

JACOBUS CAPITEIN'S TRANSLATION OF 'THE LORD'S PRAYER' INTO MFANTSE: AN EXAMPLE OF CREATIVE MOTHER TONGUE HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract: Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein (1717-1747) was the first African Protestant chaplain at the Elmina Castle, Gold Coast (Ghana). He is credited with the translation of the popular Judeo-Christian prayer, usually referred to as 'The Lord's Prayer', into the Mfantse language, using a Dutch orthography. This paper focuses mainly on the hermeneutical principles underlying Capitein's translation. It is being argued that Capitein has produced a stimulating translation that reflects a creative adaptation of various renditions of this popular prayer to the liturgical and catechetical needs of his time. He has also attempted an appreciable transposition of Judeo-Christian thought into the local edina (elmina) setting, his limited knowledge of the indigenous culture notwithstanding. His accomplishment can therefore be described as a noble pioneering effort in the discipline of biblical hermeneutics using relevant mother tongue thought categories.

INTRODUCTION

Translators and interpreters of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures i.e. the Bible have, since ancient times, been faced with the challenging task of making these Scriptures relevant to their respective communities. This has involved a dynamic process of *vernacularization* whereby thoughts embedded in an original 'revelation' are repackaged for speakers of other languages, taking cognizance of relevant theological, linguistic and cultural factors. In this process of *vernacularization*, the 'original texts' are expected to be communicated in a way that 'will effectively meet the needs and expectations of receptors whose background and experience are...

different from those who were the original receptors of the biblical document.¹

R. S. Sugirtharajah's view of vernacularization eloquently sums up the point we are trying to make:

Vernacular interpretation seeks to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of these biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides, by employing the reader's own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives. It is about making hermeneutical sense of texts and concepts imported across time and space by means of one's own indigenous texts and concepts.²

It would be legitimate to argue that this is the underlying principle governing Capitein's translation of 'The Lord's Prayer' into Mfantse.³ Precisely, his translation involved a dynamic process of vernacular interpretation informed by the existential realities of his day. In this paper, the expression 'mother tongue biblical hermeneutics' is being used, in a specific sense, as a key component of the more general discipline of 'vernacular biblical interpretation'.⁴ Attention is being drawn to Capitein's creative rendition of 'The Lord's Prayer', using thought categories embedded in the Mfantse language of Edina (Elmina).

¹ Eugene A. Nida & Jan de Waard, *From One Language to Another. Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating* (Oregon: Wipe & Stock Publishers, 1998), p. 14.

² R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 182.

³ A copy of Capitein's translation has been provided by the kind courtesy of Rev. Fr. Globus of the Environmental Concern Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Coast.

⁴ Strictly speaking, however, there is a sense in which we can draw a distinction between 'mother tongue' and 'vernacular', their points of convergence notwithstanding. B. Y. Quarshie clearly expresses this distinction as follows: 'The mother tongue of a person is that person's native language, the language that one is born into, as it were, and grows up with. It is a person's first language as compared to other languages one might learn later in life, for example, in school. The mother tongue is not the same as a vernacular, the common language of a region or group, no matter how naturally such language and its usage may come.' See his article entitled, 'Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context- The Challenge of Mother-tongue Scriptures', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 5/1 (2002), p. 7. It is clear from such distinction that a mother tongue can eventually become a people's vernacular, depending on how widely it is spoken across geographical boundaries.

No matter how extensively we debate the 'accuracy' or 'inaccuracy' of Capitein's translation/interpretation, his approach clearly illustrates the open-ended nature of cross-cultural communication, especially when it comes to the use of religious texts.

