


# Towards an Accurate Akan-*Mfantse* Translation of Matthew 28:18–20

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents an exegetical and translational analysis of Matthew 28:18–20, aimed at producing a linguistically faithful and theologically coherent Akan-*Mfantse* translation. Employing the literal-grammatical-historical method, it examines key Greek verbal structures, particularly the aorist imperative *μαθητεύσατε* (*matheteúsate*, “make disciples”) and its dependent participles *πορευθέντες*, *βαπτίζοντες*, and *διδάσκοντες*, to demonstrate that preserving the Greek syntactic hierarchy is essential for doctrinal accuracy. Drawing on Eugene Nida’s dynamic equivalence model and Hans Vermeer’s Skopos theory, the study critiqued the current *Mfantse* Bible for misrepresenting participial subordination by rendering *πορευθέντες* (going) as a primary command. Based on the critique, it proposes a revised *Mfantse* translation that restores the Greek imperative structure and preserves the Trinitarian theological integrity of the baptismal formula. While primarily exegetical, the study acknowledges limited empirical validation; future research will include field testing with translation experts, clergy panels, and *Mfantse*-speaking congregations to assess linguistic accuracy and pastoral applicability. The study concludes that a faithful *Mfantse* translation is not merely a linguistic refinement but a pastoral and theological imperative, one that deepens doctrinal understanding, strengthens ecclesial mission, and sustains discipleship within the lived realities of Ghanaian Christianity. The research contributes to New Testament exegesis, vernacular translation studies, and contextual theology in sub-Saharan Africa.

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenal growth of Christianity across sub-Saharan Africa has ushered in new theological and pastoral challenges. Chief among them is the urgent need to root Christian formation in Scripture, not merely in translation, but in a translation that speaks the language of the heart.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, the Akan-*Mfantse* language, long central to Ghana’s Christian history and the cradle of Methodism in Cape Coast, demands renewed scholarly attention.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2–5; Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 22–25.

<sup>2</sup> Casely B. Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian: A History of The Methodist Church Ghana, 1961-2000* (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc., 2010), xxxvii.

As Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako have convincingly shown, Christianity becomes truly African not just when it is adapted to the culture, but when Scripture is received and interpreted within local languages.<sup>3</sup> A mother-tongue translation, then, is not simply a tool of evangelism; it is an act of theological construction. It brings the Word into alignment with local epistemologies and spiritual imaginations.<sup>4</sup>

This study focuses on Matthew 28:18–20, often referred to as the Great Commission.<sup>5</sup> In many English versions, including the King James Version (KJV), English Standard Version (ESV) and the New International Version (NIV), the word *πορευθέντες* (*poreuthentes*) “Go” is often treated as the primary command.<sup>6</sup> However, grammatical analysis reveals that the imperative lies instead with *μαθητεύσατε* (*matheteúsate*), “make disciples”. The participles “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” support this main command, describing how discipleship is achieved.<sup>7</sup>

This grammatical distinction has major theological consequences. Where translations misplace the emphasis, especially by rendering *πορευθέντες* (*poreuthentes*) as an independent imperative, they risk reshaping the Church’s understanding of mission from a long-term process of spiritual formation into mere geographical expansion.<sup>8</sup> This problem is evident in the current Akan-*Mfantse* translation, which elevates *πορευθέντες* (*poreuthentes*) to primary status while subordinating *μαθητεύσατε* (*matheteúsate*).

Thus, the aim of this research is twofold: to offer an exegetically sound analysis of Matthew 28:18–20, grounded in its Greek syntactic and theological structure, and to propose a corrected Akan-*Mfantse* translation that reflects this structure while remaining faithful to the linguistic patterns and ecclesial language of *Mfantse*-speaking Christians. This work affirms that the integrity of translation is essential to the Church’s identity and mission. In making disciples, faithfully, clearly, and in the people’s language, the Church participates most deeply in the commission of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a literal-grammatical-historical method of biblical exegesis, seeking to uncover the original authorial intent of Matthew 28:18–20 by analysing the passage within its syntactic, semantic, and socio-historical contexts.<sup>10</sup> As Gordon Fee defines, exegesis is “the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.”<sup>11</sup> Paul Enns further emphasizes that this process must be informed by the grammatical structure and theological intent of the biblical text.<sup>12</sup>

The Greek text of Matthew 28:18–20 was examined with particular focus on three core verbal elements: *ἐδόθη* (*edothē*, “was given”), *μαθητεύσατε* (*matheteúsate*, “make disciples”), and the accompanying participles *πορευθέντες* (*poreuthentes*, “going”), *βαπτίζοντες* (*baptizontes*, “baptizing”), and *διδάσκοντες* (*didaskontes*, “teaching”). The morphological and syntactic properties of each verb, tense, voice, mood, and grammatical function were analysed using standard references such as Daniel Wallace’s *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Blass-Debrunner-Funk, and R. C. H. Lenski’s exegetical commentary.<sup>13</sup>

To contextualize these findings, the study incorporated insights from modern translation theory. Chief among them is Eugene Nida’s dynamic equivalence approach, which prioritizes meaning over formal

<sup>3</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition”, *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (June 2001), 2-11 in *Africa Bible Commentary* ed. Tokunboh Adeyemoh (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1992), 431–435.

