

# New Testament Concepts of Forgiveness in the Gospels

In the Context of the *Dangme*<sup>1</sup> Translation and Usage.

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## Abstract

In contemporary times the relationship between sin and forgiveness is a problem in Christian Communities. This article explores this problem in relation to the translation of the rendering of forgiveness to the Dangme people of Southern Ghana. The translation in the *Ngmami Klouklou o* (*Dangme Bible*) of forgiveness has led to people feeling continually enslaved and not seeing the possibility of being liberated from their predicaments of sin. This has wider implications for *Dangme* soteriology. This paper seeks to find out the extent to which the translation of the concept of forgiveness fits in with contemporary understanding and usage of it among *Dangme* users of the Holy Bible in Dangme. The out come of this work was the discovery of a more liberating concept which is *ke* (i.e. gift) which frees *Dangme* readers and particularly believers from the hangover of being perpetually *in debt* of sin which they seem unable to finish paying.

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<sup>1</sup> Dangme is one of the Ghanaian languages of Southern Ghana

## Introduction

Translation of the Bible into local languages has its own challenges. Among these are those of the types of meanings that are generated from the text and their effects on the receptor communities. Perhaps that is the reason why the United Bible Society has some laid down principles of priority to guide translators in their work when they venture into vernacular languages. Some of these principles according to Nida are: Contextual consistency, functional equivalence, aural forms of language and forms used by the intended audience.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, here contextual consistency is of major concern in this paper. With this principle, the choice of the right word depends upon the context than upon a fixed system of verbal consistency. Two reasons support this position. Each language covers the totality of experience with symbols and each language has its own system of symbolising meaning.<sup>3</sup>

In furtherance of these principles, this work is specifically done within the framework of Mother tongue hermeneutics put forward by Kwame Bediako concerning the translation and usage of Biblical texts in African communities. According to him, ‘God speaks in African idioms and that it is through hearing in African Mother Tongues that the great things that God has done ( Acts 2:11) that African Theology emerges to edify not only the African Church but the Church world wide.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E.A. Nida & R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill: Leiden, 1969, 14-32.

<sup>3</sup> E. Wendland Buku Loyera, *An Introduction to the New Chiechewa Bible Translation*. Blantyre Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1998, 67-4.

<sup>4</sup> K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa. The Renewal of Non-Western Religion*. Maryknoll; New York Orbis, 1995, 60.

Bediako's argument here is that the Bible must be translated into African languages accurately to make the message understandable to African people so that they can hear and experience the word of God in context.

Now coming to our concept, in general, according to Gary Herion in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*,

‘forgiveness is the wiping out of an offense from memory; it can be affected only by the one affronted. Once eradicated, the offense no longer conditions the relationship between the offender and the one affronted, and harmony is restored between the two’.<sup>5</sup>

This concept is applied in the Bible in diverse ways concerning the relationship between human kind and God. Heroin says that the ‘Bible stresses both human forgiveness and divine forgiveness: The latter is the divine act by which the removal of sin and its consequences is effected’<sup>6</sup>. The biblical concept of forgiveness is focused on in this article as rendered in the New Testament in the vernacular language of the *Dangme* speaking people.

In our research work on the concept among *Dangmes*, we observed that a closer look at the *Ngmami Klouklou o* reveals that there are some translation problems which affect the exegesis/hermeneutics of it in the Gospels, particularly, Mt.6:12. This text, in the *Dangme New Testament*, do not only constitute textual problems which affect exegesis/hermeneutics, but also have theological implications for the Christian faith as understood in Dangme-speaking communities. The way the text is translated in the Dangme implies that, sins are debts which must be paid for by the sinner. But among the Dangmes sins are not debts but wrong doings which must be dealt with and treated as such. So we would be looking at the historical and

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<sup>5</sup> Gary, Herion, ‘Forgiveness’ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. David Noel Freedman (ed.), Doubleday, New York. London. Toronto. Sydney. Auckland, CD Rom, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Gary, Herion, ‘Forgiveness’ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. David Noel Freedman (ed.), Doubleday, New York. London. Toronto. Sydney. Auckland, CD Rom, 1992.

grammatical background of the concept of forgiveness in the New Testament. This is then reflected on with regard to its translation into *Dangme* and opinions of *Dangme* scholars in contemporary times. This is followed by our reflections and recommendations to conclude the paper.

