

A Study of the Translation of *proseuche* (Acts 6:4) in the Greek New Testament and Asante Twi Bible

Emmanuel Foster Asamoah

Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana, West Africa, ORCID: 0000-0002-7861-8180

***Corresponding Author:** Emmanuel Foster Asamoah, Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana, West Africa, ORCID: 0000-0002-7861-8180

ABSTRACT

Proseuche was used by the apostles of Jesus Christ in Acts 6:4 as one of the primary roles for ministers of the Gospel when they decided to leave the “ministration of food” to the deacons. In the Asante Twi text, *proseuche* has been rendered as *asɔre* (church or religious services) which does not bring out the exact meaning the author meant. The paper is a study of the translation of *proseuche* and *asɔre*. The study employed the exegetical, mother-tongue hermeneutics, and communicative model methodologies. The findings are that *mpae* or *mpaebɔ* best fits the translation of *proseuche* in the Asante Twi religio-cultural context, and not *asɔre*.

Keywords: *proseuche*, *asɔre*, *mpae* or *mpaebɔ*, Mother-tongue, Bible Translation, Book of Acts, Asante Twi Bible

INTRODUCTION

The Bible translation teams in Ghana—The Bible Society of Ghana (hereinafter referred to as BSG), The Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (hereinafter referred to as GILLBT) and the New Word Publishing (Ghana) Limited—together with the International Bible Society (hereinafter referred to as IBS) and other international groups have contributed immensely to the owning of Ghanaian mother-tongue Bibles. The BSG has translated and published the full Bible in nine (9) major Ghanaian mother-tongues, namely, Asante Twi, Akuapem Twi, Ga, Mfantse, Ewe, Dagbani, Dangme, Nzema and Esahie. Translation exercise for Dagaare Old Testament, Gurune New Testament and Bono are ongoing (BSG, 2022). Revision projects on some of the older versions are underway. Working in 40 languages including sign language translation, the GILLBT has translated and published 34 Bibles—14 Full Bible and 20 New Testament Bible—in Ghanaian mother-tongues (GILLBT, 2021; GILLBT, 2022). Among these languages are Konkomba, Tampulma, Bimoba, Farefare (or Frafra), Chumburung, Sisaali, Lelemi, and Deg with the full Bible, as well as the Kasem, Kusal, Nafaanra, Gonja, Bui and Vagla (GILLBT, 2022). Languages with only the

New Testament Bibles are Hanga, Adele, Mampruli, Paasaal, Koma, Anufo, Birifor, Ntrubo, Delo, Gikyode, and Ahanta. Others are Sekpele, Siwu, Tuwuli, Nkonya, Nawuri, Avatime, Nyagbo, Logba, and Tafi (GILLBT, 2022). The New Word Publishing (Ghana) Limited has published the English-Twi Version of the New Testament (The Holy Bible Twere Kronkron, 2013).

These translations without an iota of doubt, are significant piece in the history of the establishment and growth of the Church among the people concerned in that, they expedite the understanding of the Christian faith in these dialect groups; thereby, allowing them to relate with God (and the Word) in their own dialect.

But there seem to be translation and interpretation challenges facing mother-tongue readers of the Asante-Twi Bible (hereinafter referred to as AsTB). One of such is the translation of *προσευχή* (*proseuche*) as *asɔre* in Acts 6:4 which seems to carry a different meaning from what the author meant to the Asante Twi Bible readers in particular, and Ghanaian Church leaders, in general. The question one may ask is: What did the author mean when he said *προσευχή* (*proseuche*) in the text under study? This work seeks to find out the meaning of *προσευχή* (*proseuche*), and

how it should be understood in the context of Acts 6:4. It also finds out how *proseuche* in Acts 6:4 is rendered in the Asante-Twi translations of the Bible. And how the translated text in the Asante-Twi dialect has been received by or affected Ghanaian church leaders, in general, and Asante Twi readers, in particular.