<sup>5</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 718.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 645–646.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 187–189.

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, “Matthew” in *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 953–954.

<sup>9</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 200–203.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 6–7.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 155.

<sup>13</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961).

correspondence, especially in receptor-oriented contexts.<sup>14</sup> This is complemented by the *Skopos* theory, which emphasizes the intended function of a translation within its cultural-linguistic setting.<sup>15</sup> These models guide the balance between formal fidelity to the Greek text and functional clarity in *Mfantse*, especially in rendering the hierarchical relationship between the main verb *μαθητεύσατε* (*matheteusate*) and its supporting participles.<sup>16</sup>

A comparative translation analysis is then undertaken, evaluating the current Akan-*Mfantse* rendering of Matthew 28:18–20 as published by the Bible Society of Ghana (2019 edition)<sup>17</sup> and its use in public worship and catechesis among *Mfantse*-speaking Christians. To ensure analytic transparency, the following criteria guided the evaluation of each verbal and syntactic element in relation to both the Greek and the *Mfantse* translation.

**Table 1. Analytic Criteria for Evaluating Verb Forms, Syntax, and Theological Weight**

Criterion	Description	Analytic Focus	Relevance for Translation
<b>Verb Form &amp; Tense</b>	Identification of mood, voice, and aspect (e.g., aorist, present, imperative, participle).	Determines whether the verb denotes completed, ongoing, or command-oriented action.	Ensures <i>Mfantse</i> verbs reflect correct temporal and aspectual sense (e.g., progressive <i>roko</i> for participles).
<b>Syntactic Function</b>	Role of the verb in clause hierarchy (main vs. subordinate).	Establishes how participles depend on imperatives or indicatives.	Prevents misplaced emphasis (e.g., not making <i>poreuthentes</i> a main command).
<b>Semantic Range</b>	Lexical meaning within <i>Koine Greek</i> usage and immediate context.	Interprets nuance (e.g., <i>matheteusate</i> = “make disciples,” not just “teach”).	Guides <i>Mfantse</i> word choice conveying transformation rather than mere instruction.
<b>Theological Weight</b>	Doctrinal implications arising from grammatical structure.	Links grammatical form to theological meaning (e.g., divine authority, Trinitarian structure).	Preserves doctrinal coherence through grammatical fidelity.
<b>Cultural-Linguistic Resonance</b>	Fit within <i>Mfantse</i> idiom, liturgy, and catechesis.	Tests intelligibility and ecclesial naturalness.	Balances formal and functional equivalence for local comprehension.

This framework ensures that linguistic precision, theological coherence, and contextual intelligibility remain integral to the translational process.

### Field Validation and Ecclesial Consultation

While this study focused on grammatical and theological analysis of Matthew 28:18–20, it acknowledges limited empirical validation. Future research should incorporate structured field testing with translation experts (e.g., Bible Society of Ghana, GILLBT), clergy panels, and *Mfantse*-speaking congregations to assess linguistic accuracy, theological clarity, and communicative effectiveness.<sup>18</sup> Such collaboration

<sup>14</sup> Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 1–12.

<sup>15</sup> Hans J. Vermeer, “Skopos and Commission in Translational Action,” in *Readings in Translation Theory*, ed. Andrew Chesterman (Helsinki: Oy Finn Lectura Ab, 1989), 173–187.

<sup>16</sup> Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 1–12.

<sup>17</sup> Bible Society of Ghana, *Baebor: Mfantse Bible* (Accra: Bible Society of Ghana, 2019), Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>18</sup> Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 173.

would strengthen both the translational precision and ecclesial applicability of the proposed rendering, ensuring that academic rigor is balanced with pastoral relevance.<sup>19</sup>

Where necessary, examples were drawn from *Mfantse* liturgical texts, sermon traditions, and catechetical materials to assess linguistic familiarity and ecclesial acceptability.