### **Gospel statements and exegesis of the concept of forgiveness**

The New Testament uses the Greek verb *aphiēmi* together with its cognate noun *aphesis* to express the concept of forgiveness which occurs 142 times. Of these 47 are found in Matthew, 34 each in Mark and the Lucan writings, and 14 in John. The term occurs only 45 times in the sense of “to forgive.” It is used occasionally in a secular sense (Matt. 18:27, 32), but usually in the religious sense of forgiveness or forgiveness of sins (*aphiēmi harmatias*, Mk. 2:5, 7, cf. Lk 7:47, ff), debts (*opheilēmata*, Matt. 6:12), trespasses (*paraptōmata*, Mk. 11:25 f.; Matt. 6:14 f., ). In the Gospels however, and the rest of the New Testament, *aphiēmi* is used in the original sense of “to let ” (Mk. 1:34; 5:19, 37); “to dismiss, divorce, release (Matt. 13:36); “to leave” (Mk. 1:20; 10:28); “to leave behind” (Mk. 1:18); “to abandon” (Mk. 7:8). Forgiveness can also be expressed as remitting (*apolyō*), or pardoning (*charizomai*)<sup>7</sup> in the Old Testament. Even though there are examples of human beings forgiving one another in the Old Testament (Gen 50:17; Ex 10:17; 1 Sam 15:25; 25:28; Prov 17:9), the majority of references to the forgiveness of sins have God as subject Ex 34:7; cf Num 14:18-20; Neh 9:17; Ps 130:4; Mic 7:18; Dan 9:9). Thus in the Old Testament we find many prayers of God’s forgiveness of both individuals (2 King 5:18; Ps 25:11) and especially the people of Israel (1 Kings 8:30-50; 2 Chron 6:21-39; Ps 79:9). But the

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Brown,. General Editor, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986, 697-703..

Old Testament does not represent forgiveness as automatic: It flows from the sovereign freedom of the living God.<sup>8</sup>

In the Gospels the concept of forgiveness is discussed in relation to the Son of Man who has power to forgive sins and the community of faith who must forgive in order to receive God's forgiveness. Stories of forgiveness of sins in the Gospels are not understood in isolation; they are best understood with reference to reverent passive expressions in the Old Testament such as "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps 32:1; cf Deut 21:8; Is 6:7; 33:24; 40:2). In the Synoptic story of Jesus' healing of the lame man (Mk 2:1-12), the scribes' indignation, "Who has the power to forgive sins but one, [that is,] God?" (v.7, cf Lk 5:21), is caused by Jesus' statement "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 5 ). According to Ellingworth, "Their anger is aroused not because forgiveness of one person by another is unknown, but because the passive formula implied a claim to make performative statements in God's name."<sup>9</sup> Jesus' statement that he healed the lame man so that the scribes may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth (v.10) makes the claim virtually explicit.

Closely related to forgiveness are those passages which speak of the remission of a debt. We find a typical example in the story of the two debtors (Mat 18:23-35). There, it is important to note that, as Jesus' final comment makes clear, the remission of debt is a parable of forgiveness in the kingdom of heaven. This is the sense with which forgiveness must be understood in the Lord's Prayer, where Luke 11:4 has "forgive us our sins" and Matthew 6:12

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<sup>8</sup> P. Ellingworth, 'Forgiveness of Sins' in Joel B. Green, et al, Eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 241

<sup>9</sup> P. Ellingworth, 'Forgiveness of Sins' in Joel B. Green, et al, Eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 241

has “forgive us our debts.” In Matthew’s account, sins are being thought of metaphorically as incurring indebtedness to God.

Jesus’ teaching is addressed to a community based on the giving and receiving of forgiveness, from which those who refuse to forgive their enemies exclude themselves. The passages cited above further illustrate this principle: God’s forgiveness can only be received by those who are ready to forgive others. This principle is given special emphasis in Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer by being made the subject of the verses following immediately after the Lord’s Prayer, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (vv. 14-15). The same thought is expressed in Luke 6:37 and 7:47.

### **The various translations of the concept**

As discussed earlier, the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ model prayer for the Christian community is one of the texts in the Gospels in which we find Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness. Matthew 6: 12 reads “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (*kai aphes hēmin ta opheilēmata hēmon...*). Its parallel in Luke 11:4 reads, “And forgives us our sin, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (*kai aphes hēmin tas hamartias hēmōn...*).

