., "William Cameron Townsend and his Philosophy of National Involvement in the Summer Institute of Linguistics" (MA thesis. Excelsior College, New York, 2007), 96-97.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 97.

the West have found that while Bible ownership is widespread, Scripture engagement is decreasing.⁹⁰ They see the need to do more than their traditional three emphases of translation, publication and distribution. In 2000, UBS amended their purpose statement to include “helping people interact with the Word of God”⁹¹

The influence of these changes can be seen in “The Lifecycle of the Bible” which presents the priorities of the Bible Society in the UK. Under the heading “Bible Credibility”, come engagement and advocacy (Figure 2-3).

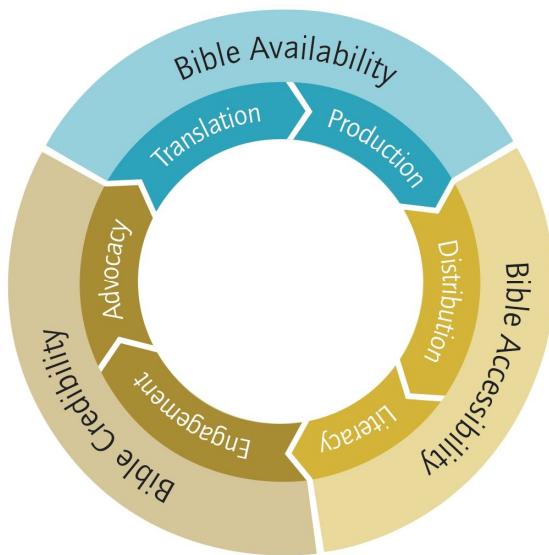


Figure 2-3. *The Life Cycle of the Bible*⁹²

Within Wycliffe and SIL, Scripture engagement has become a greater focus in the past decade, with ‘Scripture Use’ taking its place as a domain of activity alongside linguistics, literacy and translation.⁹³ Language teams are encouraged to plan

⁹⁰ Bible Society, “Taking the pulse: Is the Bible alive and well in the Church today?” Survey commissioned by the Bible Society, UK, 2008. <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/taking-the-pulse> (accessed September 6, 2013); Barna Group, *The State of the Bible, 2013: A Study of US Adults* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2013). <http://www.americanbible.org/uploads/content/State%20of%20the%20Bible%20Report%202013.pdf> (accessed July 29, 2013).

⁹¹ Balia and Kim, *Edinburgh 2010, Volume II: Witnessing to Christ Today*, 254.

⁹² Bible Society, “The Lifecycle of the Bible,” Bible Society UK. <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/what-we-do> (accessed August 2, 2013).

⁹³ SIL International, “Scripture Engagement,” SIL website. <http://www.sil.org/training/scripture-engagement> (accessed August 30, 2013); Wycliffe Bible Translators UK, “Scripture Use,” Wycliffe UK website. <http://wycliffe.org.uk/give/go/roles-scriptureuse.html> (accessed August 30, 2013).

strategically with an impact-oriented focus in mind, rather than seeing it as an afterthought.⁹⁴

Bible translation agencies are seeking to work more closely with the church, with theologians and theological seminaries. The Francophone Initiative, for example, is working to “change the perception that Bible translation is the responsibility of the sodality (Bible agency) to that of the modality (church)”.⁹⁵ In this way, the translation task is understood not as a complete missiological strategy on its own, but rather part of something greater.⁹⁶

This paper now moves to the context of Mali in order to evaluate the extent to which these concepts in Scripture engagement are being realised among the Minyanka people.

⁹⁴ Rick Brown et al., “Aiming for Impact: We Are What We Celebrate,” Wycliffe and SIL International Communications, *Intercom* (Jan-Apr 2006), 5.

⁹⁵ Michel Kenmogne, “Engaging with the Current Context of Bible Translation in Africa: The Francophone Initiative,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 15, no. 2 (December 2012), 38.

⁹⁶ Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads*, 181.

CHAPTER 3

SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT IN THE MINYANKA CHURCH CONTEXT

3.1. The Minyanka People

There are approximately 738,000 speakers of the Minyanka language, most of whom live in the circles of Yorosso, San and Koutiala in the regions of Sikasso and Ségou in the south of Mali.⁹⁷

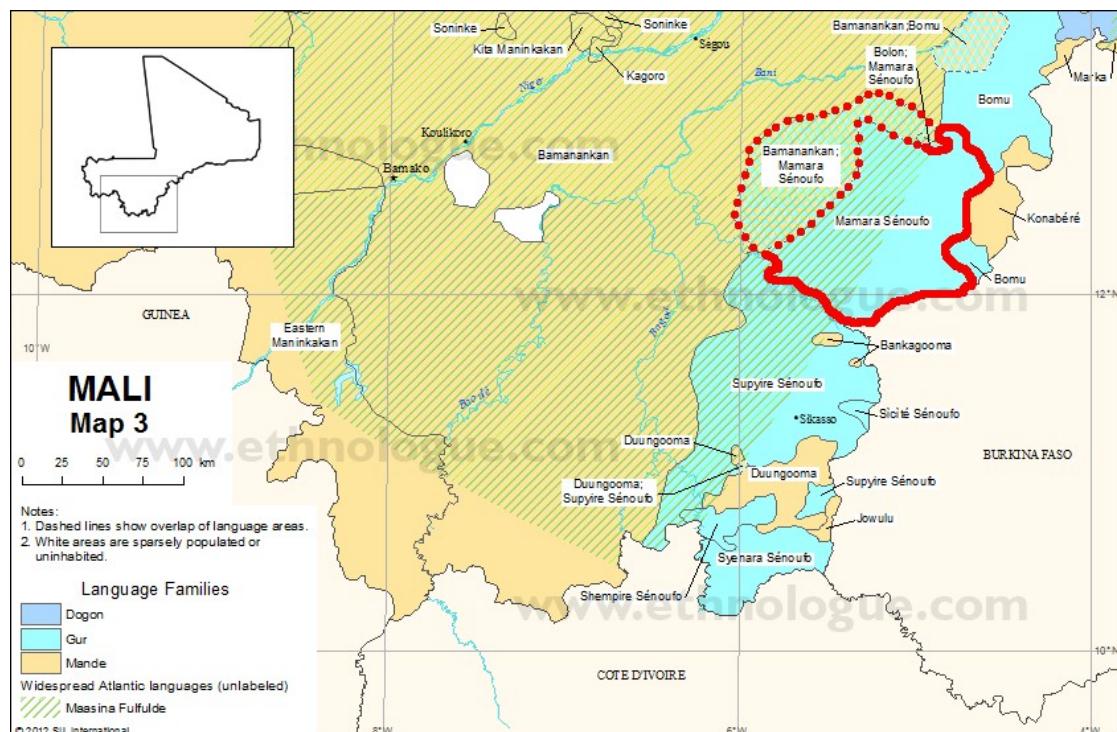


Figure 3-1. The Minyanka language area in southern Mali⁹⁸

The majority of Minyanka speakers know some Bambara as their second language. The level of bilingualism is higher in urban areas, in villages bordering Bambara-speaking areas and among those who have travelled widely. French is used less frequently, spoken by those working in administration and young people who have had some years of secondary education.

⁹⁷ M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2013). <http://www.ethnologue.com> (accessed July 18, 2013).

⁹⁸ SIL International, “Mali, Map 3,” In *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2013). http://www.ethnologue.com/map/ML_3 (accessed July 18, 2013).

In the rural areas, farming is the traditional way of life. As well as growing millet, maize and peanuts, the Minyanka region around Koutiala is the main cotton producing area of the country.⁹⁹

Most people in Mali would identify themselves as Muslim, but it is difficult to classify the Minyanka people in terms of religious identity. Alongside the mosques, Protestant and Catholic churches, many people continue to practice elements of traditional religion. Historically the Minyanka have acknowledged the existence of the supreme God, *Kile*, but he was seen as separate, unknowable and distant from his human creation.¹⁰⁰ Daily contact with the invisible world would be through fetishes, ancestors, lesser gods and objects in nature. Each village has a fetish, *yapere*, to which people offer sacrifices, the most famous of which is called the *Nya*.¹⁰¹ There is a peaceful coexistence between the different religious communities.¹⁰²

3.2. The First Minyanka Churches

The first missionaries to Mali, or French Sudan as it was then known, were from the Roman Catholic Church in 1888. Although there are reports of a journey by the *Missionnaires d'Afrique* (White Fathers) to the Minyanka region in 1922, a parish was not established there until 1936, in the village of Karangasso.¹⁰³

Protestant societies entered the country after the First World War. American missionaries from the Gospel Missionary Union (GMU) arrived in 1919, followed by the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) in 1923.¹⁰⁴ The GMU focussed their attention on the majority Bambara people in and around Bamako while the C&MA evangelised the people groups in the north, east and south of the country.

⁹⁹ Danielle Jonckers, *La Société Minyanka du Mali [The Minyanka Society of Mali]* (Paris: Harmattan, 1987), 26.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Paul Colleyn, *Les Chemins de Nya: Culte de Possession au Mali* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1988), 81.

¹⁰¹ Jonckers, *La Société Minyanka du Mali*, 76-77.

¹⁰² Seydou Maounia Dembélé, “A La Découverte des Minyankas du Cercle de Koutiala” (Koutiala, 1995), 7. <http://www.koutiala-mali.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/a-la-decouverte-des-minyankas.pdf> (accessed July 24, 2013).

¹⁰³ Missionnaires d'Afrique, “Les diocèses du Mali – éléments d'histoire.” <http://www.mafrwestafrica.net/content/view/113/85> (accessed July 26, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), 237.

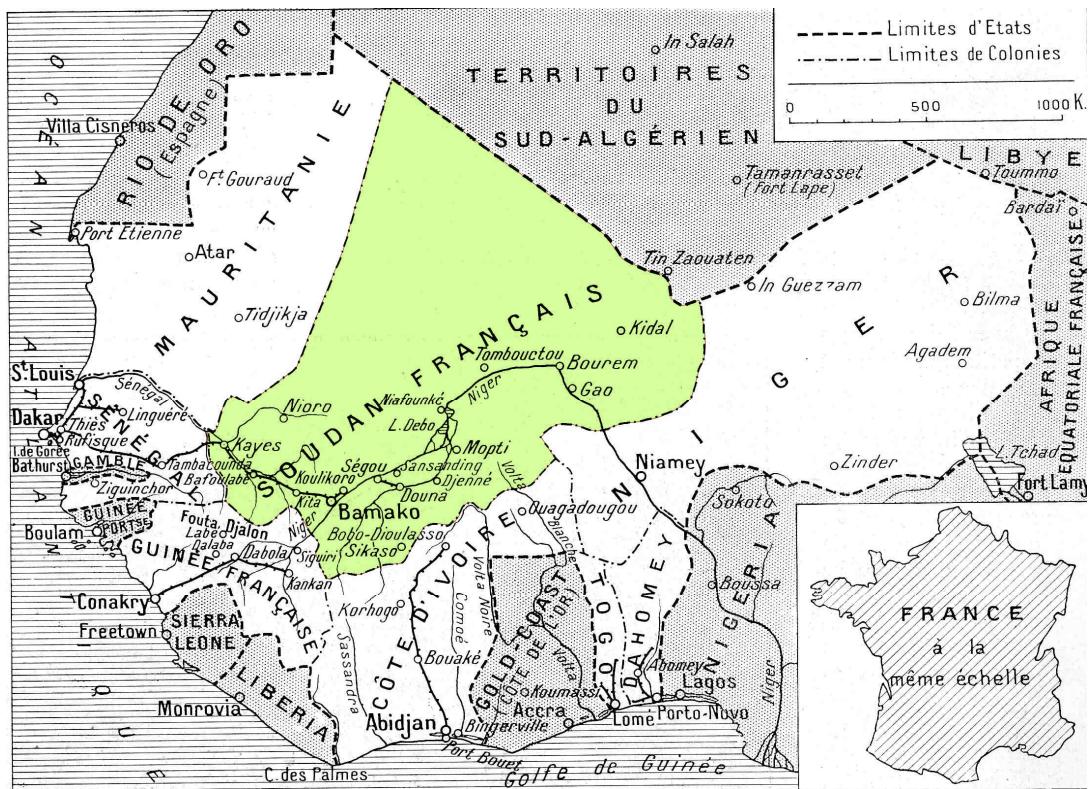


Figure 3-2. Map of French Sudan (Soudan Français) in French West Africa¹⁰⁵

The present research has included a study of the documentary archives of the C&MA since the 1920s. The reports from the pioneer missionaries provide insights into early Scripture engagement.¹⁰⁶ In 1929, they write, “we cannot resist the call of those tribes yet untouched, and our workers are putting forth every endeavor to reach the Lobi, Toma, Mianka”.¹⁰⁷

The missionaries recognised the importance of establishing “self-supporting native churches from the very beginning”.¹⁰⁸ The first mission station among the Minyanka was opened in the village of Somasso in 1932. Their strategy was to train some of the converts to be evangelists and teachers who would preach the gospel and disciple new believers. Some studied at the N’Torosso Bible School, founded by the C&MA in 1936,

¹⁰⁵ L’Illustration, “Les sept colonies qui composent l’Afrique occidentale française” in *L’oeuvre de la France en Afrique occidentale*, *L’Illustration* (February 29, 1936), 261.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AOFmap1936_Soudan_fran%C3%A7ais.png (accessed August 1, 2013).

¹⁰⁶ Christian and Missionary Alliance, “Alliance Magazine: A Legacy of Hope.”
<http://www.cmalliance.org/resources/archives/alliance-magazine> (accessed July 27, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ David Mason, “French West Africa,” *The Alliance Weekly* 64, no. 30 (July 27, 1929), 485.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

where the language of instruction was Bambara.¹⁰⁹ The first five men graduated in 1941, after four years of study and twelve months of preaching in the surrounding area.¹¹⁰

The archives contain reports of these early preaching trips. It is clear that the reading and explanation of the Scriptures played an important role.

Yuhana Samake and Ngope preached fearlessly in another Mianka section... the people in that region were quite impressed because Ngope and Yuhana could read and explain the Holy Book they carried.¹¹¹

They would have had access to the Bambara New Testament which was completed in 1933. One local chief was especially interested in hearing from this book.