METHODOLOGY

Exegetical, mother-tongue hermeneutics, and communicative model are the approaches this research employs. According to Fee (1993, 27), the exegetical method strives to discover the Biblical author's original intended meaning in the text. It talks about undergoing a careful exercise to historically investigate the Bible with the objective of coming out with an exact and useful interpretation. Mother-tongue hermeneutics finds out how the text has been translated into some indigenous Ghanaian languages, and what it means to the readers. It tries to interpret the Scriptures by employing the home language—the generally accepted language the benefactors of the translated work have known and are familiar with from their infancy—to make it meaningful and culturally relevant. Communicative model sees to it that translation becomes culturally relevant, original, and appreciable to the indigenes or benefactors of the translated text, who will access God's word in their local dialect or mother-tongue with similar effect produced by the original text (Asamoah 2020, 8-15).

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXT INTO ENGLISH

Acts 6:4 in Greek

ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν.

Transliteration

hemeis de tē proseuche kai te diakonia tou logouproskarteresomen

Some English Translations of the Text

1. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word (KJV).
2. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word (ASV).

3. Then we will give all our time to prayer and the teaching of the word (BBE).
4. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (ESV).
5. And will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (NIB).
6. And will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word (NIV).
7. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word (NKJV).
8. Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word (NLT).
9. While we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word (NRS).
10. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (RSV).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All the ten (10) versions listed above—KJV, ASV, BBE, ESV, NIB, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NRS, and RSV—translate *προσευχή* (*proseuche*) as “prayer”. Despite the usage of different translation approaches (Nida 1991, 5-25; Van der Watt, 2002, 246-265)¹, the translators in unison translated *προσευχή* (*proseuche*) as “prayer”. These translations were done to help their readers get the meaning of the text in their religio-cultural settings.

EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

The Book of Acts of the Apostles

With the arrangement of the New Testament (NT) books, Acts comes after the four Gospels and before the Epistles, beginning from Romans.

Authorship

The book of Acts does not state clearly who its writer is, but the unanimous testimony of early Christianity and the corroborating internal evidence of the two books—Luke-Acts—point

¹ Three main translation approaches were used in the translation of the ten different versions. They include Formal equivalence, Functional equivalence and Paraphrasing.

to common authorship by Luke, the third evangelist, traveling companion, and fellow worker of the apostle Paul (Talbert 1997, 1; Evans 1990, 1; Bruce 1990, 1-9; Hemer 1989, 30). This is identified from Paul's own statement, "our dear friend...the doctor" (Col. 4:14), and among Paul's co-workers (Col. 4:10-17; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phi. 1:24).

According to Conteh (2012, 8), the commonly "we" sections of Acts 16:9-18; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16 suggest that the author was an occasionally part of Paul's travel. As an eyewitness, Luke accompanied Paul from Troas to Philippi on his second missionary journey, from Philippi to Miletus on the third, from Miletus to Jerusalem, and from Caesarea to Rome. Since the style and vocabulary of these travel narratives resemble those of the rest of the book, it is highly probable that the memoir writer was also the author of the entire book.

The urbane literary style and refined use of the Greek language in the book, as well as the fact that it is addressed to someone called Theophilus (possibly a high-ranking Roman official), provide strong support for the tradition that Luke was a gentile convert to Christianity.