Why the difference? Are debts the same as sins? R.H. Gundry suggests in his *Matthew, A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* that Matthew used “debt” instead of “sin” in

order to create a parallel with debtors.<sup>10</sup> Davies and Allison's work, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* also suggest that Matthew could retain "debt" because he could assume his readers' knowledge of the equation, "sin" equals "debt".<sup>11</sup> M. Black is of the view that the different words in Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4 could be translation of variants of the Aramaic *hōb* or *hōbbāh*, with Matthew being more literal than Luke in his *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*.<sup>12</sup>

We contend that because Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 are from the same source, they have similarities. This assertion is supported by the word *epiousios* 'daily', which is common to both texts. However, the difference in the usage of the expressions "forgiveness of debts" and "forgiveness of sins" came about because the immediate readers of *hōb* or *hōbbāh* the text were from different contexts. Matthew wrote for Jewish readers; Luke for Gentiles. Matthew used "debt" because his immediate Jewish readers understand "sin" to mean "debt." The Hebrew has two meanings: first it is used to denote what is demanded of one who is guilty or liable to punishment; second, to refer to indebtedness, arrears in payment, a debt, an obligation to sin. Thus in the Old Testament, sin is no longer conceived of as intrinsic disobedience, but as an outstanding debt, for which one can compensate by appropriate accomplishment.<sup>13</sup> Even though Matthew's usage of "debts" as sins (Matt. 6:12) sounds negative, his immediate readers

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<sup>10</sup> R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, 102

<sup>11</sup> W D Davies, and Dale C Allison Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew: A Critical Exegetical Commentary*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark. 1988, 612.

<sup>12</sup> M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Act* Third Edition. Oxford: University Press. 1967, 140.

<sup>13</sup> Tiedtke and Link, *ópheilo* in Colin Brown (Gen. Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2, 667.

understood him. The basic idea he wanted to convey is forgiveness of sins. Unlike Matthew, Luke's original readers were non-Jewish. Thus he chose for his non-Jewish readers the easier word *hamartias*, [sins]. This contention is supported by Luke's retention of *opheilonti* "being indebted. The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer stresses the correspondence between divine forgiveness of debts and human readiness to forgive. As Jeremias notes, this is the one condition that Jesus sets for the one who would pray this prayer – readiness to forgive<sup>14</sup>. Both Matthew and Luke give reasons why God should forgive those who pray the Lord's Prayer their debts/sins. Matthew uses *aphekamen* "have forgiven" (6:12); Luke uses *aphiomen* "are forgiving" (11:4b). *Aphēkamen* is an aorist meaning, an action in the past; it is not continuous or habitual. *Aphiomen* is a present tense, expressing a habitual action. The two tenses are important in understanding what Jesus wants to emphasize in the Lord's Prayer regarding forgiveness. All those who want God to forgive them must be people who have forgiven all those who wronged them, and are constantly ready to forgive, and are in the habit of forgiving those who are" (Lk 11:4b) wronging them.

The approaches the two writers used to make Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4 understandable in their various contexts is a lesson for Bible translators. Some of the Hebrew and Greek words were understood by the original readers. But to us now, they make little sense; therefore in translating the Bible into our mother-tongues, we should use words that our readers can understand. Like Luke's readers, *Dangme* readers of the Bible also need a simple word in their context to translate the concept of *ta ophilēmata* "debts" in the Lord's Prayer. The way "And forgive us our debts" (Matt 6:12) is rendered in the *Dangme* Bible is a problem for

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<sup>14</sup> J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, New York: Scribner, 1971, 193-203.



*Dangme* Christians.