‘Never have I seen men with a Book before. You prove everything you say with a Book. It must be true.’ Even after they were through with the preaching services, the chief would call for them to come and explain it to him personally.¹¹²

By 1945 there were five churches among the Minyanka, including Somasso, Dioundiou, Baramba and Zamblala.¹¹³ In Somasso, the C&MA established a government-approved boys’ secondary school, teaching in French, with the Bible as “the chief textbook”.¹¹⁴ Children came from both Christian and non-Christian homes and many were converted.¹¹⁵

A common feature of early Christian testimonies was the “power encounter”. Peter Wagner defines this as “a visible, practical demonstration that Jesus Christ is more powerful than the spirits, powers or false gods worshiped or feared by the members of a given people group.”¹¹⁶ Many of the first Christians were converted after the failure of

¹⁰⁹ Youssouf Dembélé, “L’Impact des Traductions Bibliques sur la Vie Chrétienne”, 98.

¹¹⁰ Marie A. Frelich, “After Four Years,” *The Alliance Weekly* 76, no. 31 (August 2, 1941), 489.

¹¹¹ Marie A. Frelich, “Evangelizing in French Soudan,” *The Alliance Weekly* 74, no. 20 (May 20, 1939), 312.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ H. M. Wright, “Problems in Mission Work,” *The Alliance Weekly* 80, no. 25 (November 24, 1945), 393.

¹¹⁴ E. P. Howard, “The Challenge of West Africa,” *The Alliance Weekly* 82, no. 48 (November 29, 1947), 764.

¹¹⁵ R. S. Roseberry, “Winning Boys for Christ,” *The Alliance Weekly* 85, no. 1 (May 27, 1950), 329.

¹¹⁶ Peter C. Wagner, *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1996), 100.

traditional powers against the power of Christ.¹¹⁷ This is illustrated in the founding of the church in Yorosso. Local evangelist, Yuhana, who was sent to encourage the small group of converts, reports:

When I first came here [the local leaders] tried in every possible manner to drive me from [the] village. Then all available witch doctors and fetish leaders were called to try to kill me and the Christians by use of satanic power and enchantments. The Lord has cared for every one and delivered us out of the trap of the evil ones.¹¹⁸

In Somasso too, there were reports of people being threatened not to become Christians. Those who had the courage to believe in Jesus did not die as predicted. The first *Nya* fetish, which had held people in fear, was burnt in 1938 after most of its original owners had become Christians.¹¹⁹

The early preachers proclaimed that God had triumphed over the forces of evil and that Jesus was all powerful. As well as hearing the way of salvation, the believers wanted clear instructions as to how to live as Christians: what to do and what not to do. They were taught the Ten Commandments and were warned against worshipping idols, eating food sacrificed to the fetishes and wearing amulets for protection. Although they lacked direct access to God's Word in the Minyanka language, they did have a good grasp of the rules of their new faith. The songs they sang reminded them of what to believe and do.¹²⁰

In Minyanka traditional religion, there was no place for questioning the instructions of the fetish. What was required was direct obedience and people lived in fear of the consequences if they deviated from it. Minyanka translator and pastor, Josué Koné, sees this same sense of unquestioning obedience in the response of the early converts to God's Word when it was preached to them.¹²¹ The Bible was held as sacred, treated with great care and having an absolute authority. The phrase *Ala ko ten* ("God says so") was frequently used by the local preachers, and Christians became known as *Ala-ko-ten-mɔgɔw* ("people of God-says-so").

¹¹⁷ Youssouf Dembélé, "L'impact des traductions bibliques sur la vie chrétienne", 97.

¹¹⁸ Esther Kuhn, "The Gospel is Triumphant," *The Alliance Weekly* 88, no. 8 (February 25, 1953), 10.

¹¹⁹ M. Abramson, "Our Foreign Mailbag: Somasso, French Soudan, Africa," *The Alliance Weekly* 73, no. 42 (October 15, 1938), 665.

¹²⁰ Josué Koné, Interview (Skype) with author, June 13, 2013.

¹²¹ Josué Koné, Interview (Skype) with author, June 13, 2013.

It would be inaccurate, however, to view early Christianity among the Minyanka as if the believers were always living in perfect obedience to God's Word. Some of the issues faced are reminiscent of the early churches in the New Testament. In 1945, Ngope, one of the Bible teachers, reported that "the conditions among some of the Christians were beyond his control". He called for the missionary to come since "some had fallen into sin; one had even taken his father's wife as his own wife, and another had taken his second wife".¹²² In Somasso, many went back to their idols under the pressure of persecution.¹²³ Nevertheless, there were regular reports of new converts and the churches continued to multiply.

The expatriate missionaries were highly respected and were relied upon for theological direction. This is illustrated in a meeting with African pastors in 1957. In discussions regarding the standards for ordination, the Malians opted to leave the decision in the hands of their spiritual mentors:

They were unanimously agreed that they would stand by whatever judgment the missionaries reached in accordance with God's Word and their wider experience. They stated that they were indebted to the missionaries for all they knew of God's way up to this point and were continuing to look to them for guidance.¹²⁴

Ralph Herber refers to this meeting as "one of the most gratifying experiences of the conference."¹²⁵ Apparently the missionaries were honoured by the respect shown to them and culturally it would have been hard for the Malian pastors to do otherwise. Herber goes on to express the desire "that eventually a national church organization will be adopted, governing and uniting the various tribal church organizations."¹²⁶ It would need to be a church that had confidence in interpreting the translated Scriptures for themselves, reflecting theologically as they engaged with God's Word.

¹²² H. M. Wright, "Problems in Mission Work," *The Alliance Weekly* 53, no. 25 (November 24, 1945), 393.

¹²³ R. S. Roseberry, "Winning Boys for Christ," *The Alliance Weekly* 85, no. 1 (May 27, 1950), 329.

¹²⁴ Ralph W. Herber, "A Drink of Lion's Milk," *The Alliance Witness* 93, no. 8 (April 9, 1958), 11-12.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 12.

3.3. Minyanka Churches Since Independence

Mali gained its independence from France in 1960. It was also the time at which church denominations were becoming autonomous from their founding mission societies. In 1963, the *Eglise Chrétienne Evangelique* took full responsibility for the churches planted by the C&MA.

Today, the ECE is organised into nineteen districts, each with a president elected from among the local church pastors. The presidents, together with their district committees, are responsible for holding monthly meetings with the pastors, distributing financial support, determining church planting strategies and deciding on matters of church discipline. In the rural areas, pastors typically serve up to six years in a church before they are moved to another.

There are 147 Minyanka-majority churches in Mali,¹²⁷ distributed among seven districts of the ECE (Table 3-1).¹²⁸ In two of the districts, Yorosso and Kimparana, almost all of the churches are Minyanka speaking. In districts such as Bla, there are fewer Minyanka churches, with the others being predominantly Bambara.

Church district	Number of Minyanka-majority churches
Yorosso	43
Kimparana	47
Koutiala	34
Bla	9
N'Torosso	6
Bobo districts	5
San	3
TOTAL	147

Table 3-1. Minyanka churches by district

Pastors are recruited locally from within their district and serve in the same district, rather than being posted to another region of Mali. Because of this, most pastors of

¹²⁷ Robert Goïta, data compiled from church districts, September 6, 2013.

¹²⁸ See Figure 4-1.

Minyanka churches are themselves Minyanka. This is one of the factors that has favoured the use of the local language Scriptures.

In terms of denominations, the ECE is the only Protestant church in the rural areas within the Minyanka-speaking region. In the town of Koutiala, there are other denominations, as well as five ECE churches, but all of these use Bambara or French with their multiethnic congregations.

In the previous section, an excerpt from a meeting in 1957 between missionaries and Malian pastors was described in which there appears to have been a lack of confidence in “self-theologising”. This is cited by some as the “fourth self” in indigenous churches, alongside self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing.¹²⁹

Youssouf Dembélé is a theologian, national church leader and UBS translation consultant. Writing in 2011, he laments the Malian church’s ongoing weakness and inaptitude in theological reflection.¹³⁰ He argues that the availability of mother-tongue Scriptures is necessary but insufficient for the emergence of a contextual theology. Despite the existence of the whole Bible in Bambara for fifty years as well as portions in other languages, religious preoccupations in Mali tend to be “less theological than practical”.¹³¹

Dembélé’s concern is that people are resolving contextual problems by traditional and social considerations rather than by reflection on the Scriptures. He observes that preaching is becoming moralistic and that believers are being attracted by the miraculous and extraordinary. For Dembélé, such trends display a lack of regard for a true knowledge of God’s Word.¹³²

¹²⁹ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference: Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 165.

¹³⁰ Youssouf Dembélé, “L’impact des traductions bibliques sur la vie chrétienne”, 96.

¹³¹ Ibid., 96.

¹³² Ibid., 97.

3.4. Bible Translation in Minyanka

C&MA missionaries were involved in Bible translation in Mali from the outset, with work beginning in the Bomu¹³³ and Dogon¹³⁴ languages in the 1930s, seeing New Testaments published in 1954 and 1957 respectively. They also worked in partnership with the GMU on the translation of the Bambara Bible which was dedicated in March 1962.¹³⁵ This was the first complete Bible in a language of Mali and was received with joy by Malian Christians, some of whom had been waiting thirty years to receive it.¹³⁶

There was not much early progress, however, on Scripture translation in the Minyanka language. For the first 30 years of outreach among the Minyanka, C&MA missionaries opted to use the Scriptures in Bambara. Local interpreters translated messages into Minyanka where necessary. This difference in strategy compared to the work among the Dogon and Bwa can be explained partly by the higher Bambara-language ability of the Minyanka people. It was believed that most Minyanka understood Bambara and that their language “was not being maintained”.¹³⁷ For expatriate missionaries, Bambara was also a considerably easier language to learn. If it was a choice between learning Bambara or Minyanka, there was strategic value in opting for the language that was spoken more widely.

The Catholic fathers in the parishes of Koutiala, Karangasso and Kimparana made more progress than the C&MA. They used Minyanka as their liturgical language, training catechists and readers, and translated texts from the Old and New Testaments.¹³⁸ A New Testament was published in the Kimparana dialect in 2002.

Following the arrival of the Bambara Bible in 1962, the C&MA began to recognise the importance of Minyanka and work began on translating selected portions of Scripture. In the late 1970s, the mission chairman, Thomas Burns, saw the need for additional help. He invited SIL to send a team to work on linguistics and translation in the

¹³³ World Scriptures, “Boomu.” <http://www.worldscriptures.org/pages/boomu.html> (accessed August 21, 2013).

¹³⁴ World Scriptures, “Dogon.” <http://www.worldscriptures.org/pages/dogon.html> (accessed August 21, 2013).

¹³⁵ Ralph W. Herber, “When They Received the Bambara Bible,” *The Alliance Weekly* 97, no. 20 (October 3, 1962), 10.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ SIL Mali, “Minyanka Project: Program Documentation,” (April 2002), 1.

¹³⁸ Guy Belloncle, *Le tronc d’arbre et le caïman: Carnets de brousse maliens* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1981), 90.

Minyanka language.¹³⁹ Daniel and Lucia Brubaker from the United States accepted the challenge and arrived in Mali in 1982, beginning with dialect surveys. In collaboration with the Malian government, the Karangasso dialect of Minyanka was chosen as the standard. After several years of language learning and linguistic analysis with local language helpers, the ECE churches agreed that Josué Koné, a Minyanka pastor, and Ousmane Dembélé, who spoke the standard dialect, would work as translators. New Testament translation began in 1994 and was completed in 2004. Each book was reviewed by a committee consisting of fifteen pastors chosen from six ECE districts.¹⁴⁰

While waiting for the NT to arrive from the printers, the translation team embarked on a year of promotional activities, visiting as many churches as possible. Over two thousand NTs were prepaid. On 4 November 2006, Minyanka Christians from around the country gathered together in Kimparana for the dedication ceremony.

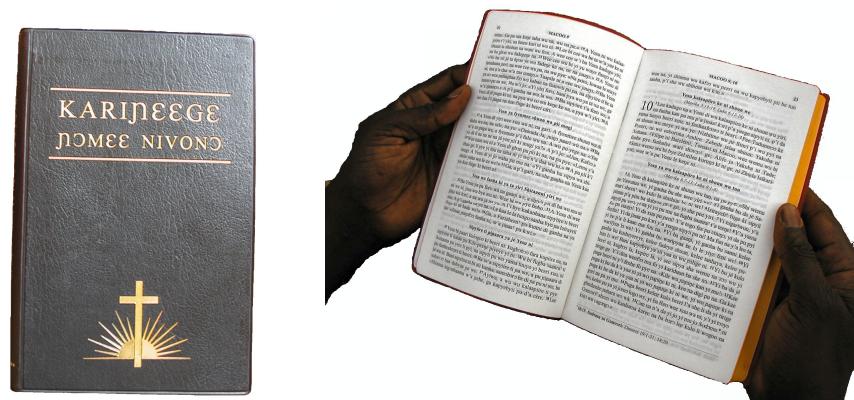


Figure 3-3. The Minyanka New Testament¹⁴¹

Attention soon turned to the Old Testament. Church leaders expressed their desire for translation to continue, seconding another pastor to join the team: Moussa Zie Coulibaly, who also lectures at a local Bible school.

3.5. Literacy in Minyanka Churches

Competency in Bambara literacy grew during the latter half of the twentieth century, both in church and society. Yearly three-month courses in the dry season were

¹³⁹ SIL Mali, “Minyanka Project: Program Documentation,” (April 2002), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴¹ Wycliffe Bible Translators, *Karijneegé Jñomée Nivonɔ: Nouveau Testament en mamara* (Mali: Wycliffe Bible Translators, 2005).

established in each church district for those who had not been to school. The state-owned cotton company, CMDT, introduced classes for adults and promoted the use of Bambara for accounting in village associations.¹⁴² There has been a push to get more children to attend primary school, in line with the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁴³

However, until the late 1990s, very few people were literate in Minyanka. The translation team was motivated to act after church leaders observed that unless something was done, the newly published portions of the Scriptures would not be read. The pace of translation was slowed down and effort was put into developing materials. The literacy programme began in 1998 with teacher training and a transition class for pastors. Robert Goïta was appointed as full-time literacy coordinator and each church district had a supervisor and literacy teachers. The years that followed saw hundreds of participants in transition and beginners' classes (Figure 3-4).