The study further engaged with vernacular theology as developed by Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, both of whom argue that theological authenticity in African Christianity is best realized through culturally embedded, mother-tongue Scriptural engagement.<sup>20</sup> This theoretical lens validates the concern that mistranslation is not merely a linguistic failure, but a theological and missional misstep.<sup>21</sup>

Secondary sources including biblical commentaries, theological dictionaries, and peer-reviewed studies in contextual theology, supported both the exegetical and translational dimensions of the research. Through this integrated approach, the study demonstrated how grammatical fidelity, theological clarity, and linguistic accessibility are indispensable for a translation that empowers the *Mfantse*-speaking Church to fulfill the Great Commission.

## Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 28:18–20

### Overview

Matthew 28:18–20 serves as the theological and narrative climax of the First Gospel. It was spoken by the risen Christ to the eleven remaining disciples in Galilee. These verses encapsulate the Church’s identity and mission, considering Christ’s universal authority.<sup>22</sup> The analysis focuses on the Greek text's verbal structure and its implications for accurate mother-tongue translation.

### Verse 18: Divine Authority Entrusted to the Risen Christ

#### Greek Text

*Καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.*

#### Literal Rendering

“And came Jesus spoke to them, saying: ‘was given to me all authority in heaven and on the earth.’”

### Grammatical and Contextual Observations

The Greek conjunction *καί* “and” signals continuity from the preceding narrative in verses 16–17. This is where the eleven disciples go to a mountain in Galilee to meet the resurrected Christ. Upon seeing Him, some worship while others doubt. This setting in Galilee is theologically significant. It is the place where Jesus began His public ministry among the marginalized. It now served as the backdrop for His final earthly commissioning. This underscores the continuity between Jesus’ earthly mission and the future mission of His Church.<sup>23</sup>

Jesus then approaches and speaks to them. The verbs *ἐλάλησεν* (*elalesen*) and *λέγων* (*legōn*) both relate to speech but with a nuanced distinction.<sup>24</sup> As Marvin R. Vincent explains, *elalesen* refers to the act of breaking silence, emphasizing the occurrence of speech itself. Whereas *legōn* refers to the actual content of the discourse.<sup>25</sup> This distinction shows that Jesus first opens dialogue (*elalesen*) and then delivers the substance of His message (*legōn*), namely the declaration of His universal authority.<sup>26</sup>

The phrase *ἐδόθη μοι* (was given to me) is an aorist passive indicative construction, with an implicit divine subject, clearly the Father. The verb’s singular form rules out the possibility of multiple agents and emphasizes that Christ alone is the recipient of this authority.<sup>27</sup> This grammatical observation invites deeper Christological reflection. R. C. H. Lenski notes that the aorist *ἐδόθη* expresses a completed action and

<sup>19</sup> Vermeer, “Skopos and Commission in Translational Action,” in *Readings in Translation Theory*, 183.

<sup>20</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*; Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 435.

<sup>22</sup> R. T. France, “The Gospel of Matthew” in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1110–1113.

<sup>23</sup> France, “The Gospel of Matthew”, 1095–97.

<sup>24</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 409–410.

<sup>25</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1888) 149.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 409–410

<sup>27</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 437–438.

refers specifically to Christ’s human nature. He writes, “The aorist *edothē* states a fact... and refers to the human nature of Jesus alone: for according to His divine nature, all authority belonged to Him from eternity.”<sup>28</sup>

### Theological Implication: Monotheistic Authority

What is given to Jesus is described as *πᾶσα ἐξουσία* (all authority). Lenski contrasts *ἐξουσία* (legitimate or judicial power) with *δύναμις* (physical strength), underscoring that what Christ receives is not mere might but rightful dominion.<sup>29</sup> This authority spans both realms, *ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*, a merism indicating universal jurisdiction.<sup>30</sup>

Lenski affirms, “Two domains are mentioned, heaven and earth. All authority in each: nothing more comprehensive can be conceived.”<sup>31</sup> This conferral of authority recalls Daniel 7:13–14, where the “Son of Man” is given authority, glory, and sovereign power by the “Ancient of Days.”<sup>32</sup> By invoking this imagery, Matthew frames Jesus’ authority as both messianic and eschatological.<sup>33</sup>

G. Jerome and Michael J. Albrecht elaborate, “With these words Jesus claims to be the Son of Man who was given all authority by the Ancient of Days. The authority... delegated to Him by the Father, He now delegates to His disciples.”<sup>34</sup> This theological dynamic is reinforced by John 20:21, where Jesus declares, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”<sup>35</sup>