### **The distinction of the concept in Dangme life and thought**

Among the *Dangme*, the English word forgive is *ke*. It is an everyday word. It means “to give a gift outrightly.” Thus there are expressions like, *nikeni* “gifts;” a short form is *keni*, which is the English equivalent of Gifty – a gift from God. *Ke* is also a religious term. It is used in association with forgiveness. Thus we have *yayami ke kemi*, ‘forgiveness of sins’. Some people also use *pa* to mean forgiveness. *Pa* has different shades of meaning in *Dangme*: it means “river,” “to drink or sip” (used to denote the act of drinking or sipping for instance, soup) and “loan.” Our interest is in its usage as ‘loan’. In this context, when *pa* “forgive” is used with *yayami* “sin”, we can have an expression like *ke yehe yayami ôme ne pa mi* “forgive me my sins.” The question one might ask is: does God “loan” us our sins or he “forgives” us our sins? If God “loans” us our sins, then every wrong-doing we commit against him [and our fellow human beings], even when we confess, we are not forgiven; God only loans us – we shall pay for all our sins later. On the other hand, if God forgives us when we sin against him and ask for forgiveness, he does not make reference to our past sins before he forgives us. Scripture supports this position. The apostle James says, when we bring our petitions before God, he answers us *aplōs kai oneidizontos*, (*i.e.* generously and ungrudgingly, or without finding fault with us (James 1:5)).

## The usage of the concept of Forgiveness Among *Dangmes*

The concept of forgiveness are documented in three *Dangme* translations. Firstly, in *The Ngmami Klôuklôu ô*, (The Holy Bible) <sup>15</sup> the *Dangme* Bible renders Matthew 6:12 as *Ngôô wa tômi ômâ kê pa wô kaa bô nâ wôhu waa kê paa nihi nâ tôô wa nôô*. [i.e. Loan us our wrong doings, just as we also loan (or are in the habit of loaning) those who wrong us].

Secondly, in *The Somi He ô* [The New Testament] <sup>16</sup> it reads: *Nâ o kê wa hiô ômâ nâ ke wô, kaa bô nâ wô hu waa kê kee ninâmâ nâ hââ wô hiô*. [i.e. cancel our debts as we also cancel the debts of those who owe us] And thirdly, *The Dangme Living Bible And Psalms* also uses *ke* and not *pa* in the translation of Matt.6:12. <sup>17</sup> The issues at stake in the translations cited above are *ke mi* (giving as a gift) and *pa mi* (giving as a loan). Is the treatment of sins with regard to forgiveness to be perceived as gifts or loans?

## The views of some *Dangme* scholars on Forgiveness of sin and Forgiveness of debt.

On the question of whether God “loans” us our sins or “forgives” us. We had different interpretations from some *Dangme* scholars. Eugene Natue is of the view that,

‘one is forgiven his or her sins to deter him or her from sinning’. When you sin and you are forgiven, you forget that you have been forgiven, and continue to sin. But when you

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<sup>15</sup> *Ngmami Klôuklôu ô* (*The Dangme Holy Bible*). Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies. 1999.

<sup>16</sup> *Somi He ô* (*The New Testament*) Accra: Bible Society of Ghana/United Bible Societies. 1977.

<sup>17</sup> *Wami Munyu ô: Somi He ô Kâ La amâ* (*The Dangme Living Bible And Psalms*). (Legon: International Bible Society. 1997.

see the forgiveness as a debt/loan which you will pay for, you do not continue to sin, else you have more debts to pay’<sup>18</sup>.

Here, the translators attempt to solve one problem creates others. That is the possibility of the accumulation of sins and a problem of always carrying excess luggage or baggage of sin. This perhaps is epitomized in a Twi Chorus among the Akans that says ‘ *Mipe se miye wude daa nanso me bone aye mima* (ie. I want to come to you but my sins have multiplied and are overflowing in me’ . This have serious implications to *Dangme* people and perhaps *Akans* of Ghana also will have guilt complexes and find it difficult to fully appreciate the doctrine of salvation that comes from the forgiveness of their sins through the finished work of Jesus Christ. This is where the concept of forgiveness as expressed in the Greek need to be translated carefully so as to reflect the context in which it will be appropriated. So with respect to God in this regard, He separates their sins from them, for the word *aphesis* from *apiēmi* translated as “forgiveness,” means “to send forth,” “to send away”<sup>19</sup> without necessarily accumulating and holding them forth for the sinners to pay for. This is where the concept of soteriology could be strengthened by appropriate translation of the concept of forgiveness. This situation can easily lead to confusion between the biblical concept of reparation for sin verses the concept of debt repayment. Even if we stretch it further, we will realized that in the area of loans, when they accumulate, the Bible still recommends debt cancellation.