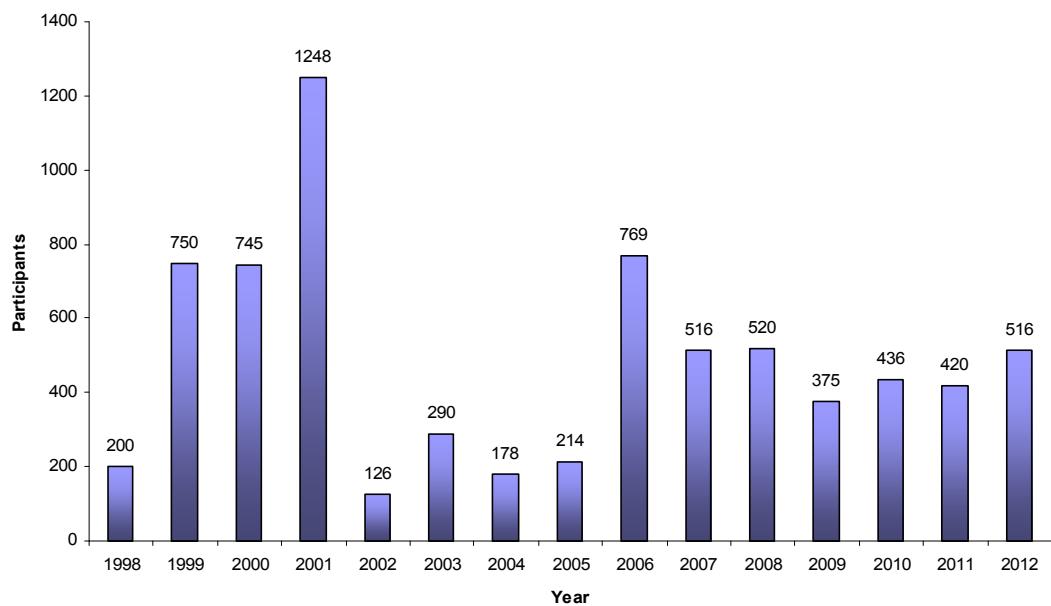


Figure 3-4. Participants in Minyanka literacy classes¹⁴⁴

The graph shows three distinct periods. Until 2001, there was significant funding and considerable effort in promoting literacy. From 2002 to 2005, motivation was in

¹⁴² Moussa Zie Coulibaly, interview (Skype) with author, June 11, 2013.

¹⁴³ United Nations, “Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education,” United Nations Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml> (accessed September 2, 2013).

¹⁴⁴ Association pour la Promotion de la Langue Mamara, Reports of Literacy Campaigns, Mali, 1998-2012.

decline. Interest was revived in 2006 with the coming of the New Testament. Until then, materials had not contained any Scripture content, but with the NT, a new series of Bible study guides was launched to be used in both beginners' classes and groups for advanced readers. This forged a tighter connection between literacy and Scripture engagement.¹⁴⁵



Figure 3-5. Minyanka literacy materials

3.6. Promoting Scripture Engagement in Minyanka

The Minyanka translation team launched a number of initiatives to facilitate Scripture engagement, such as running *training workshops for pastors* to encourage them in the use of the Scriptures.

In 2007, a *listening group programme* was started in partnership with Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH), using solar-powered digital audio players called 'Proclaimers'.¹⁴⁶ At

¹⁴⁵ Richard Margetts, "Literacy for Life Teacher's Guide: Injecting a good dose of the Bible into your literacy programme," Scripture Engagement website, 2006. <http://www.scripture-engagement.org/content/literacy-life-teachers-guide> (accessed September 5, 2013); Pat Herbert, "Literacy for Life: a Tool for the Church? A Church-Based Literacy Program for Ghana," Scripture Engagement website, 2006. <http://www.scripture-engagement.org/content/literacy-life-tool-church> (accessed September 5, 2013).

¹⁴⁶ Faith Comes By Hearing, "The Proclaimer," FCBH website. <http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/proclaimer> (accessed September 4, 2013).

each meeting, the groups listen to a few chapters of the New Testament and discuss what they have heard, with the aim of getting eventually from Matthew to Revelation. This has facilitated interaction with Scripture in hundreds of church and family settings and has enabled participation by all ages.



Figure 3-6. The Proclaimer

In 2009, the team began to produce 15-minute *radio programmes* containing a Scripture reading, Minyanka Christian music and a short explanation of the passage. These are now broadcast three times a week on seven local FM radio stations around the Minyanka region.

The extent to which these activities have facilitated Scripture engagement will be evaluated in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS AND EVALUATION

This chapter presents an analysis of the results of the survey, together with a discussion of the responses obtained during follow-up interviews.

4.1. Respondents

The questionnaires were administered in five church districts during the period July to August 2013. Fifty respondents were interviewed, both men and women from a range of age groups,¹⁴⁷ representing twenty-three different churches (Figure 4-1).¹⁴⁸

The majority of interviewees were identified by their church pastors as those who would be willing to help with the survey. The availability problem posed by the rainy season meant that it was not the most devoted Scripture readers who were chosen, although it is unlikely that those who were on the margins of the church would have been selected either. It would be fair to assume, therefore, that the majority of respondents were at least moderately committed believers. All were mother-tongue speakers of Minyanka, answering “What language do you speak the best?” with “Minyanka”.

Each questionnaire took between twenty-five and forty minutes to complete, depending on the amount of explanation needed. There was a positive attitude from both respondents and pastors. Some of the women were initially anxious about giving answers and were assured that their names would not be recorded and that it was not a test. Several respondents expressed surprise at being asked to participate in the survey and wished they had been warned in advance. They were assured that the questions did not require preparation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix D, Table D-2, “Respondents categorised by age and sex”.

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix D, Table D-1, “Districts and churches visited”.

¹⁴⁹ Robert Goïta, interview (Skype) by author, August 27, 2013.

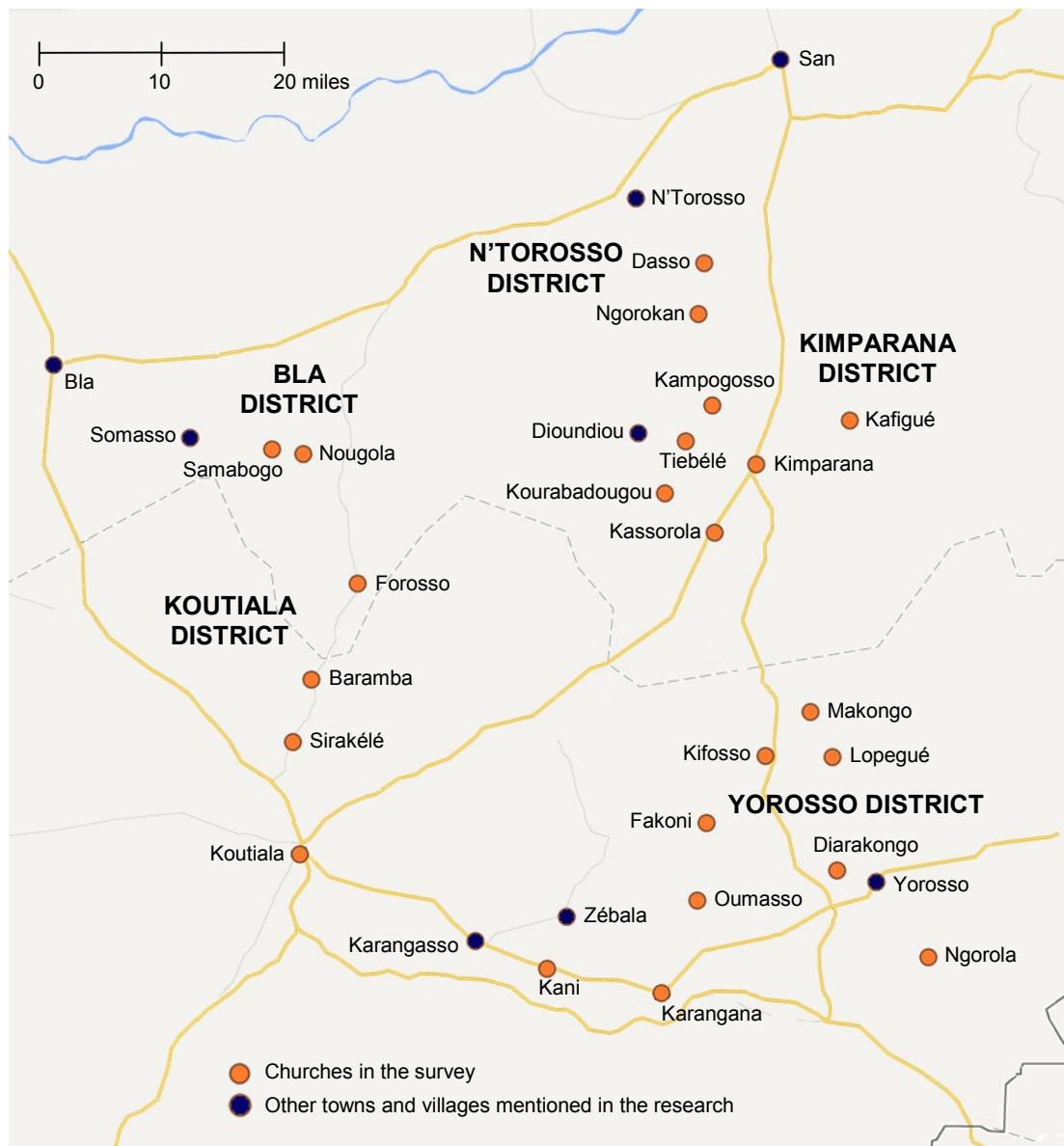


Figure 4-1. Map of Minyanka region, indicating churches represented in the survey¹⁵⁰

4.2. Listening and Reading

The results showed a high exposure to the FCBH listening group programme. All of the respondents had heard some of the audio New Testament, with 62% having listened to the entire recording from Matthew to Revelation.

	Yes, all of it	A part of it only	No
Have you already listened to all of the Minyanka NT?	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	0

Table 4-1. Listening to all of the Minyanka New Testament

¹⁵⁰ Map by author, data from Google Earth, <http://earth.google.com> (accessed September 4, 2013).

Respondents were asked to compare their preference for reading and listening. It was expected that most would opt for listening, and indeed only 18% preferred reading to listening. But what is interesting is that 54% expressed a preference for both.¹⁵¹

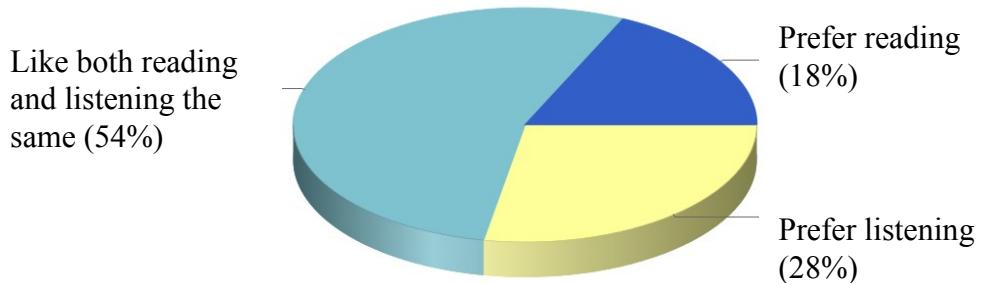


Figure 4-2. Preference for reading or listening to the Scriptures

Table 4-2 summarises the respondents' perceived reading ability in Minyanka.

Do you know how to read the Scriptures well?	Number of respondents	%
No, reading the Bible is difficult for me in any language.	2	4%
I can read well in Bambara but I have not learnt to read well in Minyanka.	11	22%
I can read Minyanka, but with hesitations.	20	40%
I can read the Minyanka NT with confidence and without too many problems.	17	34%

Table 4-2. Reading ability

It is likely that the choice of respondents favoured those with a higher than average reading ability in Minyanka, but from the perspective of a Western reader, a figure of 34% for those who can read the Scriptures confidently might seem low. This must be seen in the light of the adult literacy rate in Mali which is estimated at 33.4%.¹⁵² Within seven years of the publication of the New Testament, 74% of respondents say they are able to read it, whether confidently or hesitantly.

¹⁵¹ See Appendix D, Table D-5, "Preferences for reading or listening to the Bible".

¹⁵² UNESCO, "Literacy Rates Around the World," International Literacy Day 2013, UNESCO website. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Pages/data-release-map-2013.aspx> (accessed September 4, 2013).

When reading ability and preference for reading or listening are correlated, 64% of confident readers like both, with 23% preferring reading. The percentages do not change significantly for hesitant readers. However, for Bambara readers who have not learnt to read in Minyanka, 63% prefer listening.

92% of respondents felt that their church could do better in helping people learn to read. There was a call for more classes, for literacy teachers to be trained from the local congregation and for the church to buy course materials on behalf of the learners. Currently most classes are held in the dry season over intensive two-week periods, but interest was shown for a weekly class throughout the year, such as an evening Bible study.¹⁵³

Ownership of Minyanka New Testaments was high among the respondents, with 94% possessing a copy. Figure 4-3 presents the extent to which they say they read it.

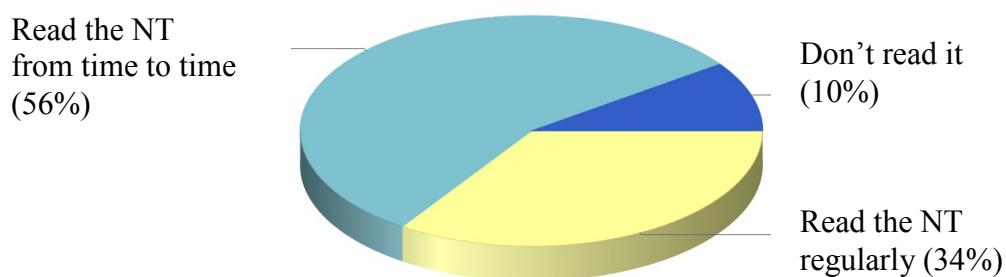


Figure 4-3. Reading the Minyanka New Testament

When reading ability is correlated with frequency of reading, 70% of confident readers say they read the NT regularly, compared to only 25% of hesitant readers.¹⁵⁴ So a confident reading ability will facilitate more frequent Scripture reading, and regular Scripture reading will undoubtedly lead to improved reading ability. The results demonstrate that there is a significant role for both literacy and audio Scriptures in Minyanka churches, and a considerable need for ongoing literacy classes to move people from hesitancy to confidence in reading.