Lamin Sanneh's comment on 'translatability' within the context of the Christian faith is apposite in this regard:

Christianity broke free from its absolutized Judaic frame and, through a radical pluralism, adopted the Hellenic culture to the point of near absolutization. By looking at the expansion of mission beyond Rome and Byzantium, we can see how this risk of absolutization was confronted...Christians were not altogether agreed on the merits of pluralism, but our concern now is to point to it as the direct and inevitable offshoot of translatability. That it was an issue within the church at all suggests it belonged with the overall enterprise of Christianity, part of that legacy that Judaization, Hellenization, Westernization, and other transformations represent.⁵

A closer look at Capitein's hermeneutical approach will help us appreciate Sanneh's point.

Some Preliminary Observations on 'The Lord's Prayer'

This is the prayer recorded in Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11: 2-4. The *Didache* (8:2), an early Christian document compiled towards the close of the first century CE, reproduces this prayer, staying very close to Matthew's version. If one were to ask about the extent to which the Gospel accounts have been able to recapture the original prayer spoken by Jesus, presumably in the Aramaic language, the answer would not be conclusive enough. An examination of the Gospel accounts shows, however, that Luke's version is shorter than Matthew's and that there are significant points of similarities and differences between them. Interestingly, some later Greek manuscripts of Matthew added a popular

⁵ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 50-51. Writing with reference to Chinese Christianity, Sugirtharajah also observes: 'The appropriation of the Christian Scripture for Chinese culture involved a massive metaphorical and linguistic transformation. The line between inculturation, contextualization and distortion of the gospel is hard to define.' (28)

doxology which runs as follows: 'For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever. Amen.'⁶ It has rightly been observed that:

Variations in the form of the LP [Lord's Prayer] did not cease with the writing of the Gospels and the *Didache*. Such variations are in no way surprising in the transmission of a text which was soon, and perhaps from the start, central in Christian liturgy and instruction. The operation of both liturgical and instructional use can be discerned. Thus, over a long period various mss have alterations, whether the addition of the liturgical doxology to Matthew or the harmonizing expansion of Luke's shorter version with Matthew's fuller and soon more widely used version. Both the gospel settings and that of the *Didache* reflect instructional needs, and the provision of a guide for Christian prayer.⁷

We should also note that it was the practice of some early Christian theologians to end their writings, sermons and prayers with a doxology, a tradition that can even be traced back to Paul himself (See especially Romans 11: 36) and adopted by St. John Chrysostom. This important observation is of particular relevance to our analysis of Jacobus Capitein's translation of 'The Lord's Prayer' into the Mfantse language of eighteenth century Edina (Elmina), which also included a doxology. It is noteworthy that during Capitein's time, there were some Latin and Dutch versions of The Lord's Prayer that contained a doxology. In line with my methodology governing the discipline of mother tongue biblical hermeneutics in a local Ghanaian setting, I have made an attempt to transliterate the Greek texts, using Mfantse characters or their closest equivalents.⁸ This has the advantage of facilitating the first-hand acquaintance of mother tongue speakers with the 'original texts' even before they are translated into their language. I have done my own translation from the Greek texts into Mfantse in order to afford readers the opportunity to compare it with Capitein's version. Following these translations from 'vernacularized-

⁶ It is generally accepted that this doxology is expressed in the style of 1 Chronicles 29: 11-13.

⁷ J. L. Houlden, 'Lord's Prayer', *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 4* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 357.

⁸ This important exercise of using the orthographies of various mother tongues to transliterate 'original biblical texts' deserves careful attention by research students of mother tongue biblical hermeneutics. Some issues that will still need to be resolved in the Ghanaian context include: vowel harmony and 'anglicizations'.

transliterated Greek' into Mfantse, an English gloss has also been provided for the benefit of non-Mfantse speakers.