The authority of the disciples is therefore derivative, rooted in the authority conferred upon Christ and extending from the Father through the Son to the Church.<sup>36</sup> Though the Holy Spirit is not named explicitly in this verse, Luke-Acts makes it clear that the empowerment for the mission is fulfilled through the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1–4), thus forming a Trinitarian framework for the Church’s commissioning and witness.<sup>37</sup>

### Verse 19: The Central Command to Make Disciples

#### Greek Text

*Πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη· βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.*

#### Literal Rendering

“Going, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

### Syntactic Structure: Imperative and Participles

The Greek clause is structured around a central imperative, *μαθητεύσατε*, “make disciples”, supported by three participles: *πορευθέντες*, “going”, *βαπτίζοντες*, “baptizing”, and *διδάσκοντες* “teaching”.<sup>38</sup>

The participle *πορευθέντες* is an aorist passive deponent plural participle. While it is passive in form, its deponent nature means it is active in meaning.<sup>39</sup> A literal rendering, “having gone,” reflects the aorist tense but may obscure its subordinate relationship to the main verb. As Obeng Adjei notes, the most contextually and grammatically appropriate translation is “going,” indicating a background action that supports the main command.<sup>40</sup> This participle’s role is not to serve as an independent command, but to mark the

<sup>28</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1171.

<sup>29</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Eisenach Gospel Selections* (Columbus, OH: The Lutheran Book Concern, 1928) 577.

<sup>30</sup> France, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 1113.

<sup>31</sup> Lenski, *The Eisenach Gospel Selections*, 577.

<sup>32</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 718.

<sup>33</sup> Michael F. Bird and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 308–309.

<sup>34</sup> G. Jerome Albrecht and Michael J. Albrecht, *The People’s Bible: Matthew* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996) 442.

<sup>35</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 575–577.

<sup>36</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 718–720.

<sup>37</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 682–685.

<sup>38</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 640–642.

<sup>39</sup> Sampson Obeng Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship and The Class System: A Study of The Effiduase Diocese of The Methodist Church Ghana” (MPhil. Thesis; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana, 2013), 33.

<sup>40</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 34.

circumstances under which the imperative *μαθητεύσατε* (make disciples) is to be fulfilled.<sup>41</sup> This fits with the broader narrative flow of Matthew’s Gospel: Jesus expands the previously restricted mission to Israel (Matt. 10:5–6) to encompass *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* (all nations), signalling a global commission.

Though translations like the *King James Version* render *πορευθέντες* as “Go,” this risks misrepresenting the Greek syntax by elevating a circumstantial participle to a main verb.<sup>42</sup> D. A. Carson rightly clarifies that participles dependent on imperatives may acquire imperatival force, but only through their relation to the main verb.<sup>43</sup> Thus, *πορευθέντες* should be read as a participle that draws its force from *μαθητεύσατε*, not as a command on its own.

### **The Role of *οὖν* (therefore)**

The conjunction *οὖν* (therefore) introduces a conclusion based on Jesus’ declaration in verse 18: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This means the commission in verse 19 proceeds directly from Christ’s sovereign authority.

R. C. H. Lenski writes, “*οὖν* draws a conclusion from the gift of all authority bestowed upon Christ; it puts all this power behind the command to evangelize the world.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, the *οὖν* structurally and theologically ties the divine authority of Jesus to the imperative action of the Church.

### **Lexical-Theological Note on *μαθητεύσατε***

The verb *μαθητεύσατε* is the aorist active imperative and functions as the main command of the sentence. Obeng Adjei emphasizes that *mathēteusate* is not a generic term for teaching or preaching but a transformative command to “turn individuals into disciples.”<sup>45</sup> Albert Barnes similarly critiques English translations that render this verb as “teach,” arguing that such renderings dilute the relational and transformational thrust of discipleship.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the focus is on forming committed followers of Christ, not merely conveying doctrinal content.

Grammatically, *μαθητεύσατε* stands in contrast to the other participles *πορευθέντες*, *βαπτίζοντες* and *διδάσκοντες*, all of which serve to support this primary imperative.<sup>47</sup> Historically, *μαθητεύειν* began as an intransitive verb meaning “to be a disciple,” but in the New Testament, it evolved into a causative transitive form, meaning “to make disciples.”<sup>48</sup> Matthew’s usage thus encapsulates a theology of multiplication: disciples are called not only to follow, but to disciple others.

