In the title of this chapter I have introduced the terms communication, conversion, and conservation. Three terms that, even though not too often repeated, represent the pillars upon which the historical study has been constructed. This final chapter is an effort to look back and consider how these analytic terms can sum up the historical findings of the project. The historical encounter between the Dii and the Norwegian missionaries was first of all about communication. The chapter therefore sums up what Norwegian missionaries intended to communicate, the process the intended message went through, and finally how the Dii interpreted this message and reconstructed its content according to their apprehension of the world. It further enters the historical and anthropological debate that concerns the second analytic term, conversion, and analyse whether this term is a mere Western ideological construct, void of meaning, or if it is an adequate term describing religious change in Africa under colonial rule. Did the Dii actively and intentionally accept the profound changes that the first missionaries and African catechists initiated, or were they, as some authors seem to argue, without means to respond to this powerful historical current that swept over most of Africa south of the Sahara? It is my contention that conversion can be a workable analytic term if it is explained contextually, and I will therefore use the four terms crisis, context, translatability, and attitude in order to describe the path towards religious conversion among the Dii. Finally, the chapter will conclude by asking how and why much in Dii reasoning and consciousness never changed as a result of the Christian missionary impact.

*Communication as Cultural Encounter*

In the beginning was the Word. Then there was enlightenment and industrial revolution. Then there was modern Christian mission. This is a bluntly constructed chain which, in spite of its childish simplicity, is of importance to this presentation. The Norwegian missionaries were actually convinced that their mission, their rather fearless encounter
with the unknown, was based on a divine commandment: to make disciples of all nations. And they thought that this commandment was for the most part self-evident and self-explanatory. It has been asserted throughout this study that such was not the case, and that what they intended to share, the timeless Gospel, was actually wrapped in temporal and material clothing very difficult to unwrap. This made their mission a joint, potentially ambiguous mission, one of evangelising and one of civilising. Which of these two missions was the most influential varied considerably according to the individual agents of the mission, the Dii respondents, and the material conditions of the different encounters. For some, the encounter with white missionaries was a ticket to the New World in terms of education, clothing, scholarship, and employment. For others, it was a message of forgiveness and protection as experienced in the daily struggle for material survival and spiritual uncertainty, communicated by a Dii evangelist on the sorghum field in the bush. For yet others, the mission hospital was the final card to play in the fight against sickness and disease, a card that sometimes lost, but often won, giving hope of new physical life, and sometimes a renewed spiritual life as well.

In the first chapter we were introduced to several process-models of communication, and in the following the encounter between the Dii and the mission will be analysed according to Øyind Dahl’s culture filter model (Dahl 2001: 66–69). Of importance to this model is that each person who intends to transmit a message does so through a cultural filter. The content of the filter of Norwegian missionaries was described in detail in chapter three, and it showed how Norwegian history and Lutheran traditions were blended together with enlightenment ideas. These blended ideas in turn created a missionary discourse where the missionaries defined their challenge as obstacles to be overcome in order to make the Dii ‘good Christians’.

This was, however, not a message easily embraced by the Dii, and they even had problems understanding it. In order to decode the message of the Norwegians, the Dii actively used their own cultural filter. One early connotation of the Norwegian message conveyed to the Dii was that these Whites would eat Dii children, as strangers apparently sometimes did, one way or another. Other connotations unintentionally conveyed made all Whites members of the colonial administration. Missionaries and their message were interpreted according to Dii mental images of who these strangers were, what they said and what they did. Having passed through these two filters one obvious conclusion is