Mfantse Transliteration and Translation of the Greek Texts of Matthew 6: 9-13 And Luke 11: 2-4 (With An English Gloss)

Hu-tos uun pr̄s-yu-k̄ests hu-m̄-yis Dem ntsi hom mbo mpaa wo dem kwan yi do: [Therefore you [are to] pray as follows]:

Pa-t̄ar hi-m̄n ho en t̄ois u-ra-n̄-yes Hen Egya a ye nyia tse sorsor/ a ɔye ɔsorsorny [Our Father, namely the One [who] is/dwells in the Exalted Heavenly realm]

Ha-gia-sti-to t̄o ɔ-n̄-ma suu [Wo dzin no a, wɔmfa ahotsewee mbo/ wo dzin no a, wɔmbo no enyidze kr̄nkr̄n mu
[Let your name be handled with the reverence that it deserves]

E-lth̄-to he ba-si-l̄-ya suu Ma W'ahendzi nda edzi
[Let your [kingly] rule be manifested]

Ge-ni-thi-to t̄o th̄-li-ma suu Wo pe nye ho
[May your will come into being/effect],

Hos en uu-raa-no kae ɛ-pi gees De mbr̄e ɔtse wɔ sorsor no, nkye ɔnye demara so wɔ asaase do
[Just as is the case in the Exalted Heavenly realm, even so on earth];

T̄on ar-t̄on he-m̄n t̄on epi-uu-si-ȳn d̄os he-min si-m̄-r̄n Ma hen nsa nka hen daadaa ehiadze nde
[Give to us today our necessary for [our] existence provision];

Kaae a-f̄es he-min ta o-f̄ei-li-ma-ta he-m̄n Na fa hen akadze kye hen
[And forgive us/cancel our debts],

Hos kaae hi-m̄-yis a-fe-ka-m̄n t̄ois o-f̄ei-l̄-tais hi-m̄n Dem mbr̄e eh̄n so ȳdze akye h̄n a wɔdze h̄n kaw
[Just as we have also forgiven our debtors/those who owe us];

Kaae mi eis-ɛ-n̄n-kes he-mas eis p̄e-ras-m n Na mma nngya hen nnk̄o ns̄hwe mu [And do not lead us into temptation],

Alla hru-sae he-mas ap̄o tuu p̄-n̄-ruu Na mbom gye hen fi ɔb̄nfo no nsamu

[But rescue us from the evil one].

The Lucan Text (11: 2-4)

Ei-pɛn dɛ au-tɔes: Hɔ-tan prɔs-yu-ki-stɛ lɛ-gɛ-tɛ Na ɔsee hɔn dɛ: Se hom robɔ mpae a, hom nka dɛ,

[And he said to them: Whenever you are praying, say,]

Pa-tɛr, ha-gia-sti-to tɔ ɔ-nɔ-ma suu Eɔya, wo dzin no a, wɔmfa ahotsewee mbɔ

[Father, let your name be handled with the reverence that it deserves]

El-thɛ-to hee ba-si-le-ya suu Ma w'ahendzi nda edzi

[Let your kingly rule be manifested]

Tɔn ar-tɔn he-mɔn tɔn ɛpi-uu-si-yɔn di-du he-min tɔ kath hi-mɛ-ran Hen ehiaɔze a yehia no ndɛ/ ɔbɔdɔ hɛn so, fa ma hɛn dabaa

[Our for the day's sufficient provision, give us every day]

Kaae a-fɛs he-min tas ha-mar-ti-yas he-mɔn Na fa hɛn mfom/ndzeyebɔn kye hɛn

[And forgive us our sins]

Kaae gaar au-tɔe a-fi-o-mɛn pan-ti o-fɛe-lon-ti he-min Osiande ehɛnara so yɛɔze kye obiara a ɔɔze hɛn kaw/ ɔafom hɛn

[Because we ourselves forgive everyone who owes/wrongs us]

Kaae mii eis-ɛ-nɛn-kis hi-mas eis pɛe-ras-mɔn Na mma nngya hɛn nnkɔ nsɔhwe mu [And do not lead us into temptation]

Capitein's Mfantse Rendition Based on an Old Dutch Orthography Together with the Reconstructed Text in Current Mfantse (Including An English Gloss)