### **The Scope: *ΠΑΝΤΑ ΤΑ ἜΘΝΗ* (all nations)**

The phrase *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* has prompted scholarly debate. Some interpret it as referring exclusively to Gentile nations, while others understand it more broadly to include both Jews and Gentiles. John Ylvisaker affirms its universal scope: “Jesus came to save all men... no one exempted.”<sup>49</sup> Obeng Adjei supports this universality, noting that the sacrifice of Christ was for all humanity, not just for Israel.<sup>50</sup> William Hendriksen underscores this inclusiveness by pointing to non-Jewish figures in Matthew’s Gospel, such as the Magi (Matt. 2:1–12) and the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:28).<sup>51</sup> The missional structure in Acts 1:8, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, confirms this trajectory. The command to disciple “all nations” is therefore not a replacement of Israel but a fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan encompassing all peoples.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 645–646.

<sup>42</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 34.

<sup>43</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984) 595.

<sup>44</sup> Lenski, *Eisenach Gospel Selections*, 580.

<sup>45</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 40.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1962), 145.

<sup>47</sup> Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 398–400.

<sup>48</sup> Blass, Debrunner and Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 82.

<sup>49</sup> John Ylvisaker, *The Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932) 781.

<sup>50</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 40.

<sup>51</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976) 999.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 531–536.

## Baptizing into the Trinitarian Name

The participle βαπτίζοντες (baptizing) derives its grammatical and theological significance from μαθητεύσατε. It describes one of the ways disciples are made, not an independent action.<sup>53</sup> Lenski affirms: “This participle has imperative force because it depends on the main verb.”<sup>54</sup>

Paul Edward Kretzmann adds that baptism is not merely symbolic but functions as a means of grace, through which divine empowerment is conferred.<sup>55</sup> Thus, baptism is not optional; it is an essential step in Christian initiation and discipleship formation.

The phrase εἰς τὸ ὄνομα is often translated “in the name,” though its more literal rendering is “into the name.” This prepositional phrase implies a movement of identity and allegiance, entering a covenantal relationship with the Triune God. Lenski prefers “in,” highlighting its sacramental use, while Hendriksen notes the semantic fluidity in English, where “in” and “into” often overlap.<sup>56</sup>

Ylvisaker captures the theological thrust: “To baptize... is to place the one who is baptized into communion with the Trinity, in such a way that the object of the act is His possession and is dedicated to His service.”<sup>57</sup> This Trinitarian formula: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, further affirms the unity and co-equal divinity of the Godhead, framing baptism as both spiritual incorporation and divine commissioning.

## Verse 20: Continuous Teaching and Christ’s Abiding Presence

### Greek Text

διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

### Literal Rendering

“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and behold I with you am all the days until the end of the age.”

### Pedagogical Continuity: διδάσκοντες

The participle διδάσκοντες (*didaskontes*) is a present active participle (masculine nominative plural) from the verb διδάσκω (I teach). As a present participle, it conveys continuous or habitual action. Obeng Adjei affirms that this grammatical form suggests that teaching is not a one-time task but an ongoing and essential activity in the disciple-making process.<sup>58</sup> This observation leads directly into the Church’s responsibility to preserve and transmit Jesus’ teachings as a sustained practice.

Paul E. Kretzmann underscores this continuity, asserting that teaching constitutes the second instrumental means of fulfilling the Great Commission. He writes that such instruction must be grounded not in human innovation, but in the inspired Word of God.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the Church’s identity is bound to its pedagogical function, and its mission, particularly in liturgical and catechetical contexts, is inseparable from continuous teaching.

## On the Order of “Baptizing” and “Teaching”

A perennial question concerns the relationship between βαπτίζοντες (baptizing) and διδάσκοντες (teaching): does the sequence in the Greek text mandate a fixed ecclesial order?

John Ylvisaker cautions against rigid interpretations: “Baptism is mentioned before the instruction, but this arrangement is not proof-positive that baptism must precede teaching in every case... God has not established a certain order in this matter.”<sup>60</sup> This flexibility supports a range of ecclesial practices, including infant baptism followed by catechesis, or adult conversion preceded by instruction. While the text allows for both, the priority remains that teaching is integral, perpetual, and formative. Thus, regardless of sequence, *didachē* (instruction) remains central to the mission of the Church.

<sup>53</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1992), 431–432.

<sup>54</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1177.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Edward Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible* (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1924) 162.

<sup>56</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1175 & Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, 1000.

<sup>57</sup> Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, 782.

<sup>58</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 42.

<sup>59</sup> Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, 162.

<sup>60</sup> Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, 781.