In another interview with Natue he says, “Another way of interpreting Matt 6:12 is to use the concept of *yayami he hiô womi* [the wages of sin – Rom 6:23] if we want to use concept of *ke ke* [forgive]. Since we have “wages of sin” in the Bible, we can then translate Matt 6:12

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<sup>18</sup> Rev. E.N. Natue holds a Specialist Certificate in Dangme from the School of Ghanaian Languages, Adjumako and an Diploma in Advanced Study of Education from he University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He is the District Minister of the Nkurakan Presbyterian Church, Ghana ( Interviewed on the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> , W.E Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words*, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1996.122

as: *Ngôô wa yayami ôme a he hiô wo ô ke ke wô* [Forgive us the wages (debts) of our sins].”<sup>20</sup>.

In *Dangme*, *hiôwo* [wages] means the payment for a piece of work done. It has both positive and negative meanings. Positively, people work for *hiôwo* [wages]. But negatively, *hiôwo* means a “punishment” or “curse.” Among the *Dangme* when someone does evil in the society, people say to the evil person, *Mawu maa wo mo hiô* [God will pay you]. By this they mean that God will punish the evil doer. This means that what the person has done to other people which they see as unacceptable or evil, God will make sure that a similar thing is done to him or her. In this sense, God is seen as the punisher of evil. Thus, among the *Dangme* even though people sometimes retaliate when they are offended, they leave vengeance for God (Rom 12:19).

On a more serious note, *hiôwo* is a “curse.” When the statement *Mawu maa wo mo hiô* [God will pay you with the same coin] is pronounced on one who violates a ritually sanctioned law among the *Dangme*, he or she understands it as a “curse.” Thus, such a person will say to the one who pronounces the judgment, *o nge mi gbiεε e* [you are cursing me]. For the curse to be removed, the *musu yemi* [curse removing] ritual is performed by the *weku nikôtôma* [head of family] who is the *se tse* [clan or stool head]. He confesses the offence that led to the curse on an animal which is usually a sheep, and slaughters it. It is believed that the blood of the animal washes away the sin of the offender as he/she is forgiven<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Further discussions with Rev. Natue on the subject on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with I.K. Narteh, a retired Educationist and Dangme Teacher, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2009 at Somanya. Mr. Narteh hold a Specialist Certificate in Dangme from the School of Languages, Adjumako, and Diploma in Linguistics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

Bringing the two usages of *hiôwo* together, we can say that *hiôwo* stands for *tue gbla mi* [punishment] for sin committed and *gbiεε* [curse] for violating ritually sanctioned laws.

Thus, using the idea of *Ngôô wa yayami ôme a he hiô wo ô ke ke wô* [Forgive us the wages (debts) of our sins] can help us translate and interpret Matt 6:12 in the context of the Dangme people. In that sense Matt 6:12 can be translated as *Ngôô wa yayami ôme a he hiô wo ô ke ke wô* [Forgive us the wages (debts/punishments) of our sins]. The problem here is that the phrase, *opsônia tēs hamartias* [wages of sin] is Pauline. Thus, we are using Pauline category to interpret Matthew. But since one of the principles of Bible interpretation is that, “we compare Scripture with Scripture...because the greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself,” using one idea in the Bible to interpret another biblical text is allowed.<sup>22</sup>

Padi Boti<sup>23</sup> is of the view that when God forgives our sins, he cancels them and remembers them no more. He says: ‘I believe that when we confess our sins, God forgives us (he cancels and remembers our sins no more). When God loans us our sins, it means that we owe God; we cannot pay because we are human beings].<sup>24</sup> Matilda Tettey-Fio<sup>25</sup> holds a similar view as that of Boti. She says:

“To me this whole idea of God ‘loaning’ us our sins as it were does not make sense. Whenever I pray the Lord’s Prayer, I say, God should forgive us our sins; that is, he should wipe them away, and take them out from his mind’.

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<sup>22</sup> G. Hendricks, and William D. Hendricks. *Living by the Book*. (Chicago: Moody Press. 1991, 230

<sup>23</sup> Rev. E.P. Boti is a Dangme specialist from the School of Ghanaian Languages, Ajumako. He is a retired Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Rev. Boti on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2009 at his residence, Somanya.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Matilda Tettey –Fio on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009 at her residence at Akuse, Ghana.