¹⁵³ See Appendix D, Table D-8, “What the church does to facilitate literacy”; Table D-9, “What people suggest their church does to facilitate literacy”.

¹⁵⁴ See Appendix D, Table D-27, “Reading ability and frequency of reading the NT”.

4.3. Understanding and Applying Scripture

Respondents were asked what happens when they read or listen to the Scriptures. Everyone said that the Bible encourages them in their faith in Jesus Christ, and all find practical teaching that helps them with the things in life that preoccupy them.¹⁵⁵ In the Minyanka region, it would be hard to find a committed Christian who openly expressed any doubts about the value, usefulness or relevance of the Scriptures.¹⁵⁶ All of them said that they find God speaking to them personally in the Scriptures, at least from time to time.

On the question of understanding, 78% admitted that they sometimes find the Bible “difficult to understand without someone explaining it”.¹⁵⁷

Interviewees were asked about the methods that help them to understand and put into practice God’s Word. They were given seven methods and ranked them in order of usefulness, choosing at least their top three (Table 4-3).

Method	Number of respondents		
	1 st choice	2 nd choice	3 rd choice
The message given by the preacher during the church service	16	6	4
Reading or listening while alone, with prayer and meditation	8	6	10
Asking the pastor questions in a group	2	2	3
Asking the pastor questions privately	17	15	4
Discussing together in a group with other Christians	1	9	6
Radio programmes	5	6	18
Reading a book that gives explanations	1	6	5

Table 4-3. Methods which help people to understand and apply God’s Word

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix D, Table D-11, “What happens when reading or listening to the Bible”.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Goita, interview (Skype) by author, August 7, 2013.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix D, Table D-11, “What happens when reading or listening to the Bible”.

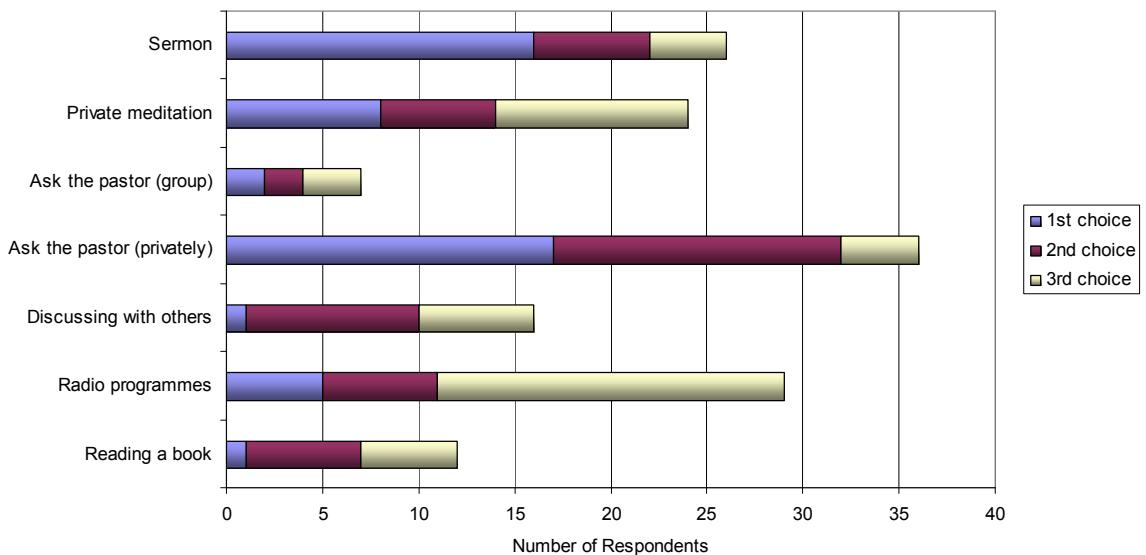


Figure 4-4. Graph of preferred methods for Bible understanding

When you combine the top two methods, asking the pastor is by far the most cited (64%), with the Sunday sermon in second place (44%) and private meditation third (28%).

If the top three methods are considered, radio programmes feature highly with 58% recognising their usefulness for Bible understanding. This validates the strategy of broadcasting Scripture-based programmes in Minyanka on stations across the region.

A high value is put on asking the pastor for advice in private. Koné explains that, in matters of spirituality, people prefer to consult the religious specialist alone. They prefer not to expose their questions in front of others, especially in mixed groups of men and women, different age groups, educational levels and social class. According to a local proverb, “it is the hidden serpent that reaches maturity.”¹⁵⁸

The answers given indicate that Minyanka believers prefer to get help in understanding and applying Scripture from an authority figure, either their local church pastor or a preacher on the radio. They also prefer oral contexts, rather than searching for the answers in books. It could be that the younger generation will become more comfortable with looking up helps in a study Bible, but for the moment listening to the pastor is the primary source of understanding. This is similar to what Katherine O’Donnell found in her research in Tanzania:

¹⁵⁸ Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 14, 2013.

the way most Tanzanian Christians perceive, engage with, interpret and apply the Bible will be primarily shaped according to what their pastors or other preachers tell them.¹⁵⁹

4.4. Pastors and Scripture Engagement

Because of the vital role of the pastor in facilitating Scripture engagement, interviewees were asked to give examples of what their pastor does to help them in understanding and applying God’s Word. Most of the responses centred around what he does in the Sunday sermon, such as using illustrations, asking questions, revising the previous week’s message, using songs, drama and stories. Appreciation was shown for his use of the Bible in discussions and pastoral visits. People liked it when their pastor was a “teacher” and not only a “preacher”, and valued when he taught using the Minyanka language and asked members of the congregation to read from their Minyanka New Testaments.

Although most of the respondents were literate to some extent, it is interesting to note the importance they attribute to oral methods of communication,¹⁶⁰ such as illustration, story, repetition and participation.

When asked what they would like their pastor to do to facilitate Scripture engagement, respondents suggested that he get more people to read in public. They called for Bible studies and courses to improve reading, seminars on relevant topics and the equipping of others in the church to teach the Bible.

Related to this was a question on the perceived busyness of their pastor (Table 4-4), with 64% agreeing that he had less time for Bible study and discipleship than in the past.

¹⁵⁹ Katherine O’Donnell, “Umuhimu wa Biblia: An investigation into how Tanzanian Christians perceive and engage with God’s Word” (MA diss., Redcliffe College, 2013), 71.

¹⁶⁰ Rick Brown, “Communicating God’s Message in an Oral Culture: Communicating Effectively to Non-Readers,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 123.

	True	False	Don't Know
“Our pastors are so busy that they don’t have enough time for studying the Bible and discipling believers as they did in the past.”	32 (64%)	16 (32%)	2 (4%)

Table 4-4. Busyness of pastors: past and present

Believers themselves admitted they were busier than in the past, and their pastor is no exception, preoccupied with finding the means to live. Rural pastors are bi-vocational, needing to balance the demands of church ministry with work in the fields to raise sufficient funds for their family. The expenses of twenty-first century life are high, including school fees, health costs, telephone credit, motorbike fuel and repairs.

Niara Jérémie Coulibaly, an experienced Minyanka pastor, calls for pastors to be reminded of their calling, and urges them to put a greater priority on teaching and pastoral visits.¹⁶¹ At the same time, Koné reminds church members to be realistic in their expectations, and encourages them to ensure that their pastors have enough to live on and sufficient resources for their work.¹⁶² It is a major challenge for the churches of Mali to find ways of liberating their church leaders so that they can give more time to the “ministry of the word”.¹⁶³

4.5. Knowledge of the Scriptures

In order to gauge the basic Bible knowledge of respondents, three questions were asked:

- a) There are four books in the New Testament that speak of the life of Jesus. What are their names?
- b) Who wrote the letter to the Romans?
- c) Put in order the following Bible characters, starting with the one who was born first: Moses, David, Abraham, Peter, Ruth.

Although this was far from an in-depth survey of biblical literacy, it did provide some significant insights, especially when combined with the follow-up interviews.

¹⁶¹ Niara Jérémie Coulibaly, interview (Skype) by author, August 19, 2013.

¹⁶² Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 14, 2013.

¹⁶³ Acts 6:1-4.

64% of respondents were able to name all four gospels.¹⁶⁴ 72% knew that the author of the letter of Romans was the Apostle Paul.¹⁶⁵ The ability to give the right answer does not appear to be a question of literacy. Those respondents who identified themselves as unable to read in any language answered these first two questions correctly.

The third question was more difficult and only 14% were able to put the five Bible characters into the right chronological order.

Answer given	Number of respondents	%
Correct order: “Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Peter”	7	14%
Almost correct, putting David before Ruth: “Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, Peter”	12	24%
Getting Abraham, Moses and David in order	26	52%
Incorrect: Putting Moses before Abraham	11	22%
Incorrect: Not putting Peter in last position	16	32%
Did not give an answer	3	6%

Table 4-5. Chronological order of Bible characters

The placement of Ruth posed problems, with 24% getting the order almost correct, but putting David before Ruth, not recognising that she was his great-grandmother.¹⁶⁶ Just under half of the respondents were unable to put Abraham, Moses and David in the correct order. Over a fifth put Moses before Abraham, and almost a third did not put Peter in the last position as the only New Testament character of the five.

It could be argued that the difficulty in answering this question is due to the absence of the Old Testament in Minyanka. But all five appear in the New Testament,¹⁶⁷ and Abraham, Moses and David are important prophets in Islam. Their names in the Minyanka Christian Scriptures, *Ibirayima*, *Musa* and *Dawuda*, are close to their Arabic equivalents (*Ibrahim*, *Mūsa*, and *Dawud*) and all three are popular boys' names.

¹⁶⁴ See Appendix D, Table D-19, “Naming the four gospels”.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix D, Table D-20, “Naming the author of the letter to the Romans”.

¹⁶⁶ Ruth 4:21-22; Matthew 1:5-6.

¹⁶⁷ e.g. Matthew 1; Acts 7.

The interviewer, Robert Goïta, was surprised by some of the answers he received. In particular, when interviewing someone who had been a Christian for many years and who had held posts of responsibility in the church, he was not expecting hesitant responses with regard to basic Bible knowledge. It revealed the level of understanding among believers of which he suspects many pastors are unaware.¹⁶⁸ Koné explains that people in the rural churches are more interested in how God wants them to live, the way of salvation, and what the Bible characters actually did, rather than questions of chronology and authorship.¹⁶⁹

Jérémie Coulibaly was not surprised that people do not know the answers to such questions if they have not been taught. He gives an example of how pastors teach about Old Testament characters:

What did David do? He was a valiant soldier. He challenged Goliath by faith. You too need to challenge the idols and the witches by faith!¹⁷⁰

Pastors tend to cite the names of Bible characters and talk about them without situating them in their historical context.¹⁷¹ Although the order of events is culturally important, pastors assume it is something that is taught in Sunday School and not of immediate relevance to the point they want to make.¹⁷² It is also common for them to skip around topics in their sermons from Sunday to Sunday, as well as between passages within a single sermon, so it would be hard for people to establish a clear sense of chronological order.¹⁷³

Hindrances to Scripture engagement

The answers to the questionnaire and the related discussion in the follow-up interviews reveal that the Old Testament is often taught as *disconnected stories* rather than as part of *one story*. This issue presents a number of potential hindrances to Scripture engagement.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Goïta, interview (Skype) by author, August 7, 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 14, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Niara Jérémie Coulibaly, interview (Skype) by author, August 19, 2013.

¹⁷¹ Ousmane Dembélé, e-mail message to author, August 19, 2013.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Lucia Brubaker, e-mail message to author, August 14, 2013.

Firstly, people are less likely to see how the Bible fits together and “grasp its overarching story”.¹⁷⁴ Bartholomew and Goheen rightly describe this as the “unified and progressively unfolding drama of God’s action in history”:¹⁷⁵

The Bible is not a mere jumble of history, poetry, lessons in morality and theology, comforting promises, guiding principles and commands; it is a fundamentally coherent whole.¹⁷⁶

Secondly, an insufficient grasp of the Bible story can lead to hermeneutical difficulties. Knowing the “big picture” will keep Bible readers “from lifting passages out of context or reading something into the Bible that is not there.”¹⁷⁷ This will become especially significant when the Old Testament is published, since biblical passages are best interpreted in the light of their place in salvation history.¹⁷⁸ For example, it will be important for Christians to know how to interpret the Law for today and why they do not follow all of the instructions in Leviticus.

Thirdly, if Bible characters are presented simply as “heroes of the faith” to be emulated, there is the risk of neglecting to see God as the ultimate hero of the “big story”. Bible stories become lessons in faith and morals as believers are encouraged to imitate Abraham, David and Ruth, and less emphasis is put on seeing the Lord’s sovereign purposes behind the pages of history as he prepares his people for the coming King.¹⁷⁹

Scripture knowledge among young people

Most respondents said that their church had a Sunday School for children, but 90% felt that they could do better in helping the younger generation understand the Scriptures.¹⁸⁰ When asked to compare young people’s Bible knowledge with that of the past, a significant majority believed that it had improved (Table 4-6).

¹⁷⁴ George H. Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God’s Word* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 27.

¹⁷⁵ Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (London: SPCK, 2006), ix; See also Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 47.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., ix.

¹⁷⁷ Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*, 28.

¹⁷⁸ D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 49.

¹⁷⁹ Luke 24:25-27.

¹⁸⁰ See Appendix D, Table D-16, “Satisfaction with what church does in youth Scripture engagement”; Table D-17, “What the church does to facilitate youth Scripture engagement”; Table D-18, “What people suggest their church does to facilitate youth Scripture engagement”.

	True	False	Don't Know
“Young people of today know the Bible better than previous generations.”	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0

Table 4-6. Young people's Bible knowledge: past and present

Interestingly, some interviewees asked “What do you mean by ‘know the Bible better’?”¹⁸¹ In the past, there were fewer people in the church who were literate enough to read the Scriptures. Often it was only the pastor who was “the holder of the sacred Bible”. Today, access to the biblical text is widespread, especially among the younger generation who are attending school in greater numbers. Some are university students who return to their home villages in the farming season. The question is whether this increased academic knowledge of Scripture is matched by a corresponding increase in faith and spiritual life.¹⁸² This brings the debate back to the comprehensive meaning of Bible understanding as outlined in Chapter 2.