Jinjena Jinnadja endi owassor Hen nyina hɛn Eɔya a ntsi ɔwɔ sor

[The Father of us all who is on this account, automatically in the exalted place above i.e heaven]

Oediɛn Wobonnejé Wo dzin wɔmbɔ no yie

[May Your Name be handled with due reverence]

Maohiman umbra Ma w'aheman mbra

[Let your kingdom come]

Dieekjereé wojén essúr, onne adaéde Dza ekyere w nyen ɛsor, ɔnye asaase [What you decree should be done in heaven and on earth]

Innadubánne mánjen dabaé Hen edziban ma hen dabaa ε
[We beseech you to give us our food everyday]

O'anne innadebónni jáje fakjejen Onye hen ndzebón a y'aye fakye
hen
[And forgive us for the wrongs we have committed]

Ebiso wájejen adebonni jeedebékjen Obiso w'ay ε hen adzebón a
yэдzebəkьen' [If another person has wronged us, we shall forgive him/her]

O'anne meéma jenitiér ónko adebonnim Ono dze mamma hen tsir
nnkó adzebón mu
[And do not allow our heads to be pushed into evil]

Meéma ebiso ónjyen adebónni Mamma obiso onye hen adzebón
[Do not allow others to harm us]

A'de ehinman owowarra on?im Adze a oye ahenman no, ówo w'ara
w'enyim/ woara na inyim
[That which is the kingdom is known to you alone/is under your absolute control]

O'anne oahómadin Ono nye w'ahóodzen
[And that is your strength/power]

O'anne adeaóje injena okán aman injejánoe Onye adze a oye [biara]
inyina ókan aman a onnyi ewiei
[And let that together with whatever else is good abide in the everlasting
realms of light]

Ojendám. Onye dem.
[Let it be so]

A look at Capitein's background will help us to appreciate the effort that went into producing this interesting translation.¹

Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein was indeed an ex-slave who eventually assumed the prestigious but difficult responsibility as Chaplain of the Castle at Edina (Elmina), following the successful completion of his

¹ For a comprehensive treatment of this background, readers are referred to David Nii Anum Kpobi's standard works entitled:

Mission in Chains. The life, theology and ministry of the ex-slave Jacobus E. J. Capitein (1717-1747) with a translation of his major publications.

(Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993).

Saga of a Slave. Jacobus Capitein of Holland and Elmina. (Legon: Cootek Limited, 2001).

studies at Leiden University, Holland, in 1742. He was most probably kidnapped in a slave raid and separated from his parents at a very tender age. He was later presented as a gift to a certain Captain van Goch who later took him to Holland. He acquired Dutch habits and became deeply entrenched in Dutch culture during his stay in Holland. But he received serious catechetical instruction prior to his unique experience as the first black African to be baptized into the Dutch Reformed Church. He was also given the best of theological education available at the time, having mastered the Hebrew, Greek and Latin languages. Even though Capitein's Latin dissertation justifying slavery has sparked off a lot of controversy, we should not be too harsh on him because he was a product of his time, having worked under close supervision in Holland. Capitein did in any case suffer much frustration from most of his European co-workers at the Edina castle and could hardly gain the full confidence of the adult indigenous people of Edina. He also felt neglected by his employers in Holland. He died at an early age of thirty.

But his translation of the Lord's Prayer into Mfantse using the existing Dutch orthography reflected a creative interpretation of the theology behind this prayer and can be described as an appreciable pioneering effort in mother tongue biblical hermeneutics. Given his comprehensive exposure to the Hebrew, Greek, Dutch and Latin languages during his studies in Holland and his avowed aim to pursue mother tongue theology in the mission field, it should not surprise us that Capitein took pains to translate such a popular prayer into a local Gold Coast (Ghanaian) language. It would be instructive to hear what has been said about Capitein's translation interest:

Already in his student days in the Netherlands, Capitein had proposed that missionary work could be meaningful only if the people were taught the fundamentals of the Christian message in their own language... It was therefore his intention to start using the language of the Elmina folk as soon as possible. In his report to the WIC [West Indian Company], he mentions that he is 'seeking ways of putting the local language into writing'. He was so serious about this matter that, within a year of his arrival in Elmina, he was able to produce his first translation from Dutch into Fanti. He started by translating the Lord's Prayer...the Twelve Articles of Faith...and the Ten Commandments... In 1744, a publishing company in Leiden, Jacobus de Beunje, published this translation under the title: Translation of the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, and the Ten Commandments. From the Low

German [Dutch] language into the Negro language as it is spoken from Abrowarie to Apam.

When Capitein started using his translation with the children in his school, he was so excited about the response of the children that he decided that other important texts should be translated as well... This undertaking was an indication of the importance Capitein attached to communicating in one's mother tongue. He regarded the means of communication as one of the pillars of successful missionary enterprise. Unlike most other missionaries before him, Capitein wanted to approach the African people in a language that was meaningful to them. To do this, he had to render the teachings of the Gospel in their idiom. He knew that, by ignoring the language and culture of a people, the missionary ignores the very basis of any lasting conversions.²

I have quoted this at length in order to illustrate that Capitein's translation of the Lord's Prayer was not done in a vacuum. It is doubtful whether Capitein was solely dependent on existing Dutch versions for his Mfantse translation. I have examined various Dutch translations ranging from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries and have come to the plausible conclusion that Capitein was not particularly attached to any of these.³ There were times when he even got into trouble with his superiors in Amsterdam because he was accused of not having translated accurately from "the original". In such cases, he was humble enough- or should we say diplomatic enough- to admit the inaccuracies in his translation, promising to revise them at the earliest given opportunity. Be that as it may, Capitein can be described as a pragmatic theologian who did some independent thinking on the communication of Judeo-Christian theological themes within a Gold Coast setting. He can be said to have made good use of his solid academic background and ministerial formation in the Netherlands in order to approach his translation task scientifically, artistically, and under the deep conviction that divine guidance was crucial for an effective mother tongue translation. Given the limited space at my

² Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 148.

³ Interestingly, the doxology which Capitein includes in his Mfantse translation of The Lord's Prayer, appears, in a modified form, in a 1513 Dutch version and a 1713 Latin version with which he was probably familiar. It also appears in an 1884 Latin version and some Dutch versions of 1869, 1870, 1883, 1884, 1905, 1936 and 1972. But it is neither in the Vulgate nor in the 1593 Latin version which I have examined.

disposal, I would like to focus on some key components of Capitein's translation.

An examination of the two versions of the prayer in the texts of Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11: 2-4 alongside some translations into Latin and Dutch, languages that Capitein would have understood very well, shows clearly that Capitein has produced an interesting translation that blends the Matthean and Lucan versions [with Matthew as the base text]. It would also be legitimate to argue that the liturgical and catechetical needs of the day are reflected in Capitein's translation. This is particularly evident in his special rendition of the doxology which sounds like a frequently recited concluding statement of faith adapted to the local Edina setting. It is in any case significant to observe that Capitein's translation affirms God as the ontologically exalted One who exercises providential parental care towards creation and deserves our liturgical as well as ethical reverence. This type of reverence has practical implications for interpersonal relations and is concretized in reciprocal forgiveness and peaceful coexistence.