Date

The question of the date and place of the origin of Acts of the Apostles continues to be debated since there are no clear indications in the book itself. Some scholars such as Hemer (1989, 408) argues for an early date of 62 AD. A still earlier date around 60 and 61 AD, which is closer to Paul's Roman imprisonment (early 60s), has been advocated by a number of scholars (Conteh 2012, 8). Other scholars date it in the last quarter of the first century, a date not much before 85 AD, since Luke had written an earlier book to his patron, before this book (Acts of the Apostles). Proponents of such a late date claim support from the theology of Acts, which they see as picturing a Christian church settled into history, adjusted to the prospect of a lengthy period before the Lord's return (Illumina P&T edition, 2003). The book may have been written at an early date around 60s but appeared at a later date not much before 85 AD. This view is corroborated by Conteh (2012, 9) who believes the book appeared some years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Addressee

With regard to its destination, however, Luke did not leave any doubt. Presenting the history of the Early Church and writing as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, is addressed to a man named "Theophilus" who is also referred to as "the most excellent Theophilus" in Luke 1:1-4. It is not clear who that person was. Some interpreters think that Theophilus (which means "dear to God" or "lover of God") stands for Christian readers in general rather than any specific individual. Some also think that he was a wealthy and influential man, and was a leader in the city of Antioch during Luke's time (Polhill 1992:79; DeSilva 2000:126; Peterson 2009:102; Garland 2011:56). There is another group who believe he was the Roman lawyer who defended the apostle Paul during his trial in Rome. For this reason, holders of this view think that he used this book as a legal brief to defend Paul against charges of insurrection. However, the designation "most honourable" argues against such an assumption. That ascription was a common title of honour, designating a person with official standing in the Roman socio-political order.² It is thus likely that Luke intended his work for an official representative of Roman society, and other in similar situation to have a reliable account of the beginnings of Christianity. This view is supported by Creamer, Spencer and Vijoer (2014), who conclude that "Theophilus was a man of prominent position: a Gentile who had received some introductory teachings about Christ and who needed factual verification of the events surrounding the emergence of Christianity."

Purpose

Luke writes with a variety of purposes to fill a need in the Gentile church for a full account of the beginnings of Christianity. The first purpose is historical (Conteh 2012, 10). As a historian, Luke writes what Jesus did and is still doing and teaching through the ministries of his disciples and converts after his ascension.

Secondly, Luke writes for theological purpose. According to Conteh (2012, 10), Luke gives specific theological perspective about God, about Jesus, and about the Holy Spirit. For the

² This title was used for Felix in Acts 23:26; 24:2, and Festus in Acts 26:25.

author, “God initiates the saving events and determines their timing; Jesus is the Son of God, who because he saves, is Lord and Christ; the Holy Spirit is the anointer of Jesus, who [in] turn, pours out the Holy Spirit to baptise the disciples”.

Luke reveals the role of the Holy Spirit in the church’s life and mission, emphasising the baptism in the Holy Spirit as God’s provision for empowering the church to proclaim the gospel and to continue Jesus’ ministry. Luke explicitly records three times that the baptism in the Spirit was accompanied by speaking in tongues (2:4ff; 10:45-46; 19:1-7). The contest of these passages indicates that this was normative in early Christianity and is God’s enduring pattern for the church.

Another reason that accounts for Luke’s writing is presenting an indispensable role as the connecting link between the two collections—the Gospels and letters (and epistles), and rightly belongs in its present canonical order.

Luke again writes it to let his benefactor Theophilus, and everyone else who reads his account, know about the things God has accomplished through His servants. He shows that God’s servant moved the gospel triumphantly from the narrow borders of Judaism into the Gentile world in spite of opposition and persecution, tracing the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, mentioning no fewer than 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 Mediterranean islands, 95 different persons by name, and a variety of governmental officials and administrators by their precise titles (Metzger 1965, 171).

Background to the Text

Right after the disciples (with the apostles inclusive) had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they zoomed into preaching and teaching the Good News to all. This act won many souls from all over Jerusalem, and subsequently in other parts of the world for Christ. Since members of the church in Jerusalem were both Hellenistic Jews and native Hebrews (Hebraic Jews), the church was experiencing “growing pains,” and this was making it difficult for the apostles to minister to everybody (Cook 2003, 342). The Hellenistic Jews were the Greek-speaking Jews who had come to Palestine from other nations, and therefore may not have spoken Aramaic, while the native Hebrew were