4.6. Impact of Scripture Engagement

Changes in church, personal and family life

Interviewees were asked to cite the biggest changes they had seen in church, personal and family life since the coming of the New Testament.¹⁸³

The most frequent change mentioned was the *increased understanding of Scripture*. One respondent explained that “many used to read the Bible without knowing the meaning. But now the people are edified by the reading in Minyanka.”¹⁸⁴ Another said that “the coming of the New Testament has unveiled those things that remained hidden in the Bambara Bible”.¹⁸⁵ It had been an opportunity to discover a lot of “hidden

¹⁸¹ Robert Goïta, interview (Skype) by author, August 7, 2013.

¹⁸² Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 14, 2013.

¹⁸³ See Appendix D, Table D-22, “Changes in church since the arrival of the Minyanka NT”; Table D-23, “Changes in personal and family life since the arrival of the NT”.

¹⁸⁴ Respondent 14, survey by Robert Goïta using questionnaire by author, July-August 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Respondent 16, survey by Robert Goïta.

treasure”¹⁸⁶ and to correct understandings of verses that had previously been “twisted”¹⁸⁷.

Another significant change was the *influence on language choice* within the church. Respondents indicated that since the coming of the New Testament, there has been a switch to do more of the church service in the Minyanka language. This includes the Bible reading, the sermon, prayers, testimonies and singing. A lot of people bring their New Testaments to church.¹⁸⁸ These appear to be changes in church tradition rather than a transformation of spiritual life, but for a Minyanka believer a move to use more of their language carries a much greater significance.

Jérémie Coulibaly explains that traditional religious cults in the Minyanka region each had their associated “language of initiation”. When he became a Christian, Coulibaly assumed that the language of initiation for Christianity was Bambara. Although he was not able to pronounce all of the words correctly, he made an effort to communicate in this new language of the Christians. This included words that appeared in the Bambara Bible which were not common in everyday speech. For most of his childhood, Coulibaly does not recall hearing anyone pray in his church in Minyanka. When Christians came from the east of the district, he was amused to hear some praying in Minyanka, thinking that they had not learnt the language of initiation.¹⁸⁹ Now, however, it is clear to all that Christianity requires no special language and that people can hear from God and speak to him in their own mother tongue.

Koné explains that people now see that “God is the God who speaks Minyanka. He is our God. He is not some god fetched from somewhere else to colonise us.”¹⁹⁰ The changes taking place have a deep theological significance. As Kwame Bediako has argued, they demonstrate that “translatability” is an essential character of Christianity.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Respondent 20, survey by Robert Goïta.

¹⁸⁷ Respondent 13, survey by Robert Goïta.

¹⁸⁸ Respondents 7, 17, 30, 34, 35, 36, 40, 42, 45, 46; Pastors 4, 5, 6, survey by Robert Goïta.

¹⁸⁹ Niara Jérémie Coulibaly, interview (Skype) by author, August 19, 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 14, 2013.

¹⁹¹ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions Clé, 2000), 32; cf. Kwame Bediako, “Biblical Exegesis in the African Context: The Factor and Impact of the Translated Scriptures,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 6, no. 1 (June 2003), 17.

In family life, nineteen respondents spoke of *the effect on their children*. Not only are they able to understand the Scriptures in a way they could not before, but they are often to be found reciting what they have memorised from the audio Scriptures, chatting about it and asking questions.¹⁹²

Several people mentioned that they now do their Scripture meditation in Minyanka, individually or as a family. Six people said they now compare what they read in Minyanka with the same passages in Bambara.¹⁹³

The impact of listening to the audio Scriptures

One of the most insightful sources of the impact of the Minyanka Scriptures can be found in the testimonies reported by those listening to the audio New Testament.¹⁹⁴ These came from over a hundred churches over a period of six years, 2007-2013. They were collected by the promoters, known as ‘colporteurs’, who are responsible for visiting the listening groups. Table 4-7 summarises the testimonies received, categorised by theme.

Theme of Testimony	Number of testimonies
Challenged in obedience and repentance	40
Received encouragement in the faith	24
Increased understanding of Scripture, correcting misunderstandings from Bambara	12
Conversion: one or more people became Christians	10
Facilitated people getting together more to hear and discuss the Word of God	10
Provided opportunities for non-Christians to hear the Scriptures	9
Learnt to read the NT by following along while listening	6
The Proclaimer became a pastor to isolated Christians and those who could not get to church	2
Enabled a blind person to hear all of the NT	1

Table 4-7. Summary of testimonies from Faith Comes By Hearing groups

¹⁹² Respondents 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, 34, 36, 45, 46, 49, survey by Robert Goïta.

¹⁹³ Respondents 24, 36, 37, 42, 46, 49, survey by Robert Goïta.

¹⁹⁴ Minyanka FCBH, “Testimonies from Listening Groups in Minyanka, 2007-2013”, Koutiala, Mali.

The testimonies on the theme of obedience and repentance show that significant transformation has taken place in people's lives.¹⁹⁵ Several speak of reconciliation and forgiveness, especially between family members. Individuals have turned from adultery, theft, lying, anger, worldliness, keeping idols, seeking help from diviners and keeping taboos. Listening to God's Word has also been a source of encouragement in the faith and a means to people becoming Christians.

4.7. Obstacles to Scripture Engagement

Interviewees were asked to identify three obstacles in life that prevent Minyanka people from reading or listening to the Scriptures (Table 4-8).

Obstacle Cited	Number of respondents
Laziness (of readers)	35
Work (lack of time and tiredness)	34
Lack of love of the language	32
Dialectal differences	22
Illiteracy / Don't know alphabet	6
Bad time management	2
Discouragement, lack of courage	2
Lack of consecration	1
Do not see value of the language	1
Neglect	1
Do not see the value of God's Word	1
Useless chat	1
Tea	1
People prefer listening to reading	1

Table 4-8. Obstacles to Scripture engagement

Four obstacles dominate the responses: laziness, work, lack of love for the Minyanka language and dialectal differences. No one mentioned problems with availability, awareness, distribution or cost.

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix D, Table D-30, "Summary of testimonies: obedience and repentance".

Laziness and work

Although most respondents cited simply “laziness” as an obstacle, some were more precise in specifying “laziness *in reading*” as the problem. To pick up the Scriptures and read them requires more effort than listening to the radio or to the audio Scriptures.

Regarding work, there is the feeling by 72% that life is busier than in the past and that there is less time for the Bible.

	True	False	Don't Know
“We are so busy that believers no longer have enough time for God’s Word compared to the past.”	36 (72%)	14 (28%)	0

Table 4-9. Busyness of respondents: past and present

People are certainly occupied during the intensive farming time of the year. When they return home after a twelve-hour day in the fields, it is dark, they are tired, and all they want to do is wash, eat, talk a little and sleep.¹⁹⁶

Koné suggests that there are underlying issues behind the top two obstacles. He links them with the admission by 80% that respect for the Scriptures is not what it used to be.

	True	False	Don't Know
“There is a much greater respect for the Word of God today compared to the past.”	10 (20%)	40 (80%)	0

Table 4-10. Respect for God’s Word: past and present

Now that the fear of the fetishes has gone, Koné suspects that Christians are becoming more casual about their relationship to God. “Look at what people do when they get back from the fields,” he says. “They have time to sit and chat and drink tea, to dance to balophone music and to listen to the radio”.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, “tea” and “useless chat” are cited by others as obstacles. Television and mobile phones have introduced distractions that were not present in the past. Koné is not suggesting that people attempt to read large

¹⁹⁶ Lucia Brubaker, e-mail message to author, August 14, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 15, 2013.

portions of Scripture when they are tired. But he does not see any valid excuse for not reading a few verses each day.¹⁹⁸

Although Minyanka Christians live very different lives to their counterparts in the West, on this issue the similarities are striking. Lawson Murray, president of Scripture Union Canada, identifies “I don’t have time” as the top reason for Christians not reading the Bible regularly. But, like Koné, he sees underlying issues:

I personally think it’s a smokescreen for the real reasons why Christians don’t read the Bible. After all, we’re rarely too busy to surf the internet, watch television or go to the coffee shop. The fact is we think we have better things to do and choose to prioritize our time for what’s most important to us.¹⁹⁹

Once access and understanding barriers have been resolved, Scripture engagement is ultimately a question of spiritual motivation.²⁰⁰

Lack of love for the language

The obstacle “lack of love for the language” is less about Scripture engagement itself and more about the language people choose to use for the Bible.²⁰¹

In the past, there was a tendency for Minyanka people to want to hide their ethnic identity when they travelled. They were known for their adherence to traditional religious practices and were mocked as eaters of dog meat.²⁰² When the issue was discussed during the follow-up interviews, several expressed the feeling that this trend is less evident today. There appears to be an increasing pride in the language and it can be heard on national and local media. Because of population growth, there are more Minyanka speakers than ever before. It could be, however, that although people like speaking Minyanka, they are less motivated to learn to read in it because literacy in Bambara and French is perceived to be more useful. Those children who grow up in

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Lawson Murray, “Why Christians Don’t Read the Bible,” *Jump Into the Word Blog*, entry posted August 1, 2013. <http://jumpintotheword.com/2013/08/01/why-christians-dont-read-the-bible> (accessed August 16, 2013).

²⁰⁰ T. Wayne Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 95.

²⁰¹ Hill and Hill, *Translating the Bible into Action*, 6.

²⁰² Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, August 15, 2013.

urban areas with parents from different ethnic groups are most at risk of losing their language.



Figure 4-5. The Minyanka language area in southern Mali²⁰³

Dialectal differences

In dialect surveys carried out in the 1980s, there were villages in the north-west of the Minyanka-speaking region where comprehension of the standard dialect was measured at 66%.²⁰⁴ This could have qualified as a distinct language. It was not felt, however, that an additional translation was needed since the people in these areas recognise that their dialect contains a lot of borrowed words from Bambara and bilingualism is higher than elsewhere. Several respondents mentioned that listening to the audio New Testament “corrects their Minyanka”.²⁰⁵ Time will tell whether there will be increasing comprehension of the standard dialect or whether the Bambara Bible will continue to be their preferred translation.

²⁰³ SIL International, “Mali, Map 3,” in *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th ed. (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2013). http://www.ethnologue.com/map/ML_3 (accessed July 18, 2013).

²⁰⁴ Daniel Brubaker, e-mail message to author, August 30, 2013.

²⁰⁵ Respondents 1, 6, 8, 13, survey by Robert Goïta.

CHAPTER 5

FACILITATING SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT

This chapter brings together the insights from the preceding research in order to identify more precisely those factors that facilitate and hinder Scripture engagement in the Minyanka churches.

5.1. The Role of Understanding in Scripture Engagement

Scripture in the mother tongue

The availability of the Scriptures in the mother tongue, Minyanka, has been a major factor in facilitating engagement with God's Word. It has helped both in terms of understanding the Scriptures better and in enabling people to relate to God by means of their own language. To find this to be the case is especially significant in view of the early missionary decisions to focus on the use of Bambara in the church.

The research had not set out to affirm the importance of the mother tongue, but it confirms what Lamin Sanneh, Andrew Walls and Kwame Bediako write about the theological significance of Bible translation in Africa²⁰⁶ as well as one of SIL's core values, the "language of the heart".²⁰⁷

Bediako explains:

In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother tongue... Each of us with the Bible in our mother tongue can truly claim to hear God speaking to us in our own language.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 208-209; Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 1996; Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Exegesis in the African Context: The Factor and Impact of the Translated Scriptures," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 6, no. 1 (June 2003): 22.

²⁰⁷ SIL International, "SIL Core Values," SIL Board Policy Manual (Dallas, 2006).

²⁰⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Editions Clé, 2000), 32.

The Pastor as the leading sword-handler

The vital role of local church pastors in facilitating Scripture engagement has been emphasised. Koné argues that pastors need to be the “leading sword-handlers” in the church.²⁰⁹ It is their responsibility to “correctly handle the word of truth”²¹⁰

Since people look to the pastor as their primary source of help in understanding the Scriptures, whether through individual questions, Bible studies or the Sunday sermon, the church must think seriously about how pastors can be more available and better resourced to carry out their vocation. This carries responsibilities for both pastor and people: pastors need to be re-envisioned in the way they carry out their ministry, and believers need to be committed to providing their pastors with the necessary material and financial resources so they can give more time to the work.

Although people look to their pastor, it is clear that they too want to receive training, whether this is to be able to read more fluently or to be able to better help others understand the Scriptures. As Youssouf Dembélé argues, the pastor has a key role in equipping people to use the translated Scriptures so that “they can give Biblical answers to specific theological problems in their communities, and to new situations that arise among them”.²¹¹ Minyanka Christians must seize the opportunity afforded to them with the local language Scriptures in order to reflect theologically at a local level. There are many questions of Gospel and culture currently left unanswered, and there is the need to respond confidently and biblically to new teachings such as the prosperity gospel and the challenges to traditional values being brought about by globalisation.

Teaching the Bible’s grand narrative

The interviewer, Robert Goïta, himself a pastor, admitted that one of the most important lessons he learnt from the survey is that pastors have a lot of work before them.²¹² He wonders whether some of the messages preached go over the heads of the ordinary church member, with pastors assuming that a basic level of Bible knowledge is already there when it is not. People become Christians at different times and not all have had the opportunity of a well-taught Sunday school programme when they were young.

²⁰⁹ Ephesians 6:17.

²¹⁰ 2 Timothy 2:15; Josué Koné, interview (Skype) by author, June 13, 2013.

²¹¹ Youssouf Dembélé, “L’impact des traductions bibliques sur la vie chrétienne”, 98.

²¹² Robert Goïta, interview (Skype) by author, August 27, 2013.

As argued in Chapter 4, an inadequate sense of the *grand narrative* will pose hermeneutical problems and can hinder Scripture engagement:

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits – theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits, narrative bits. But to read the Bible in such a fragmented way is to ignore its divine author’s intention to shape our lives through its story.²¹³

With work on Old Testament translation well underway, there is an opportunity for using the significant narrative portions already available to teach basic biblical literacy, helping people to understand the key events of the Scriptures and how the different parts of the Bible fit together.

Young people and children

Only 10% of respondents were satisfied by their church’s approach to helping children and young people engage with the Scriptures.²¹⁴ This calls for action in the light of Mali’s predominantly young population, where 53% are aged under eighteen.²¹⁵ A similar demographic is found in Minyanka churches.

There is a desire for Bible studies and seminars on relevant issues facing young people today, as well as children’s and youth materials in the Minyanka language, of which there is currently very little.