Although Capitein was seriously queried for the translation: *Hən nyina hən Egya a ntsi ɔwɔ sor* [The Father of us all who is unquestionably in the exalted place above]⁴ because it did not correspond to the exact 'original' [presumably the critics were also thinking of a Dutch version], I am of the opinion that he has touched on some vital hermeneutical issues that deserve our attention. The first concerns the Universal Fatherhood/Parenthood of God which Capitein wanted to make

⁴ In a letter addressed to Capitein from his Superiors in Amsterdam [known as the Venerable Classis] and dated 10 January 1745, the following observations are made:

We must also enquire about a small book consisting of the following translated items: the Lord's Prayer, the Faith, and the Law. This came to our attention as printed in Leyden. On the one hand, we deeply value your attempts to make the [basic] documents of the truth widely available in the language which the moors understand. But the Classis had certain reservations about which it wishes to enquire further. For example, could the translation not in places have kept closer to and be more in accord with the original text. For instance, you know that neither in the Greek nor in any European translation known to me do the words 'of all' appear in the first phrase of the prayer, yet according to the translation of the Moorish version made by you it would read: Father of us all, who is in heaven. One can find other similar instances, although it is possible that as yet there is no other appropriate translation, a possibility which we readily allow, being ignorant of the language. (Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, p. 250)

unmistakably clear to his target audience in Edina. In an age characterized by the ruthless exploitation, enslavement and humiliation of persons created in the *imago Dei*, it was important to emphasize that God is indeed our common Parent, irrespective of our ethnicity, skin colour, social standing, gender or age. This theological fact may not have been clearly articulated in the translations available to Capitein and it was essential to erase doubts that were possibly lingering in the minds of some Africans as to whether the God being preached by the Dutch and other European missions, amidst the horrifying experience of slavery and other forms of exploitation, was also their God. This concept of God's Universal Fatherhood and Motherhood [*Ga: Ataa-Naa Nyɔnmɔ*] is deeply rooted in the world-view of the Akan, Gã and other peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa. This is buttressed by the popular Akan saying: '*Obi nnkyers abofra Nyame*' ['No one points out God to a child'] and Capitein's rendition of line 1 of 'The Lord's Prayer' was simply an attempt to reaffirm that which was already indigenous to his target audience.

Another key hermeneutical issue worth considering is Capitein's presentation of God's Universal Parenthood and Exaltedness in ontological rather than spatial terms. This is clearly brought out in the expression: *Hen nyina hen Egya a ntsi ɔwɔ sor* which points to the indubitable and unquestionable Exalted State of God as the Universal Parent of humankind. Although myths abound in Africa regarding God's abode in the distant skies - following His withdrawal from humankind as a result of being hit by the old lady's *fufu* pounding pestle - Capitein's translation is not primarily meant to reinforce the notion of God's abode in an upper topographical location. The focus here is rather on God as the Majestic One who watches over the entire creation. A re-look at the syntax of the Greek text of Matthew 6: 9b [*Pater hēmon ho en tois ouranois*] leaves open the possibility of translating it as: 'Our Father, namely the One in the Exalted/Heavenly sphere...' It can be argued that Capitein has succeeded in blending an African myth familiar to his target audience with a profound Judeo-Christian theological concept regarding God's Majestic nature and gracious dealings with creation.

If God is the Majestic 'Wholly Other' who is concerned about creation, then those who approach Him must do so reverently not only from a liturgical but also from an ethical perspective. Hence Capitein's

rendition: *Wo dzin wɔmbɔ no yie* [May Your Name be mentioned/handled with due reverence]: which translates the Greek *hagiasthētō to onoma sou* (Matthew 6:9c/Luke 11:2b) carries the purpose of drawing people's attention to the fact that in approaching God, we must be conscious of Who He is and let this influence the way we conduct ourselves. It should not be forgotten that in most communities especially within Sub-Saharan Africa, names are not abstract phenomena, but concrete expressions of a person's character. This explains why diligent care is taken to name children after people who have played an outstanding role in society and impacted people's lives positively. The expectation is that these children will emulate their noble example. My suspicion is that Capitein's translation of the Ten Commandments, especially the one having to do with 'not taking the name of the LORD your God in vain' (Exodus 20:7) might have influenced his translation of this part of 'The Lord's Prayer'. But he can also be credited with a creative rendition of the aorist imperative passive form of the Greek *hagiazō* which includes the idea of 'making holy' and 'regarding as sacred'. In this case, the underlying thought in Capitein's translation is the reverence with which we handle God's Name, as revealed in God's character/nature, in our relationship with Him and with our fellow human beings. That is precisely why the call for the manifestation of God's kingdom and the accomplishment of God's will on earth as in heaven is most appropriate in the Lord's Prayer. Accomplishing God's will also involves our readiness to forgive those who commit wrongs against us, even as we reverently call on God to forgive us the wrongs we ourselves have committed. Much as Capitein's translation reflects these aspects of the prayer, he seems to have simplified them- including the quest for the supply of our daily needs- presumably because of his primary target audience, namely the school children.

