One might ask: But when they become Christians, what is the nature of their conversion? What do they turn away from? Here we have to be careful. If one thinks thoroughly through this question, one will conclude that their conversion is more radical than it is for us in an old Christian country. We have hundreds of years of Christian life and Christian culture behind us. … Compare this with the thick, dark wall of heathendom that has existed for thousands of years. Like a labyrinth is his life. Spiritual forces, most of them evil, surround him. When he wakes or sleeps, cultivates, builds, he is constantly surrounded by spirits that he has to consider, if not he will be harmed. Immorality, quarrels, fighting and untruthfulness is he fed with from infancy. But love, helpfulness, empathy and compassion are unknown words. We easily forget that when we received the faith, we could take the whole Bible into our hands and through it receive knowledge about the road to salvation and the Christian life. How many Africans can do the same?1

Norwegian missionaries found on the Dii-plain a people open towards their activities and could finally report home stories about the first local converts. But what did the term ‘conversion’ mean to the missionaries? To what extent was the missionary agency predetermined, i.e. biased in a Western worldview which the missionaries imposed on the indigenous

---

population, and to what extent was the missionary agency a relative one, open for negotiation with the indigenous population? This chapter contains in-depth analysis of all the two hundred seventy one articles in *Misjonstidende* written by or about² the Norwegian missionaries working in Cameroon in the period 1934–1960.³ The aim is to analyse how the Norwegian sources describe the religious encounter between Christianity and Traditional African Religion, and their legitimisation of their project through the construction and negotiation of ‘self’ and ‘the other’. The reactions of the indigenous population to the message of the missionaries will also be briefly analysed, but only through the looking glass of the Norwegian sources. If conversion was some kind of reorientation, a way out of a labyrinth of evil forces, what was, according to Norwegian missionaries, the population in Adamaoua to be converted from – and what were they to be converted to?

**Conversion as a Process of Growth and Liberation**

In order to establish an analytic approach towards the missionary idea of conversion, I will start by looking at their use of biblical images. The missionary theological discourse in Cameroon is surprisingly homogenous regarding the relatively large number of missionaries present in the actual period.⁴ In the NMt articles, biblical images were used eighty three times as metaphors for the work. An overall majority, forty seven, were connected to images of farming. The missionaries regarded their work as that of the sower, and the image of ‘seed/time to sow’ was found eighteen times in the articles. The agricultural metaphors also focus on the hope for ‘fruit and harvest’, an image that was found twelve times in the texts. The resistance the missionaries met was described nine

---

² When the missionaries themselves are not authors of the analysed articles, the articles are interviews with the missionaries, often on vacation in Norway. Other articles about Cameroon are not included in this study.

³ Since mission work in Cameroon until 1939 was funded by *Sudanmisjonen* (the Sudan Mission), many articles were written by the Norwegian missionaries in the periodical *Lys over Sudan* (Light over Sudan) that the missionaries themselves edited from 1937 to 1939. Most articles in this periodical were, however, later published in NMt.

⁴ In 1934 there were four missionary couples present in Cameroon. The number of missionaries experienced a steady growth (apart from during, and the first years following, the Second World War) towards 1960 when there were thirty seven Norwegian missionaries present at the conference.