5.2. The Role of Orality and Literacy in Scripture Engagement

It was argued in Chapter 2 that it should be unnecessary to choose between oral and literate methods of Scripture engagement and that both can reinforce each other. Indeed, the research has shown that Minyanka Christians appreciate having access to the Bible in a variety of ways. Although it is generally said that Malians prefer to listen than to read, there was a higher than expected interest in being able to read the Scriptures in the churches.

²¹³ Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (London: SPCK, 2006), ix.

²¹⁴ See Appendix D, Table D-16, “Satisfaction with what church does in youth Scripture engagement”.

²¹⁵ UNICEF, “Mali – Statistics,” Information by Country, UNICEF website. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mali_statistics.html (accessed July 15, 2013).

The use of the audio New Testament via the Faith Comes By Hearing (FCBH) listening groups has been especially instrumental in facilitating acceptance of God's Word in Minyanka. The timing was ideal, with the printed NT dedicated in November 2006 and the launch of FCBH three months later in February 2007. The testimonies speak for themselves as to how listening to the Scriptures in a group context has created a fruitful context for Bible engagement. Several people made the connection with literacy in revealing how they learnt to read the Minyanka Scriptures by following the audio in their printed NT.

When respondents were asked to give examples of what their pastor does to facilitate Scripture engagement and what they would like him to do, they mentioned a combination of oral and literate methods. They appreciated the illustrations, the repetition and participation, the songs, stories and drama. But they also wanted more emphasis on the public reading of Scripture and group Bible studies. This kind of feedback provides useful insights for pastors to reflect on and encourages them to be more intentional about evaluating and adapting their teaching methods. They do not need to choose between the extremes of literacy and orality but must find the right combination of Scripture engagement approaches which best fit the people in their church and community.

Secondary orality among young people will influence the way Scripture engagement is facilitated in the future. The research has shown that radio continues to be a popular medium. In the light of the explosive growth in mobile phone use,²¹⁶ mobile technology will also become increasingly strategic.²¹⁷ Providing access to the Scriptures via these methods does not guarantee Scripture engagement, however, and so careful thought needs to be given as to how to encourage regular interaction with God's Word.²¹⁸

After leaving Bible school, church leaders have limited opportunities to update their skills and very few contextually relevant materials are available to read, especially for

²¹⁶ International Telecommunication Union, *The World in 2013: ICT Facts and Figures* (Geneva, ITU: 2013). <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/ICTFactsFigures2013.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2013).

²¹⁷ Keith Williams and Leith Gray, "The Little Phone That Could: Mobile-Empowered Ministry," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27, no. 3 (July-Sept 2010), 139.

²¹⁸ Richard Margetts, "Between Friends: Passing the Scriptures from Phone to Phone: Some Implications of Mobile Phone Technology for Scripture Distribution," Scripture Engagement website, 2010. <http://www.scriptureengagement.org/content/between-friends-passing-scriptures-phone-phone> (accessed August 16, 2013), 8.

those who do not know French. There is a lot of scope for harnessing the opportunities of digital technology to distribute training modules in audiovisual format. A video series on Scripture engagement methods in Minyanka would have considerable strategic value in training pastors on the issues covered in this chapter, especially if it was combined with the opportunity to discuss the implications in a local group context.

5.3. The Role of Bible Agencies in Scripture Engagement

Integration into current church structures

Almost all of the Minyanka-majority Protestant evangelical churches belong to a single denomination. The Minyanka Bible translators, literacy coordinator, reviewers, literacy supervisors and teachers, and FCBH colporteurs are all from the ECE church. Although there has been significant involvement from expatriates in technical aspects of the work, the outward face of the translation has been predominantly the Malian team members. Their age, education and pastoral experience has given them a certain level of respect and influence among the younger pastors.

These factors have facilitated ownership of the translated Scriptures and have meant that Scripture engagement promotion activities can be integrated into the existing structures of each church district. There have been challenges, such as in communicating effectively with over a hundred churches, but change has been easier than if the Bible translation team had been completely separate from the churches or if it had been attempting to encourage Bible use across multiple denominations.

Sustained investment in Scripture engagement activities

The research has shown that there have been significant changes in the churches over the seven years since the launch of the New Testament. But such changes, after decades of church tradition using the Bambara Scriptures, were not automatic. It has meant a commitment to invest in literacy, training workshops, radio programmes and a listening group programme over a sustained period of time. As such, the Minyanka programme has seen a greater investment of resources in facilitating Scripture engagement than a typical Bible translation project.

Since these activities have benefited from external funding, there is the valid question of sustainability. But given the resources invested in the translation phase itself, it can be

argued that it is wise stewardship to invest in encouraging Scripture engagement, at least for an initial period of several years, as a catalyst for change.

5.4. Transformation in Scripture Engagement

It was shown in Chapter 2 that *transformation* is a desired outcome of the Scripture engagement process. It is possible to use the Scriptures, understand their meaning, and even interact with them and know that God is speaking personally, but fail to be changed by them.

The survey of Minyanka church history has demonstrated that the first converts turned from the worship of the local fetishes to trust in Christ. They heard God's Word preached and believed that Jesus was more powerful than the spiritual powers they used to fear.²¹⁹ The relevance of the message and the people's seriousness in matters of religion facilitated transformational Scripture engagement even though the translation was only available in Bambara and the orality movement had yet to be born.

Today, Minyanka Christians feel that there is less respect for God's Word despite having greater access to it and better knowledge of it. Life is busier and there are more distractions.²²⁰ With laziness being cited as the biggest obstacle to Scripture use, the underlying lack of motivation must be addressed. It will be insufficient to preach against laziness; what is needed is a commitment to *spiritual discipline* and a revival of *spiritual passion*, as people rediscover the gospel and the extent to which they cannot live without the Word of God.²²¹

There can be the tendency to believe that if only the strategic planning is right, transformation will follow. Bible agencies can develop programmes and resources with the aim of seeing the impact of the Scriptures in people's lives. Pastors can adapt their teaching methods to facilitate Bible understanding. Best practices can be adopted in orality and literacy. This research has shown that while these things do help, there is only so far one can go to influence a person's response to the Scriptures. In the words of Minyanka translator, Ousmane Dembélé, "our church needs a spiritual awakening".²²²

²¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

²²⁰ Matthew 13:22.

²²¹ Psalm 19:7-11; Matthew 4:4.

²²² Ousmane Dembélé, e-mail message to author, August 19, 2013.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the coming of the New Testament in 2006 heralded a new era of Scripture engagement for the Minyanka churches of Mali. Discoveries have been made together with Minyanka pastors and translators which have practical implications for the development of future training programmes and resources. Further research needs abound, such as in youth Scripture engagement and in issues of Gospel and culture.

All those who have supported the Minyanka translation programme have reason to be encouraged. It is evident that the translated Scriptures in Minyanka do not belong to Hill's category of those that sit "in storehouses, rejected by those for whom they were intended".²²³ The testimonies of change and transformation are an answer to Pastor Timothée Coulibaly's prayer for this food to be eaten and for its light to shine.²²⁴

But this paper has also shown that there is no room for complacency. There is an urgent call for basic Bible teaching and ongoing literacy classes. Pastors have an especially important role to play and need to be given encouragement, time, resources and training to more effectively facilitate Scripture engagement. Their choice of communication methods and their availability to answer questions from the Bible will have a considerable influence on the way people interact with the Scriptures. Their passion to know God better, and their motivation to grow in deeper understanding of God's Word, will be the kind of leadership the church needs in Mali today.

Scripture engagement is not automatic. As Bible agencies have learnt in the West, it is possible to have access to the Scriptures and some of the best resources and programmes, but fail to be changed by God's Word. In this sense, Minyanka Christians are no different from Christians anywhere else in the world, facing the challenge of making Scripture engagement a priority amid the many distractions in life.

²²³ Harriet Hill, "The Vernacular Treasure", 83.

²²⁴ Timothée Coulibaly, prayer at the Dedication of the Minyanka New Testament, Kimparana, Mali. November 4, 2006.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1888	Roman Catholic missionaries enter Mali, Kita parish founded
1919	GMU missionaries enter Mali
1923	C&MA missionaries enter Mali
1932	Somasso church founded (first church among the Minyanka people)
1933	Bambara New Testament published
1934	Koutiala church founded
1936	N'Torosso Bible School begins
1936	Karangasso parish founded (the first Catholic church in the Minyanka region)
1939	Baramba church founded
1941	First five men graduate from N'Torosso Bible School
1948	The gospel reaches Yorosso
1960	Independence from France: French Sudan becomes Mali
1962	Bambara Bible dedicated
1963	<i>Église Chrétienne Évangélique</i> autonomous from C&MA Mission
1979	C&MA invites SIL to be involved in Minyanka
1980	SIL begins work in Mali
1982	SIL team arrives to begin analysis of Minyanka language
1994	Minyanka translation work begins
1998	First Minyanka literacy teacher training course
2004	New Testament translation completed
2005	Typesetting of the New Testament in Dallas, Texas.
2005	<i>Association pour la Promotion de la Langue Mamara</i> founded
2005	Minyanka NT recorded for Faith Comes By Hearing
2006	Year of NT promotion begins, people pre-order NTs
2006	Scripture-content materials, <i>Literacy for Life</i> , launched for literacy programme
2006	Minyanka New Testament dedicated, Kimparana, 4 November 2006
2007	Faith Comes By Hearing listening groups begin in Minyanka
2007	Minyanka Old Testament translation work begins
2009	Minyanka radio programmes, <i>Kile Jomɔ Yere</i> , begin broadcasting, initially on four local FM stations (seven by 2013).

APPENDIX B

READING COMPARED TO LISTENING TO AUDIO SCRIPTURES

Reading the Scriptures <i>Advantages</i>	Listening to Audio Scriptures <i>Advantages</i>
People can pause while reading, to meditate on a section, reading it again slowly, focussing on specific words.	Gives access to the Scriptures for those who cannot read, those who cannot read well and those who don't like reading.
Can be used to read specific verses and passages when teaching the Bible to others.	The text is read fluently without hesitation by someone who is a capable reader.
Readers can scan the text forwards and backwards to identify the context and find specific verses.	Gives access to the Scriptures for blind and visually impaired people.
Can be read at the speed of the reader's choosing, which can be faster than audio Scripture readings.	Helps people learn to read, as they follow the text while listening.
Readers can highlight verses and make notes.	Dramatised readings, music and sound effects can enhance the experience and emotional engagement with the text.
A book can last a lifetime, which is not true of technology which can break.	Enables people to hear more of the Scriptures than they would if they were reading, hence helping them to get a better overview of the message of a book.
Ensures a level of concentration.	
Possibility of accessing extra-textual helps such as footnotes, study Bible notes, glossaries, maps, illustrations.	Enables people to listen to the Bible while doing other things such as household chores.
Cheaper than a phone or solar-powered digital audio player.	

Reading the Scriptures <i>Advantages</i>	Listening to Audio Scriptures <i>Advantages</i>
	<p>Makes the Scriptures more accessible to younger children who will memorise what they hear as they listen repeatedly.</p> <p>Requires less mental effort for some, meaning that listeners can focus on thinking of the meaning instead of decoding the letters on the page.</p> <p>Facilitates listening to Scriptures in community.</p> <p>There is a certain novelty factor, meaning that people who would not normally listen to someone reading the Scriptures would be intrigued to hear them through an audio player, radio or mobile device.</p>

Reading the Scriptures <i>Disadvantages</i>	Listening to Audio Scriptures <i>Disadvantages</i>
<p>Not accessible to those who cannot read and those who cannot read well.</p> <p>Needs light to read by in the evenings.</p>	<p>Requires a functioning digital audio player, radio, phone or cassette player. These can break or have battery charging problems.</p> <p>Recording can involve making a choice as to the interpretation of how a verse is to be understood, e.g. in the tone of voice and which words are stressed.</p>

Reading the Scriptures <i>Disadvantages</i>	Listening to Audio Scriptures <i>Disadvantages</i>
	<p>Navigation within a chapter can be limited, so it is hard to go back a couple of verses or spend longer meditating on a section.</p> <p>The text is read at a constant speed, but people might prefer to slow down at certain points in order to take it in.</p> <p>It is harder to provide study notes to facilitate interpretation and application.</p> <p>Dramatised readings, music and sound effects can be off-putting and distracting to some who would prefer a more straightforward reading of the text.</p> <p>It is possible to have the audio Scriptures playing but not to be listening attentively.</p> <p>Solar-powered digital audio players are expensive and unlikely to be available to every family in a church. Before everyone has their own MP3-capable phone, access to the audio resource will likely be shared, so not everyone will use it at the same time.</p>

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRES

C.1. Questionnaire (in French)

L'utilisation des Saintes Ecritures dans les églises mamaraphones

Date Lieu

Merci beaucoup d'avoir accepté de répondre à quelques questions pour une recherche sur l'utilisation de la Parole de Dieu dans les églises mamaraphones. Ce n'est pas un examen et il n'y a pas de réponses « correctes ». Nous n'allons pas écrire votre nom sur ce papier et nous n'allons pas dire à votre pasteur comment vous avez répondu. Si vous préférez ne pas répondre à une question ou si vous voulez un éclaircissement sur le sens d'une question, n'hésitez pas à nous dire.

1. M F

2. Age (approx) : Moins de 15 ans 15-19 ans 20-29 ans 30-39 ans
 40-49 ans 50-59 ans 60 ans ou plus

3. Quelle est la langue que vous parlez la mieux ?

Mamara Bambara Autre (Cochez un seul choix)

4. Quelle est votre préférence de langue pour écouter la Bible ?

(Mettez « 1 » pour votre premier choix, et « 2 » pour le deuxième, etc.)

Mamara Bambara Français Autre

5. Avez-vous déjà écouté tout le Nouveau Testament mamara ?

Oui Non Une partie seulement (Cochez un seul choix)

6. Avez-vous regardé le film JESUS ?

Oui, en mamara Oui, en bambara Non (Cochez tous les choix applicables)

7. Quelle est votre préférence concernant la lecture et l'écoute des Saintes Ecritures ?

Je préfère lire qu'écouter (Cochez un seul choix)
 Je préfère écouter que lire.
 J'aime les deux également : lire et écouter.