Jewish residents of the land who spoke both Aramaic and Greek. The word Hellenistic Jews indicates that they were zealous for Judaism in their opposition to Paul. Hebraic Jews spoke Hebrew, though many would have known Greek as the *lingua franca* of the day, and probably to a greater degree resisted Greek culture. The Hellenistic Jews complained their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, which was handled by the apostles (6:1).³ The explosive growth of the Church brought pressure on the apostles in meeting all the needs—both material and spiritual—of the people. In as much as they tried their best to distribute food for all the church populace, they were not meeting the demands of the people; they sidelined some. The apostles were teaching and preaching in addition to busily serving at tables. The fact that the “outsiders” were being neglected created a situation that could have divided the church. However, the apostles handled the problem with great wisdom and did not give Satan any chance in the fellowship.

The apostles wisely anticipated that if they focused their attention on sharing of food, it could distract them from their primary ministry of prayer and teaching the Word (6:2-3). Therefore, they recommended the church select seven men as (*diakonia*) deacons, to oversee the care of widows; and they made selection of Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolas of Antioch, who had become a Jew (6:5).

Exegesis

The word *ἡμεῖς* (*ego*) which is a personal pronoun (we) is used in plural sense, to mean the oneness and agreement to select people for service, and concentrate on the principal employment to their calling as Gospel ministers into prayer and ministry of the word of God. It is also used in the nominative case which is the case of the subject. This comes after the conjunction *δὲ* “but”, which translates as, “But we”.

Προσευχή (*proseuche*) means “prayer” or “place of prayer” and it’s used in the dative case as fundamentally the case for the indirect

³As the leaders of the church everything was on the apostles’ shoulders including the sharing of food to church members.

object, suggesting the involvement of the apostles in this exercise after disassociating themselves from the present. But in this context, “prayer” seems best to be used. Also, “prayer” best agrees with the verb *προσκαρτεροῦμεν* (*proskarteresomen*) than “a place of prayer”. Barnes (2021) believes the apostles were seeking to continually engage in public prayer, which possibly was to be organised at the “place of prayer,” also referred to as *proseuche*. In addition to Barnes assertion is Gill (2021) who avers that the form of prayer includes “the private for themselves, and the church; and in the houses and families of the saints, with the sick and distressed.” Thus, the apostles decided to concentrate much on prayer unto God for themselves and the church members in all matters, and to speak unto the people from the Lord. This, according to Gill (2021) is one of the primary employments of a minister of the Gospel, and are what they ought to be concerned in, “not only now and then, but what he should give himself up unto wholly, that his profiting might appear; and what he should be continually exercised and employed in.”

The noun *διακονία* (*diakonia*) is used in the feminine sense to mean “ministry,” “service,” “waiting upon,” or “contribution”. Instead of taking the role or position of serving food or helping with food deliveries to the member of the church, the apostles decided to “serve the word of God” instead. Thus, they took the leadership role of feeding members of the church with spiritual food, and committed the physical to the deacons. According to Thayer (1977, 137), this form of ministry or service is especially executed at the command of others, —possibly, from a higher authority, which is no other person than the Lord Jesus Christ. They resolved for *προσευχῇ* (*proseuche*) and ministry of the *λογος* (*logos*). In effect, the apostles were to continue in prayer—possibly, for themselves and church members—in addition to ministry of the word.