### Teaching What Was Commanded: *Ἐνετειλάμην* (I commanded)

The verb *ἠνετειλάμην* is an aorist indicative active, best translated as “I commanded you.” The aorist tense denotes a completed action in the past, referring to the full body of Jesus’ teaching during His earthly ministry.<sup>61</sup> Obeng Adjei suggests that these teachings are systematically preserved in Matthew’s Gospel in the form of five major discourses:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
2. The Missionary Discourse (Matthew 10)
3. The Parabolic Discourse (Matthew 13)
4. The Community (or Church) Discourse (Matthew 18)
5. The Eschatological Discourse (Matthew 23–25)<sup>62</sup>

Matthew’s intentional structuring of his Gospel into five didactic blocks perhaps echoes the five books of Moses (Pentateuch), thereby portraying Jesus as the new and authoritative Teacher of God’s people.<sup>63</sup> This structural insight highlights the nature of Christian teaching: it is not speculative theology, but a faithful transmission of Jesus’ own commands, ethical, ecclesial, and eschatological. Thus, disciple-making involves not merely initiation into the faith but formation in obedient praxis, rooted in the revealed teaching of Christ.<sup>64</sup>

### Christ’s Presence: “I Am with You Always...”

The final clause, *καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας...*, is theologically profound. The phrase *ἐγὼ εἰμι* (I am) echoes the divine name *YHWH*, as revealed in *Exodus 3:14*: “I AM WHO I AM.”<sup>65</sup> John Munro Gibson argues that Jesus’ declaration here serves as the New Testament fulfillment of the Old Covenant revelation of God’s eternal presence. He writes: “This final utterance... is the interpretation, full and clear at last, of that great Name of the old covenant.”<sup>66</sup>

This identification of Jesus with *ἐγὼ εἰμι* (John 8:58) affirms not only His divinity but also His eternal solidarity with His followers. While the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers the mission in Luke-Acts (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), here Matthew grounds that empowerment in the personal and perpetual presence of Christ Himself.<sup>67</sup> The expression *μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας* (I am with you all the days) indicates uninterrupted presence, and *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος* (until the end of the age) expands the promise beyond the immediate disciples to include the entire Church age.<sup>68</sup> This assures readers that Christ’s presence remains active in every era, empowering every disciple-making endeavour.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 2. Summary of Grammatical Structure**

Greek Form	Function	Translation Priority
<i>ἔδοθη</i>	Aorist passive indicative	Completed divine action
<i>Μαθητεύσατε</i>	Aorist active imperative	Main command (make disciples)
<i>Πορευθέντες</i>	Aorist participle	Subordinate circumstantial
<i>Βαπτίζοντες</i>	Present participle	Instrumental/supportive
<i>Διδάσκοντες</i>	Present participle	Ongoing action

## Towards an Accurate Akan-Mfantse Translation of Matthew 28:18–20

### 1. Rationale for Mother-Tongue Fidelity

Translation into the mother tongue is not merely a linguistic task; it is a theological and missional imperative. As Lamin Sanneh argued, “The translatability of the Gospel is the single most critical fact in

<sup>61</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 562.

<sup>62</sup> Adjei, “The Matthew 28:18-20 Concept of Discipleship,” 43.

<sup>63</sup> *Reformation Study Bible* ed. R.C. Sproul (Orlando, Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2015) 1668.

<sup>64</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 718–19.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 39–40.

<sup>66</sup> John Munro Gibson, *The Expositor’s Bible: The Gospel of St. Matthew* (London: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1903) 450.

<sup>67</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1114–1116.

<sup>68</sup> Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew: Apostate, reformer, revolutionary?” *New Testament Studies* 49, no. 2 (2003): 193–209.

<sup>69</sup> Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 353.

the expansion of Christianity.”<sup>70</sup> In the same spirit, Kwame Bediako emphasized that the theological maturity of African Christianity depends on engagement with Scripture in indigenous languages.<sup>71</sup> This study affirms that a faithful Akan-*Mfantse* rendering of Matthew 28:18–20 must preserve both the grammatical structure and theological meaning of the original Greek. Care must be taken with verbal relationships, possessive forms, and the Trinitarian baptismal formula, all of which carry critical doctrinal implications.

## 2. Current *Mfantse* Translation

*Na Jesus bekasaa kyeree hɔn de, Wɔdze sor nye asaase do tum nyina ama me. Dem ntsi hom nkɔ nkeye amanaman nyina m'esuafo, na hom nnuma hɔn nhye Egya, nye ɔba, nye Sunsum Krɔnkrɔn dzin mu; na hom nkyerekyerɛ hɔn de wondzi dza mahye hom nyina do: na hwe, menye hom wɔ hɔ daa, dze kesi wiadze ewiei.*<sup>72</sup>

## 3. Key Translational Corrections

### A. Verse 18: Divine Authority—Restoring the Singular Agent

- Greek verb: *ἔδóθη* (aorist passive indicative, 3rd person singular)
- Common *Mfantse* rendering: *Wɔdze sor nye asaase do tum nyina ama me* (they gave all authority in heaven and earth to me)
- Problem: The verb *Wɔdze* implies a plural subject (they gave), which misrepresents the divine passive, where God the Father alone is the agent.
- Corrected rendering: *ɔdze sor nye asaase do tum nyina ama me* (He gave all authority in heaven and on earth to me)
- Linguistic Note: Akan syntax requires subject-verb concord. *ɔdze* restores the singular agent and preserves monotheistic theological clarity.