8. Savez-vous bien lire les Saintes Ecritures ? (Cochez un seul choix)

Non, la lecture de la Bible est difficile pour moi dans n'importe quelle langue.
 Je sais bien lire en bambara mais je n'ai pas appris à bien lire en mamara.
 Je sais lire en mamara mais avec hésitations.
 Je lis très bien le NT mamara avec confiance et sans trop de problèmes.

9. Est-ce que votre église aide ceux qui veulent être alphabétisés et qui veulent apprendre à lire couramment les Saintes Ecritures en mamara ? (Cochez un seul choix)

Oui, je suis satisfait de ce que mon église fait dans ce domaine.
 Nous essayons, mais je pense que nous pouvons mieux faire.
 Non, je pense que nous négligeons beaucoup ce domaine.

Qu'est-ce que votre église est en train de faire maintenant ?

Qu'est-ce que vous aimeriez que votre église fasse ?

10. Quelles sont les moments pendant lesquels vous avez l'habitude d'écouter ou de lire les Saintes Ecritures ? (Cochez tous les choix applicables dans la première colonne, et pour chaque ligne que vous cochez, cochez la/les langue(s) utilisée(s) dans cette activité pour les Saintes Ecritures)

	Dans quelle(s) langue(s) ?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Lecture biblique pendant le culte du dimanche	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Lecture individuelle (tout seul)	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Réunion de prière	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Méditation biblique en famille (culte familiale)	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Groupe d'écoute à l'église	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Groupe d'écoute à la maison	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Dans les chants	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Emissions à la radio	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Groupe de jeunes	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Groupe de femmes	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Ecole du dimanche	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Etude biblique en groupe	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français
<input type="checkbox"/> Autre	<input type="checkbox"/> mamara	<input type="checkbox"/> bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> français

11. Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand vous lisez ou vous écoutez la Bible ? (Cochez un seul choix pour chacun)

Quand je lis ou j'écoute la Bible...	Oui	De temps en temps	Non, pas vraiment
a) Je trouve que Dieu me parle personnellement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) J'ai du mal à bien comprendre sans explication par quelqu'un.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) J'ai des difficultés pour me concentrer et mon attention s'égare.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Je trouve des enseignements pratiques qui m'aident beaucoup dans les choses de ma vie qui me préoccupent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) La Bible m'encourage dans ma foi en Jésus Christ.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Quelles méthodes vous aident le plus à comprendre et mettre en pratique la Parole de Dieu (dans n'importe quelle langue) ?

Mettez « 1 » pour votre premier choix, « 2 » pour le 2ème, « 3 » pour le 3^{ème}, etc.

- Le message donné par le prédicateur pendant le culte
- La lecture ou l'écoute quand vous êtes seul, avec prière et méditation.
- Poser des questions au pasteur dans un groupe de méditation
- Poser des questions au pasteur tout seul
- Discuter ensemble en groupe avec d'autres chrétiens
- Les émissions à la radio
- Lire un livre qui donne des explications

13. a. Donnez un exemple de quelque chose que votre pasteur fait pour vous aider à mieux comprendre et mettre en pratique les Saintes Ecritures (dans n'importe quelle langue).

b. Donnez un exemple de quelque chose que vous aimeriez que votre pasteur fasse pour vous aider à mieux comprendre et mettre en pratique les Saintes Ecritures (*dans n'importe quelle langue*).

14. En général, si vous comparez la situation d'aujourd'hui par rapport aux temps passé...

- a) Il y a un plus grand respect pour la Parole de Dieu aujourd'hui par rapport aux temps passés.

Vrai Faux Je ne sais pas (Cochez un seul choix)

- b) Nous sommes tellement occupés que les croyants n'ont plus assez de temps pour la Parole de Dieu comme dans le passé.

Vrai Faux Je ne sais pas (Cochez un seul choix)

- c) Nos pasteurs sont tellement occupés qu'ils n'ont pas assez de temps pour l'étude de la Parole de Dieu et l'affermissement des croyants comme dans le passé.

Vrai Faux Je ne sais pas (Cochez un seul choix)

- d) Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui connaissent mieux la Bible par rapport aux générations précédentes.

Vrai Faux Je ne sais pas (Cochez un seul choix)

15. Est-ce que votre église fait assez pour aider les enfants et la jeunesse à comprendre la Parole de Dieu ? (*dans la/les langue(s) appropriée(s)*) (Cochez un seul choix)

Oui, je suis satisfait de ce que mon église fait dans ce domaine.

Nous essayons, mais je pense que nous pouvons mieux faire.

Non, je pense que nous négligeons beaucoup ce domaine.

Qu'est-ce que votre église est en train de faire maintenant ?

Qu'est-ce que vous aimeriez que votre église fasse ?

16. a. Il y a quatre livres dans le Nouveau Testament qui parlent de la vie de Jésus. Quels sont leurs noms ?

b. Qui a écrit la lettre aux Romains ?

c. Mettez en ordre les personnages suivants en commençant avec celui qui est né le premier :

Moïse, David, Abraham, Pierre, Ruth.

17. Racontez-moi **un des plus grands changements** que vous avez vus **dans votre église** depuis l'arrivée du Nouveau Testament mamara.

18. Racontez-moi **un des plus grands changements** que vous avez vus **dans votre vie personnelle ou vie de famille** depuis l'arrivée du Nouveau Testament mamara.

19. Avez-vous un Nouveau Testament mamara ?

Oui Non

Si non, qu'est-ce qui vous empêche d'en acheter ?

Si oui : Est-ce que vous pouvez le lire ? Oui Avec difficulté Non
Est-ce que vous le lisez régulièrement ? Oui De temps en temps Non

Si non, pourquoi l'avez-vous acheté ?

20. Selon vous, quelles sont **trois obstacles dans la vie** qui empêchent les Mamara à lire ou écouter davantage les Saintes Ecritures ?

Merci beaucoup !

C.2. Questionnaire (in English)

Scripture Engagement in Minyanka Churches

Date Place

Thank you for your willingness to answer some research questions into the use of God's Word in Minyanka-speaking churches. It is not an exam and we are not looking for "correct answers". We will not write your name on this paper and we will not tell your pastor how you have answered the questions. If you prefer not to respond to a question or if you want clarification as to the meaning of a question, do not hesitate to ask.

1. M F

2. Age (approx) : Under 15 yrs 15-19 yrs 20-29 yrs 30-39 yrs
 40-49 yrs 50-59 yrs 60 yrs or more

3. Which language do you speak the best?

Minyanka Bambara Other (Choose one)

4. In which language do you prefer to listen to the Bible?

(Put "1" for the first choice, "2" for the second, etc.)

Minyanka Bambara French Other

5. Have you already listened to all the Minyanka New Testament?

Yes No Only a part of it (Choose one)

6. Have you watched the JESUS film?

Yes, in Minyanka Yes, in Bambara No (Choose all that are applicable)

7. What is your preference concerning reading or listening to the Scriptures?

I prefer reading to listening (Choose one)
 I prefer listening to reading.
 I like the two equally: reading and listening.

8. Are you able to read the Scriptures well? (Choose one)

No, reading the Bible is difficult for me in any language.
 I know to read well in Bambara but I have not learnt to read well in Minyanka.
 I can read Minyanka, but with hesitations.
 I can read the Minyanka New Testament with confidence and without too many problems.

9. Does your church help those who want to learn to read the Scriptures fluently in Minyanka?
(Choose one)

Yes, I am satisfied with what my church does in this area.
 We try, but I think we could do better.
 No, I think that we neglect this a lot.

What is your church doing already?

What would you like your church to do?

10. In what situations do you regularly listen to or read the Scriptures? (Choose all the applicable situations in the first column, and then for each situation selected, specify the language(s) used for the Scriptures.)

	In which language(s)?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Bible reading during the church service	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Bible reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Prayer meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Bible meditation	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening group at church	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Listening group at home	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Songs	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio programmes	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Women's meeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Children's Sunday School	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Bible study	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Minyanka	<input type="checkbox"/> Bambara	<input type="checkbox"/> French

11. What happens when you read or listen to the Bible? (Choose one for each line)

When I read or listen to the Bible...	Yes	From time to time	No, not really
a) I find that God speaks to me personally.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) I find it difficult to understand without someone explaining it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) I find it difficult to concentrate and I am distracted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) I find practical teaching that helps me a lot in the things of life which preoccupy me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) The Bible encourages me in my faith in Jesus Christ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Which methods help you the most to understand and put into practice the Word of God (in any language)?

Put "1" for the first choice, "2" for the second, "3" for the third, etc.

- The message given by the preacher during the church service
- Reading or listening while alone, with prayer and meditation
- Asking the pastor questions in a group
- Asking the pastor questions privately
- Discussing together in a group with other Christians
- Radio programmes
- Reading a book that gives explanations

13. a. Give an example of something that your pastor does to help you to better understand and put into practice the Scriptures (in any language).

- b. Give an example of something that you would like your pastor to do to help you to better understand and put into practice the Scriptures (in any language).

14. In general, if you compare the situation today with times past...
- a) There is a much greater respect for the Word of God today compared to the past.
 True False I don't know (Choose one)
- b) We are so busy that believers no longer have enough time for God's Word compared to the past.
 True False I don't know (Choose one)
- c) Our pastors are so busy that they don't have enough time for studying the Bible and discipling believers as they did in the past.
 True False I don't know (Choose one)
- d) Young people of today know the Bible better compared to previous generations.
 True False I don't know (Choose one)
15. Does your church do enough to help children and young people to understand God's Word?
(in the appropriate languages) (Choose one)
- Yes, I am satisfied with what my church does in this area.
 We try, but I think we could do better.
 No, I think that we neglect this a lot.
- What is your church doing already?
- What would you like your church to do?
16. a. There are four books in the New Testament that speak of the life of Jesus.
What are their names?
- b. Who wrote the letter to the Romans?
- c. Put in order the following Bible characters, starting with the one who was born first:
Moses, David, Abraham, Peter, Ruth.
17. Tell me about **one of the biggest changes** that you have seen **in your church** since the arrival of the Minyanka New Testament.
18. Tell me about **one of the biggest changes** that you have seen **in your personal or family life** since the arrival of the Minyanka New Testament.

19. Do you have a Minyanka New Testament?

Yes No

If not, what has prevented you buying one?

If yes: Can you read it? Yes With difficulty No
Do you read it regularly? Yes From time to time No

If not, why did you buy it?

20. In your opinion, what are **three obstacles** in life which prevent Minyanka people from reading or listening to the Scriptures more?

Thank you very much!

C.3. Questionnaire For Church Pastors (in French)

Questions pour les pasteurs et dirigeants d'église

1. Racontez-nous quelques-uns des plus grands changements que vous avez vus dans votre église depuis l'arrivée du Nouveau Testament mamara.
2. De quelle mesure est-ce que les fidèles sont en train de comprendre et mettre en pratique la Parole de Dieu qu'ils reçoivent en mamara ? Donnez-nous des exemples.
3. Quels obstacles voyez-vous qui empêchent les Mamara à lire ou écouter davantage les Saintes Ecritures ?
4. Quelles stratégies pouvez-vous suggérer pour que les gens lisent, écoutent, comprennent, et mettent en pratique davantage la Parole de Dieu en mamara dans votre église ?

C.4. Questionnaire For Church Pastors (in English)

1. Tell us about some of the biggest changes that you have seen in your church since the arrival of the Minyanka New Testament.
2. To what extent are the believers understanding and putting into practice God's Word they receive in Minyanka? Give some examples.
3. What obstacles do you see that prevent Minyanka people from reading and listening more to the Scriptures?
4. What strategies can you suggest so that people read, listen, understand and put into practice more the Word of God in Minyanka in your church?

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

This appendix contains the results of the questionnaire. They represent answers from 50 people, from 23 different churches.

Church District	Churches Visited	Number of respondents
Yorosso	Diarakongo (1), Fakoni (1), Kani (1), Karangana (5), Kifosso 2 (4), Lopegué (2), Makongo (1), Ngorola (1), Oumasso (1)	17
Koutiala	Baramba (7), Forosso (2), Sirakele (5), Koutiala (1)	15
Kimparana	Kafigué (2), Kampogosso (1), Kassorola (1), Kimparana (1), Koroubadougou-Kagoua (1), Tiebélé (2)	8
N'Torosso	Dasso (3), Ngorokan (2)	5
Bla	Nougola (2), Samabogo (3)	5

Table D-1. Districts and churches visited

Since the districts of Yorosso, Kimparana and Koutiala have the most Minyanka churches, it was appropriate for the majority of questionnaires to be administered there. The interviewer would have liked to survey more people in Kimparana, but was inhibited by the rains.

Questions 1 and 2

Age	Men	Women	Total
20-29	2	4	6
30-39	6	1	7
40-49	14	8	22
50-59	8	4	12
60+	3	0	3
Total	33	17	50

Table D-2. Respondents categorised by age and sex

More young people could have been included if there had been more time and if a season had been chosen which did not involve the younger generation in the fields for most of the day.

Question 3

All respondents answered “Minyanka” as the language they spoke the best.

Question 4

All respondents answered “Minyanka” as the language of preference for listening to the Scriptures, with “Bambara” as their second choice.

Question 5

	Yes, all of it	A part of it only	No
Have you already listened to all of the Minyanka NT?	31 (62%)	19 (38%)	0

Table D-3. Listening to all of the Minyanka New Testament

Question 6

	Yes, in Minyanka	Yes, in Bambara	No, in neither language
Have you watched the JESUS film?	21 (42%)	45 (90%)	0

Table D-4. JESUS film

Question 7

What is your preference regarding reading or listening to the Scriptures?	Number of respondents	%
I prefer reading to listening	9	18%
I prefer listening to reading	14	28%
I like the two the same: reading and listening	27	54%

Table D-5. Preferences for reading or listening to the Bible

Question 8

Are you able to read the Scriptures well?

Do you know how to read the Scriptures well?	Number of respondents	%
No, reading the Bible is difficult for me in any language.	2	4%
I can read well in Bambara but I have not learnt to read well in Minyanka	11	22%
I can read Minyanka, but with hesitations	20	40%
I can read the Minyanka NT with confidence and without too many problems.	17	34%

Table D-6. Reading ability

This question asked about the respondent's *perceived* reading ability. An alternative would have been for the interviewer to show people a card with verses printed in Bambara and in Minyanka.²²⁵ He could have then assessed their reading ability, in order to get an objective measurement.