As to how the apostles will give much priority to prayer and the ministry of the word is the usage of the verb *προσκαρτεροῦμεν* (*proskarteresomen*), from the root word *προσκαρτερέω* (*proskarterew*) meaning “to continue faithfully or devote oneself” (Zerwick and Grosvenor 1996, 368), “to persevere [‘continue steadfastly’] in anything” or “to give constant attention to a thing as in Acts 2:42” (Thayer

1977, 547). While they stopped the service of food sharing, the apostles were now to “continue faithfully or devote themselves,” “persevere or continue steadfastly in” or “give constant attention to” prayer and the ministry of the word. The apostles were now going to give all their time to prayer and ministry of the word, and assign the sharing of food to the deacons. They were now to continue in a loyal manner on spiritual matters—prayers and ministry of the word of God. This is affirmed by Barnes (2002) who opines that “the apostles meant to make this [prayer and ministry of the word] their constant and main object, undistracted by the cares of life, and even by attention to the temporal wants of the church.” They devoted themselves to prayer and ministry of the word to continue being dutifully firm and unwavering to the command of their master—Jesus Christ—to avoid distraction. As an active verb in the first-person plural, *προσκαρτεροῦμεν* (*proskarteresomen*) agrees with the subject of the sentence *ἡμεῖς* (*ego*). Being in indicative mood the apostles (church leaders) said it not to ask a question or make an order, but to make a statement.

In a nutshell, the apostles sought to look for deacons to serve food to the church members—both the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews—so that they will devote themselves, continue faithfully or steadfastly, give constant attention to prayer and the ministry of the word, and not be distracted by the cares of life and even by the attention to the temporal wants of the church. Hence, Acts 6:4, reads as “but we will give constant attention to prayer and ministry of the word,” “but we will devote ourselves to prayer and ministry of the word,” “but we will continue steadfastly in prayer and ministry of the word” or “but we will persevere in prayer and ministry of the word.”

THE ASANTE-TWI TRANSLATION OF ACTS 6:4

Asante Twi is a dialect spoken by the Asante who predominantly live in Ashanti Region with Kumasi as their regional capital. The Asante form part of the greater Akan people who constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana as well as part of the Akan language (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022). Other mother-tongue in the Akan language is Akuapem-Twi, Mfantse, Agona, Akyem, Kwahu, Wasa, Assin, Denkyira, Buem, and among others. Because they all form part of

the Akan language, there is some level of mutual intelligibility, which is subject to the distance between the geographical areas each covers. For example, there is more mutual intelligibility between the Asante Twi and the Akyem because of the closeness to each other than the Asante Twi and the Wasa.

Asante-Twi Twere Kronkron (The Asante-Twi Holy Bible, BSG/UBS, 2012)

Na yendee, yebekura asore ne asem no som mu.
[For us, we will hold unto church and ministry of the word].

The AsTB translates *proseuche* as *asore* instead of “*mpae*” or “*mpaebɔ*” (the act of praying). *Asore* simply means “church” or “church building” (Anane 2000, 48; Martin n/p, 60). While church refers to religious services held in a building set apart for worshipping God by a group of Christians, church building is the place for organising religious services. Any of these does not fit for the context, for the apostles say: “we will continue in prayer...,” and not in church or church building. Accepting the usage of *asore* (church) as the translation for *proseuche* in the Asante Twi could mean more to praying. Thus, the apostles did other religious activities in addition to prayer which is not the case for the text under study. They were to continue to engage in the communication between God and man which involves the offering of the emotions and desires of the soul to God, in the name and through the mediation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as well as ministry of the word.

From the discussion so far, the usage of *asore* (church) for *proseuche* (prayer) is problematic because it fails to state the exact action the apostles decided to take which is explicit than allowing people to read into the text their own ideas, assumptions, thoughts, and opinions which is an opposition to good exegesis. By so doing, they ignore what is actually there in the text, and come out with their own interpretation to facilitate their own agendas and opinions.

Also, the text as it stands in the Asante Twi Bible fails to recognise the need for prayer which takes precedency of the ministry of the word. Since prayer is not explicitly mentioned in the text, it does not allow church leaders, in general, and apostles, in particular, to put in much importance on the subject. It allows them to engage in other religious services,

believing that the apostles did not even pray, but were able to lead the church of God. The Christian who prays is always drawn nearer to God than the one who does not, and he receives spiritual nourishment for daily living. Such a person takes clue from Jesus Christ who always sought from God power for doing His work (cf. Mark 1:35).