Of special significance, however, is Capitein's translation of Matthew 6:13 as : *Na mma hen tsir nnkɔ adzebɔn mu; Ma mma obiso nnye hen adzebɔn* [And do not allow our heads to be pushed into evil; and do not allow others to harm us]. In Akan anthropology, the head symbolizes a person's luck or ill-luck in normal day to day activities, as in the expression: *Wo tsir annyɛ yie koraa* [Literally: Your head did not turn out well at all=You have not been lucky at all] or *Owoara na edze wo tsir akɛhyɛ ɔhaw yi mu* [Literally: You

yourself have pushed your head into this trouble=You have brought this trouble upon yourself]. Going by this anthropological world-view, Capitein deserves commendation for such an interesting rendition of the Greek *kai mē eisenegkēs hēmas eis peirasmon* [And do not lead us into temptation] since it accurately reflects the serious business of endeavoring, with divine help, not to run into anything that has the potential of degrading our humanity. In all probability, the picture of the degrading slave dungeons out which the captured and humiliated slaves emerged with their heads, prior to their being loaded on ships that will carry them to their unknown fate in the Americas, must have aided Capitein in coming out with this important translation which carries profound hermeneutical consequences. It is not clear why Capitein opted to translate the expression *alla hrusai hēmas apo tou ponērou* [But deliver us from the evil one: Matt ̣:sub3 as *Ma mma obiso nnys hen adzebɔn* [Do not let another person also harm us]. Was he wrestling with the exact sense of *tou ponērou* which has either been rendered as 'evil' or 'the evil one' in line with the Greek definite article? Or was it an attempt to spare his target audience the trouble of speculating about the origins of evil or about the cosmic agents of evil? It is really difficult to determine the exact rationale behind Capitein's translation. One can, at best, comment that it was another instance of simplifying a difficult theological concept and adapting it to the needs of his audience. To borrow the words of Kpobi, 'He was attempting, in his own peculiar way, to contextualize Reformed theology in the Elmina situation. Indeed Capitein regarded his theology as a sincere search for what was best for the Africans.'⁵ His effort clearly illustrates the delicate task of communicating religious thought across cultures via the process of *vernacularization*.

Concluding remarks

In spite of his limitations and frustrations at the local and international levels, Capitein's translation of 'The Lord's Prayer' into Mfantse has obviously given us much food for thought. It has at least demonstrated that texts that are considered 'original' and which turn out to be 'vernacularized interpretations/translations' of earlier texts, can themselves undergo a metamorphosis in response to changing circumstances. It is precisely for this reason that we need to take another look at Early Christian texts such as the Creeds in order to

⁵ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, p. 179.

adapt them creatively and meaningfully to our local settings. Churches will need to set up Departments of Theology, Research and Hermeneutics in order to tackle this challenge.

Even if doubts have been expressed in certain circles as to whether lapses in Capitein's translation were genuine mistakes or intentional,⁶ we cannot deny him the credit for being a pioneer European-trained Gold Coast theologian who made an effort to communicate Judeo-Christian theological concepts in the indigenous language of Edina. He can therefore be regarded as an important forerunner in the discipline of mother tongue biblical hermeneutics, a discipline that is likely to shape the future of Biblical Studies in Africa.

⁶ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, p. 149.