

EPILOGUE 1985

by Paul E. Meier

Five years have since passed. The first edition of 2000 Izi New Testaments has been sold out. A new edition is being prepared. Samuel Iyoku and Justin Ogodo are busy with the translation of the Old Testament in Izi. The Old Testaments in Ikwo and Ezaa are in the planning stage. A Dutch translator couple, sent by the Dutch Reformed Church, is supervising the new project. John Ovuoba has started his training as translation consultant and - together with his wife Margret - is on the staff of the Nigerian Bible Translation Trust. The Lord has not failed any of our friends.

Our former team-mates remind us of the parable in Matt. 20. There we are told of men who stood around idle until the end of the day. When the owner of the vineyard asked them: "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" they answered him: "Because no one has hired us!"

It was and still is the task of the evangelizing church to call all peoples to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Since the end of the translation project described in this book, a number of other national Bible translation organizations have come into existence in Africa - in the eleventh hour, so to speak, when no one had expected this.

This book, we would like to raise this heart-searching question: If it is possible to utilize the talents of young Africans and in this way reach the goal faster, why do we act as though everything depended on us alone?

According to reliable sources ¹, approximately one third of all the yet unwritten languages of the world are in Africa (around 1000). However, of the nearly 5000 members of Wycliffe Bible Translators, only 10% are assigned to Africa and many of these are still in training. Those already in Africa have worked - with the help of many Africans - in 174 language projects so far. Thirty of these have been finished, including the three projects of which you have read in this book.

More than 99.5% of all co-workers in African language projects come from our Western churches. Can we continue to tolerate this? Do we allow God to call Africans too? Or do we block their calling to be our partners with arguments that are not valid in the view of the Third World? E.g., "If God calls, he will also raise up the support." Or: "It is not good that they become dependent again." Could it be that we are hindering the calling of Africans to the translation task, in spite of all our efforts so far?

¹ Ethnologue, Tenth edition, Barbara F. Grimes etc. Languages of the World, Dallas, SIL, 1985. (The result of 30 years of work, 5445 languages in 210 countries.)

This book expresses the firm conviction that there is a great potential of future Bible translators in Africa. Africans possess an extraordinary talent for learning languages - contrary to deeply grounded misjudgments. Why have these talented Africans never been made use of?

The historic causes are too complex to be enumerated here. We just want to mention three points:

1. Many African Christians do not see the necessity to bring the Word of God to their own people. What needs to happen so that they will recognize their responsibility?

2. African Christians mostly do not have the financial resources which are necessary for the training and the support of Bible translators. How could they obtain these finances?

3. Christians in our parts of the world have stressed too long the erroneous idea that independence should be the ideal for Christians in the Third World too. They overlook the fact that the Christian church in the New Testament is compared to a body whose members are dependent on one another. Keeping this in mind, we have to ask: How can we attain a spiritually healthy interdependence and work together as partners?

If we are really convinced that God wants to speak in every language, then we have to search for answers and look for ways where we can walk together.