### B. Verse 19: The Command Structure—Preserving the Verbal Hierarchy

- Greek: *Πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε...*
- Common *Mfantse* rendering: *hom nkɔ nkeye...m'esuafo* (You go and make my disciples)
- Problem: *Nkɔ* is imperative, which falsely elevates the participle *poreuthentes* to a primary command.
- Corrected rendering: The *Mfantse* phrase “*Hom rokɔ yi... hom nye amanaman nyina m'esuafo*” (As you are going...make all nations my disciples)
- Linguistic Justification: *rokɔ yi* (a progressive verbal form with an adverb) better mirrors the Greek participial sense. The structure clearly supports *hom nye* (make), the true imperative.

### C. Lexical Clarification: “*m'esuafo*” (my disciples)

- Objection: The use of *m'* (possessive prefix) might seem theologically problematic.
- Clarification: In *Mfantse* liturgy and Christian discourse, divine possession (*me Nyankopɔn*, “my God”; *m'Egya*, “my Father”) is common. *M'esuafo* echoes the ecclesiological truth that all disciples belong to Christ.<sup>73</sup>

### D. Trinitarian Formula: Preserving Doctrinal Integrity

- Greek: *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος*
- Translation: *nhye Egya, nye ɔba, nye Sunsum Krɔnkrɔn dzin mu*
- Note: The *Mfantse* rendering preserves singular “name” (*dzin*) while invoking the three Persons, thus maintaining the unity of essence and diversity of persons central to Trinitarian theology.

<sup>70</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 51.

<sup>71</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 437–440.

<sup>72</sup> Bible Society of Ghana, *Baebor*, Matthew 28:18-20.

<sup>73</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 451.

**Table 3. Summary of Translational Corrections (Greek → *Mfantse* → Theological Rationale)**

Greek Term / Phrase	Morphological Form	Common <i>Mfantse</i> Rendering	Proposed <i>Mfantse</i> Correction	Theological / Linguistic Rationale
ἐδόθη μοι (was given to me)	Aorist passive indicative, 3rd singular	<i>Wɔdze sor nye asaase do tum nyina ama me</i>	<i>Ɔdze sor nye asaase do tum nyina ama me</i>	Restores singular divine agency (Father as sole agent); prevents plural misrepresentation of the divine passive.
πορευθέντες (going)	Aorist participle, deponent (active meaning)	<i>hom nkɔ nkeye...m'esuafo</i>	<i>hom rokɔ yi...hom nye amanaman nyina m'esuafo</i>	Clarifies participial subordination to <i>matheteusate</i> ; avoids falsely elevating it to a primary command.
μαθητεύσατε (make disciples)	Aorist active imperative	<i>nkeye m'esuafo</i> (secondary to "go")	<i>hom nye amanaman nyina m'esuafo</i>	Centralizes the true imperative of the passage; discipleship, not mere movement, is the command.
βαπτίζοντες (baptizing)	Present participle	<i>hom nnuma hɔn</i>	<i>hom nnuma hɔn nhye Egya, Ɔba, nye Sunsum Krɔnkrɔn dzin mu</i>	Identifies baptism as the instrumental means of disciple formation; affirms Trinitarian unity.
διδάσκοντες (teaching)	Present participle	<i>hom nkyerekere hɔn</i>	<i>hom nkyerekere hɔn de wɔndzi dza mahye hom nyina do</i>	Highlights ongoing pedagogical process implied by the present aspect; links discipleship with obedience.
εἰς τὸ ὄνομα... (into the name...)	Prepositional phrase	<i>nhye...dzin mu</i>	<i>nhye Egyá, Ɔba, nye Sunsum Krɔnkrɔn dzin mu</i>	Preserves singular "name" with plural referents; maintains doctrinal integrity of the Trinity within <i>Mfantse</i> syntax.