Acts 6:4 in some other Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Translations of the Bible

1. Akuapem-Twi

Akuapem-Twi Kyerâw Kronkron (The Akuapem-Twi Full Bible, BSG/UBS, 1964)

Na yendee, yebekura asore ne asem no som mu. [For us, we would uphold church and ministry of the Word].

2. Chumburung

Abwareseŋ Wore-ɔ (The Word of God, The Holy Bible App, Version 8.2.5, Online from YouVersion.com)

Na ane feraa ane kusuŋ kii feye ane dee kya se kore kebwarekore, ne ane e tawe adwreseŋ. [For our service would be for prayer and ministry of the Word].

3. Ewe

Biblical Éwé New Testament (Ewe Bible New Testament, The Holy Bible App, Version 8.2.5, Online from You Version.com)

Ale be míawo la míakpɔ yeyiŋi awɔ mía fe do si nye gbedododa, mawunyagbɔgbɔ kple nufiafia amewo. [So that, we would have time for our work which is prayer, preaching and teaching].

4. Konkomba

Uwumbcraagbaŋ (Ewe Bible New Testament, the Holy Bible App, Version 8.2.5, Online from You Version.com)

Tima aanimbil ga li man limeel, ni Uwumbɔr aabɔr aamoon pu la. [As for us we would consent ourselves with prayer and preaching of the gospel].

Analysis and Interpretations of the Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Translations

With the exception of Akuapem-Twi, the other three Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Acts 6:4 under study translated *προσευχή* (*proseuche*) as “prayer”. They employed the literal equivalence philosophy which

according to Wonderly (1968, 6 -13)“...is a translation that emphasises formal correspondence...toward the source message or the message in its original form, and tries to preserve as much as possible of its grammatical form, sentence and clause structure, and consistency of word usage in terms of the source language.” The Chumburung, Ewe, and Konkomba Bibles translate *proseuche* as “*keɓwarekore*” (prayer), “*gbedododa*” (prayer) and “*Uwumbɔr*” (prayer). The Akuapem-Twi translators maintained *proseuche* as *asɔre* in the text as in the case for Asante-Twi translation; Asante-Twi Bible was birthed from the revision of the Akuapem-Twi Bible which initially was referred to as Akan Bible (Ekem, 2011).

The translation of *proseuche* (*asɔre*) as it stands now does not bring out the true meaning of the text. Hence, the Asante reading community and users of the Asante-Twi Bible find it difficult to interpret the text, which is affecting the whole section within which the text is identified.

CONCLUSION

The noun *proseuche* in Acts 6:4 is used in the dative case as fundamentally the case for the indirect object. The usage of *proskarteresomen* in the text best agrees with “prayer” than to “place of prayer”, which also agrees with the other indirect object *διακονία* (*diakonia*). Also, ‘prayer’ best agrees with the verb *προσκαρτεροῦμεν* (*proskarteresomen*) than “a place of prayer”.

The English translations used in the study as well as some Ghanaian mother-tongues such as Konkomba, Chumburung, and Konkomba have a translation that meet the worldview and culture of their readers. For users of the Asante-Twi Bible to get the meaning of the text of Acts 6:4, I suggest a new translation of the text, which reads, “na yen deɛ, yɛbɛma yen ani akɔ mpaɛɔ ne asem no som mu” [but we will give constant attention to prayer and ministry of the word]; “na yen deɛ, yɛde yen ho besi hɔ wɔ mpaɛɔ ne asem no som mu” [but for us, we will devote ourselves in prayer and ministry of the word]; “na yen deɛ, yɛbe toaso pintinn wɔ mpaɛɛ ne asem no som mu” [but we will continue in prayer and ministry of the word]; or “na yen deɛ, yɛbe tɔakeso wɔ mpaɛɔ ne asem no som mu” [but we will persevere in prayer and ministry of the word].

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