Question 9

Does your church help those who want to learn to read the Scriptures fluently in Minyanka?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, I am satisfied with what my church does in this area.	4	8%
We try, but I think we could do better.	42	84%
No, I think that we neglect this a lot.	4	8%

Table D-7. Satisfaction with what the church does to facilitate literacy

²²⁵ Cf. Vincent. W. Griffis, "Vernacular Scripture Use in Two Cameroonian Language Communities: Kom and Bafut" (Doctor of Education diss., Boston University, 2011), 169.

What is your church doing already?

What is your church doing already?	Number of respondents
Holds literacy classes regularly	11
Advertises/promotes literacy classes	11
Encourages public reading by Christians	5
Looks after visiting literacy teachers	5
Holds weekly classes	1
Held literacy classes in the past	3
Literacy teachers have been trained	1
Buys materials	2
Provides lighting	3
Provides blackboard	1
Preaching in Minyanka	3
Choir in Minyanka	3
Scripture memory	1
Prayer	1

Table D-8. What the church does to facilitate literacy

What would you like your church to do?

What would you like your church to do?	Number of respondents
Hold more classes (especially for adults)	21
Hold weekly classes	8
Buy materials for participants	7
Get church members trained as literacy teachers	6
Organise (evening) Bible study/courses	4
More public reading of Minyanka NT	2
Continue in promotion	2
Support literacy teachers	1
Form a Minyanka prayer group	1
Build a literacy classroom	1

Table D-9. What people suggest their church does to facilitate literacy

Question 10

In what contexts do you regularly listen to or read the Scriptures?

	In Minyanka	In Bambara
Radio programmes	47	0
Songs	43	1
Bible reading during the church service	39	13
Individual Bible reading	33	9
Listening group at home	30	2
Listening group at church	25	0
Family Bible meditation	13	4
Group Bible study	7	0
Prayer meeting	6	1
Women's Meeting	6	0
Youth Meeting	3	0
Children's Sunday School	0	0

Table D-10. Contexts for regular Scripture engagement

Question 11

What happens when you read or listen to the Bible?

When I read or listen to the Bible...	Yes	From time to time	No
I find that God speaks to me personally.	46	4	0
I find it difficult to understand without someone explaining it.	8	31	11
I find it difficult to concentrate and I am distracted	2	28	20
I find practical teaching that helps me a lot in the things of life which preoccupy me.	50	0	0
The Bible encourages me in my faith in Jesus Christ.	50	0	0

Table D-11. What happens when reading or listening to the Bible

Question 12

Which methods help you the most to understand and put into practice the Word of God?

Method	Number of respondents		
	1 st method	2 nd method	3 rd method
The message given by the preacher during the church service	16	6	4
Reading or listening while alone, with prayer and meditation	8	6	10
Asking the pastor questions in a group	2	2	3
Asking the pastor questions privately	17	15	4
Discussing together in a group with other Christians	1	9	6
Radio programmes	5	6	18
Reading a book that gives explanations	1	6	5

Table D-12. Methods which help people to understand and apply God's Word

Question 13

Give an example of something that your pastor does to help you to better understand and put into practice the Scriptures.

What I appreciate the pastor does to help Scripture understanding and application	Number of respondents
Illustrations of his message	24
Revision of previous message	11
Gets others to read in public	8
Asks questions, encourages participation	6
Preaches in Minyanka	4
Answers questions in discussions	4
Gives author/audience/context information	2
Teaches, not only preaches	3
Introduces his message with a song	2
Uses drama to illustrate his message	1
Preach series on same theme	1
Puts verses to music	1
Leads Bible study	1
Pastor prays for the church	1
Encourages people to use their language	1
Visits believers and gives advice from the Bible	1

Encourages people to come with questions	1
Gives advice/teaching apart from sermon	1
Gives verses to read at home	1
Programmes readers to preach at prayer meeting	1
Scripture memory	1

Table D-13. What people appreciate the pastor doing to facilitate Scripture engagement

Give an example of something that you would like your pastor to do to help you to better understand and put into practice the Scriptures.

What I suggest the pastor does to help Scripture understanding and application	Number of respondents
Gets others to read from the Scriptures in public	15
Organise a course to improve Bible reading	8
Lead Bible studies (in Minyanka)	7
Train others to give talks/preach from the Bible	7
Organise seminars on relevant themes	4
Preach more in Minyanka	2
More of service in Minyanka (songs/prayers, etc.)	2
Visit families	1
Run a competition to find the best reader	1
Give more time for sermons	1
Preach more messages on the same theme	1
Revise the previous message	1
Illustrate the message more	1

Table D-14. What people would like the pastor to do to facilitate Scripture engagement

Question 14

In general, if you compare the situation today with times past...

	True	False	Don't Know
“There is a much greater respect for the Word of God today compared to the past.”	10 (20%)	40 (80%)	0
“We are so busy that believers no longer have enough time for God’s Word compared to the past.”	36 (72%)	14 (28%)	0
“Our pastors are so busy that they don’t have enough time for studying the Bible and discipling believers as they did in the past.”	32 (64%)	16 (32%)	2 (4%)
“Young people of today know the Bible better than previous generations.”	45 (90%)	5 (10%)	0

Table D-15. Comparing the past and present

Question 15

Does your church do enough to help children and young people to understand God’s Word?

	Number of respondents	%
Yes, I am satisfied with what my church does in this area.	5	10%
We try, but I think we could do better.	44	88%
No, I think that we neglect this a lot.	1	2%

Table D-16. Satisfaction with what church does in youth Scripture engagement

What is your church doing already?

What is your church doing already?	Number of respondents
Sunday School	41
Buys materials for children's work	7
Scripture memory	6
Choir sings in mamara	6
Bible camps, holiday Bible clubs	4
Youth Bible study	3
Prayer for youth	2
Weekday afternoon meetings/clubs	2
Older people give advice to young	1
Sends representatives to seminars/training	1
Scripture reading by youth	1
Organises competitions	1
Seminars on relevant topics	1

Table D-17. What the church does to facilitate youth Scripture engagement

What would you like your church to do?

What would you like your church to do?	Number of respondents
More emphasis on teaching/training youth	12
Seminars on relevant topics	9
Bible course/study for youth	8
Youth materials in Minyanka	8
More training for youth leaders	4
More time for teaching children	2
More Scripture memory	1
Appoint someone to be responsible for Minyanka language teaching among the youth	1
Bible competitions	2
Bible camps	1

Table D-18. What people suggest their church does to facilitate youth Scripture engagement

Question 16

There are four books in the New Testament that speak of the life of Jesus. What are their names?

Answer given	Number of respondents	%
Named all 4 gospels correctly as “ <i>Matthew, Mark, Luke and John</i> ” (in any order)	32	64%
Named 3 of the 4 gospels correctly	11	22%
Named 2 of the 4 gospels correctly	1	2%
Named 1 of the 4 gospels correctly	2	4%
Did not give an answer	4	8%
Cited an incorrect book in their answer	10	20%

Table D-19. Naming the four gospels

Who wrote the letter to the Romans?

Answer given	Number of respondents	%
Gave answer correctly as “ <i>Paul</i> ”	36	72%
Answered incorrectly	6	12%
Did not give an answer	8	16%

Table D-20. Naming the author of the letter to the Romans

Put in order the following Bible characters, starting with the one who was born first: Moses, David, Abraham, Peter, Ruth.

Answer given	Number of respondents	%
Correct order: “ <i>Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Peter</i> ”	7	14%
Almost correct, putting David before Ruth: “ <i>Abraham, Moses, David, Ruth, Peter</i> ”	12	24%
Getting Abraham, Moses and David in order	26	52%
Incorrect: Putting Moses before Abraham	11	22%
Incorrect: Not putting Peter in last position	16	32%
Did not give an answer	3	6%

Table D-21. Chronological order of Bible characters

Question 17

Tell me about one of the biggest changes that you have seen in your church since the arrival of the Minyanka New Testament.

One of the biggest changes observed in church	Number of respondents
Better understanding compared to Bambara Scriptures (especially by the young and old)	13
People bring their New Testaments to church	10
Public prayers are done in Minyanka	9
Scripture memory is done in Minyanka	8
Sing and get to know songs in Minyanka	8
Public testimonies given in Minyanka	7
Public reading done in Minyanka	6
More people are reading the Scriptures	4
More messages preached in Minyanka	3
More services held in Minyanka	2
Church has accepted Minyanka	3
The NT corrects our Minyanka	4
Progress in the faith	2
It has attracted young people to study the Bible	1
Pastor can ask others to read	1
Older Minyanka-speakers are more engaged in the church	1
Discussions about the Bible	1
Additional get-together to listen to Scripture	1
Many have received teaching in Bible studies	1
People are finding the passage in their own NTs before the pastor reads it	1
Encouraged those who can't go to church	1
Helped those who can't read to hear all NT	1
Helps us share our faith with non-Christians	1
Minyanka Sunday celebrated	2
The Apostles Creed is done in Minyanka	1
The women do sketches in Minyanka during festivals	1

Table D-22. Changes in church since the arrival of the Minyanka NT

Question 18

Tell me about one of the biggest changes that you have seen in your personal or family life since the arrival of the Minyanka New Testament.

One of the biggest changes observed in personal and family life	Number of respondents
I/we understand the Scriptures better, it is clear compared to the Bambara Bible	20
Children recite and chat about what they've heard	19
I do my meditation in Minyanka	11
Corrects our language	9
We do family prayers in Minyanka	5
I've learnt to read in Minyanka	6
I compare the Scriptures in Minyanka and Bambara	6
The children read from the Scriptures	5
I pray in Minyanka	3
The children pray in mamara	3
I sing in Minyanka, understanding the words	3
I evangelise in Minyanka	2
Personal transformation: helped to correct my spiritual life, helped me to submit to God's Word, gave me assurance of the truth	3
Enabled me to hear all of the NT	2
Recognised that what we do in Bambara can also be done in Minyanka	1
I can answer questions the children ask	1
Brings family together in evenings	2
Increased Bible knowledge in family	1
Bible teaching throughout the week, not only Sundays	1
Children receive God's Word	1
Corrects spiritual life of children	2
Feel 'at home', God is Minyanka	1
It has given me love for God's Word	1
I've learnt more from the Bible	1
Appreciated extra-textual helps	1
People come and listen to the Scriptures	1

Table D-23. Changes in personal and family life since the arrival of the NT

Question 19

	Yes	No
Do you have a Minyanka New Testament?	47 (94%)	3 (6%)

Table D-24. Ownership of the Minyanka New Testament

	Yes	With difficulty	No
Can you read it?	36 (72%)	9 (18%)	5 (10%)

Table D-25. Ability to read the Minyanka New Testament

	Yes	From time to time	No
Do you read the Minyanka NT regularly?	17 (34%)	28 (56%)	5 (10%)

Table D-26. Reading the Minyanka New Testament

Perceived reading ability	Reading NT regularly	Reading NT from time to time	Not reading the NT
No, reading the Bible is difficult for me in any language.	0	0	2
I know to read well in Bambara but I have not learnt to read well in Minyanka	0	8	3
I can read Minyanka, but with hesitations	5	15	0
I can read the Minyanka New Testament with confidence and without too many problems.	12	5	0

Table D-27. Reading ability and frequency of reading the NT

Question 20

In your opinion, what are three obstacles in life which prevent Minyanka people from reading or listening to the Scriptures more?

Obstacle Cited	Number of respondents	%
Laziness (of readers)	35	70%
Work (lack of time and tiredness)	34	68%
Lack of love of the language	32	64%
Dialectal differences	22	44%
Illiteracy / Don't know alphabet	6	12%
Bad time management	2	4%
Discouragement, lack of courage	2	4%
Lack of consecration	1	2%
Do not see value of the language	1	2%
Neglect	1	2%
Do not see the value of God's Word	1	2%
Useless chat	1	2%
Tea	1	2%
Prefer listening to reading	1	2%

Table D-28. Obstacles to Scripture engagement

Testimonies from Faith Comes By Hearing groups

Theme of Testimony	Number of testimonies
Challenged in obedience and repentance	40
Received encouragement in the faith	24
Increased understanding of Scripture, correcting misunderstandings from Bambara	12
Conversion: one or more people became Christians	10
Facilitated people getting together more to hear and discuss the Word of God	10
Provided opportunities for non-Christians to hear the Scriptures	9
Learnt to read the NT by following along while listening	6
The Proclaimer became a pastor to isolated Christians and those who could not get to church	2
Enabled a blind person to hear all of the NT	1

Table D-29. Summary of testimonies from Faith Comes By Hearing groups

Theme of Testimony	Number of testimonies
Forgiving others	6
Family reconciliation, including between couples	7
Church reconciliation	1
Renewed love and mercy towards others	3
Service to others in the church	2
Giving/tithing	3
Paying taxes	1
Treating husbands better	1
Turning from trusting in riches, love of money	2
Turning from criticising each other	1
Turning from lying	2
Turning from stealing	2
Turning from anger	1
Turning from worldliness	2
Turning from drunkenness	1
Turning from keeping taboos	1
Repenting of adultery	3
Repenting of keeping idols	1
Repenting of seeking help from local diviner	1
Not seeking to be 'chief'	1

Table D-30. Summary of testimonies: obedience and repentance

ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	<i>Alliance Biblique du Mali</i> (Bible Society of Mali)
AGEMPEM	<i>Association des Groupements des Eglises et Missions Protestantes Evangéliques au Mali</i> [Association of Protestant Evangelical Churches and Missions in Mali]
C&MA	Christian & Missionary Alliance http://www.cmalliance.org
CMDT	<i>Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement du Textile</i> [Malian Company for the Development of Textiles] http://www.cmdt.ml
DNAFLA	<i>Direction Nationale de l'Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquée</i> [National Directorate of Functional Literacy and Applied Linguistics]
ECE	<i>Église Chrétienne Évangélique</i> [Evangelical Christian Church]
EEPML	<i>Eglise Évangélique Protestante au Mali</i> [Evangelical Protestant Church in Mali]
FCBH	Faith Comes By Hearing / Hosanna http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com
FOBAI	Forum Of Bible Agencies International http://www.forum-intl.net
GMU	Gospel Missionary Union (now Avant Ministries) http://www.avantministries.org
IMB	International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention http://www.imb.org
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SIL	SIL International (formerly known as Summer Institute of Linguistics) http://www.sil.org
TUCSE	Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement http://tucse.taylor.edu
UBS	United Bible Societies http://www.unitedbiblesocieties.org

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