**4. Proposed Translation: Matthew 28:18–20 in Akan-*Mfantse***

*Na Jesus bekasaá kyeree hɔn de: "Ɔdze sɔr nye asaase do tum nyiná ama me. Dem ntsi, hom rokɔ yi, hom nye amanaman nyiná m'esuafo; na hom nnuma hɔn nhye Egyá, nye Ɔba, nye Sunsum Krɔnkrɔn dzin mu; na hom nkyerekere hɔn de wɔndzi dza mahye hom nyiná do. Na hwe, me nye hom wɔ hɔ daa, dze kesi wiadze ewiei."*

**5. Table 4. Summary of Enhancements**

Greek Element	Greek Form	<i>Mfantse</i> Correction	Rationale
ἐδόθη μοι	Aorist passive, 3rd singular	Ɔdze...ama me	Restores divine singularity
Μαθητεύσατε	Aorist active imperative	hom nye ... m'esuafo	Central command preserved
Πορευθέντες	Aorist participle	hom rokɔ yi	Subordinate action clarified
Βαπτίζοντες	Present participle	hom nnuma hɔn	Instrumental means of discipleship
Διδάσκοντες	Present participle	hom nkyerekkyere hɔn	Ongoing teaching role of the Church
Trinitarian name	εἰς τὸ ὄνομα ...	nhye ... dzin mu	Preserves singular “name” with plural referents

**6. Translational Theoretical Insight**

The translation reflects both formal equivalence (structural faithfulness to the Greek) and functional equivalence (cultural-linguistic clarity in *Mfantse*). In line with Nida’s model, the goal is not mere word-for-word rendering but meaning-for-meaning translation that preserves grammatical force, theological emphasis, and ecclesial resonance.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, drawing from Skopos theory, the function (*skopos*) of this translation is discipleship-oriented liturgical and catechetical instruction. It is intended to shape *Mfantse*-speaking Christians in both faith and practice.

**7. Ecumenical and Dialectical Implications for Akan-speaking Communities**

The implications of this translation extend beyond the *Mfantse*-speaking Church. Other Akan dialect communities, including *Asante-Twi*, *Akuapem-Twi*, and *Agona*, share linguistic roots but exhibit phonological and syntactic variations that affect translation and liturgical use.<sup>75</sup>

An accurately structured *Mfantse* translation can serve as a linguistic and theological bridge for these related dialects, fostering unity across denominational and regional lines. This cross-dialectal clarity has ecumenical value: it strengthens inter-Akan biblical literacy, harmonizes catechetical materials, and supports shared liturgy among Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal congregations.<sup>76</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

This study examined Matthew 28:18–20 through exegetical and translational analysis within the Akan-*Mfantse* context, emphasizing the central imperative μαθητεύσατε (make disciples) as the grammatical and theological core of the passage. The participles πορευθέντες (going), βαπτίζοντες (baptizing), and διδάσκοντες (teaching) were shown to function subordinately, describing how discipleship occurs. Misplacing this hierarchy, as seen in the current *Mfantse* translation, risks reducing mission to activity rather than sustained formation.

The proposed translation corrects these structural inaccuracies, restoring ἐδόθη (was given) to its singular divine agent and accurately rendering πορευθέντες as a participial clause. This ensures theological fidelity, particularly in maintaining the unity of the Trinitarian formula εἰς τὸ ὄνομα (into the name).

While this research grounded its findings in the literal-grammatical-historical method and modern translation theories, especially Eugene Nida’s dynamic equivalence and Hans Vermeer’s *Skopos* theory, it recognizes a methodological limitation: the lack of formal field validation. Future studies would engage Bible translators, clergy, and congregations to confirm the translation’s pastoral usability and idiomatic authenticity.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 12–13.

<sup>75</sup> Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 241.

<sup>76</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, 173.

Such consultation would also promote ecumenical coherence among Akan dialect communities (e.g., Twi, Wassa, and Nzema), advancing a unified approach to Scripture engagement.<sup>78</sup>

Ultimately, this study affirms that faithful translation is a theological construction. As Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako observe, the Word becomes truly African when it is heard in the language of the heart.<sup>79</sup> A grammatically and theologically sound *Mfantse* rendering of the Great Commission thus strengthens discipleship, deepens worship, and anchors the Church's mission in the abiding authority of Christ.

This study, therefore, contributes to three interrelated fields: New Testament exegesis, vernacular biblical translation, and contextual theology. It calls translators, pastors, and theologians to seriously take the interplay between syntax and mission, between grammar and gospel. In doing so, it echoes the call of the risen Christ, not merely to go, but to make disciples, teaching them to observe all He has commanded, and trusting in His abiding presence until the end of the age.

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<sup>78</sup> Vermeer, "Skopos and Commission in Translational Action," 183.

<sup>79</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 239.

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