Joshua Nyumuah<sup>26</sup> holds the same view as Tettey-Fio. J.B. Lawerteh<sup>27</sup> also speaks his mind on the discussion:by saying

“In reciting and teaching the Lord’s Prayer, I always used *ke* for forgiveness. [God should forgive us our sins] because that is the ideal. Theologically, ‘forgive’ carry the meaning of cancellation of sins, without remembering them any more. And that is exactly what Christ wants us to do. In fact, that is what he demonstrated during his earthly ministry, that, when someone sins against us, we should forgive the person completely, and try not to remember it.”

Gloria Kitcher-Asare was one of the translators of the *Dangme* Bible. I asked her comment on the translation of Matthew 6:12. She says:

“When we were doing the translation, we debated the issue of *ke* and *pa* as forgiveness. On the popularity of the language we agreed that forgiveness in *Dangme* should be *ke*. However, when we contacted some elderly *Dangmes*, they were of the view that *ke* connotes an outright gift. Thus, when it is used to translate the word forgiveness, it will give people the license to continue sinning. So we settled on *pa*.<sup>28</sup>

.Fred Appertey<sup>29</sup> was among the team of reviewers of the *Dangme* Bible. He shares a similar view with Kitcher-Asare that the ideal word for forgive in *Dangme* is *ke*.

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<sup>26</sup> Telephone Conference with Joshua Nyumuah on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009. He holds a degree in *Dangme* from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

<sup>27</sup> Rev. J.B. Lawerteh is a graduate of *Dangme*, Theology and Guidance and Counselling from Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, University of Education Winneba. Interview took place on 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Gloria Kitcher –Asare is a graduate of the School of Ghanaian Languages, Ajumako and the University of Cape Coast. Interviewed on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Rev. Fred Appertey is a Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, stationed at Asesewa. He is a linguist, Educationist and theologian from the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science And Technology, Kumasi. Interviewed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 2009.

From the interviews conducted, we see that there are three ways by which Matthew 6:12 could be translated: *Ngôô wa tômi ômâ kê pa wô...* [Loan us our wrong-doings...]; *Ngôô wa yayami ômε a he hiô wo ô kε ke wô...* [Forgive us the punishment and curse of our sins...]; *Ngôô wa tômi ômâ kê ke wô...* [Forgive us our wrong-doings...]. *Pa* means “loan.” It implies that when we sin God just overlooks it. He has forgiven but has not forgotten. *Ke* connotes an outright gift. The implication here is that when God forgives us, he does not hold our sins against us. He forgets our offences. *Ngôô wa yayami ômε a he hiô wo ô kε ke wô...* [Forgive us the punishment and curse of our sins...] is an interpretation of Matthew 6:12 rather than a translation. Even though it sounds good, but it is an interpretation of Jesus, using Pauline categories.

Interestingly, both the *Dangme Living Bible and Psalms* published in 1977 and the *Dangme New Testament* published in 1997 used *ke* and not *pa*. But as we heard from those who were involved in the Translation exercise later in 1999 of the Full *Dangme* Bible, rather preferred the *pa* which seems to rather give meanings which most contemporary *Dangme* people find problematic and undermines their assurance of forgiveness with regard to sin. In their choice, their choice was informed by maintaining a theory that the concept of sin as ‘loans’ to be paid and its effects of punishment to be feared if allowed to accumulate was the employed forgetting that that also has its own negative effects on those who were confronted with these. The question therefore is, what is the way forward?

## Conclusion

The translation of *pa* and *ke* were the two main terms that were explored with regard to forgiveness. The former centralizing on loans or debts of sin to be forgiven and the latter focusing on ‘giving out’ or ‘sending forth’ forgiveness as gifts to free people from their predicament. To the translators, it was an ethical dimension that informed their choice of the conception of loans or debts that must be paid so as to deal with people taking God’s forgiveness for granted. On the other hand, the perception of debts or loans as stigma that is difficult to shed if it is continually associated with a *Dangme* person therefore calls for a re-assessment of its effect on people in reality. Looking at the views expressed and our analysis, it is therefore expedient to consider revising this translation to reflect a more liberative perception of forgiveness rather than an enslaving one. So there is therefore the need to change the perception of forgiveness from *pa* to *ke* to reflect the foundations of God’s work of *giving (ke)* of His Son in the incarnation instead of the present translation that gives the impression of *taking (pa)* which is presently in use among *Dangme* users of the *Ngmami Krou krou o (The Dangme Holy Bible)*.



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