

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Anything about religions must be a very sacred topic to talk about. Despite the fact that it is, the writer realizes how important it is to research two of many hot issues that have constantly been debated by religious leaders, particularly among Christians (“Forum Diskusi Alkitab Discussions”). Among all of those debated religious terms in Christianity, there are two terms that the writer finds linguistically explainable and of no less interest. This research is merely to find out the original meanings and the values of two confusing yet basic words in Christianity, from linguistic point of view, along with the historical proofs. Furthermore, without revealing the hidden facts within the essence of these problems, it is highly predicted that there will be much more misunderstandings that might lead to a total confusion among the religious practitioners, particularly the Christians. Therefore, the writer selects this topic in order to linguistically research these two religious terms and present it to the public in the end so that the deeper comprehension of the selected terms is obtained by the people.

Christian is a very big religion in the world. In fact, it is the largest religion in the world with the most adherents (approximately a third of the world population) according to the last statistics data made in 2005 (“Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents”). Its holy book is the Holy Bible. Even though

there are so many versions of the Holy Bible, the contents of all of them are basically the same. Being always simplified by the theologians in collaboration with some expert translators, the Holy bible keeps changing and improving in terms of more understandable languages it uses. Christians believe as what Jesus Christ (whom the Christians refer to the Messiah- Son of God) said in the bible that they need to go and make disciples (“μαθητεύσατε” /matheteusate/) of all nations, baptizing them (“βαπτίζοντες” /baptizontes/) in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them (“διδάσκοντες” /didaskontes/) to obey everything that Jesus has commanded (*Greek Study Bible*, Matthew 28. 19-20). This order is well-known in Christianity as the great commission, which Jesus gave before He was taken up to Heaven. For this very reason, the Christians always try to simplify their teachings of Christianity to make people understand better the truth (what Christians refer to the truth), resulting in various versions of the bible that are believed improving along with the need of the readers to more understandable texts. As soon as these readers of the Bible read it, they are likely to understand the concepts of Christianity. Some who believe it will give themselves to be baptized, and some others who choose not to believe it will not be baptized.

This baptism itself indicates the repentance and the faith of the new believers who are going to be baptized. When one has been baptized, one is then recognized as a Christian (it is an admission to a Christian church (“baptism”, newworldencyclopedia.org)) since that very one has believed in Jesus Christ prior to the baptism (*King James Bible*, Acts viii.12; viii.35-39). This concept is generally

accepted in Christianity in spite of the existence of infant baptism, which has become familiar in Christianity as well. In fact, most Christians are believed to have understood the core meaning of baptism, yet another problem exists. While the other two orders of the great commission (i.e., /mathateusate/ and /didaskontes/) have been fully agreed to be translated to “make disciples” and “teaching them”, “baptizing (them)” is as the matter of fact not translated. The Holy Bible does not mention explicitly the right way of how someone should be baptized. The ways to perform the baptism ritual vary according to what the churches teach (“baptism”, newworldencyclopedia.org).

Things have become more complicated when it is found that there are tens of thousands of denominations of Christian nowadays, which means tens of thousands of hyponyms of “Christian”. In 2001, there were approximately 38,000 Christian denominations in the world according to World Christian Encyclopedia (“Christianity Today- General Statistics and Facts of Christianity”). Their lexical representations have the same feature (+Christian), yet each denomination holds to its own teaching. The Holy Bible translations have somehow resulted in different interpretations among the Christians. Thus, there is only one source (the original bible in its original language), yet there are so many interpretations of it. The translations are made to interpret the original language so that the readers can grasp the original idea within, yet apparently one crucial major, which is how the baptism conducted, exists. These various interpretations have made many of the Christians wonder which baptism is the right one according to the Holy Bible. However, it is written in the Holy Bible,

furthermore: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (*New International Version Bible*, Ephesians 4.5). Therefore, there is only one true baptism despite the fact that there are so many teachings regarding this in Christian churches. For this very reason, further research of the word baptism is conducted linguistically based on the ground knowledge or the concentration taken by the writer in the faculty of education of the English Department.

Christian is a religion that started out in the Middle East. It is a hyponym as well as 2 other big religions, such as Islam and Judaism, because Christian is classified as an Abrahamic religion just like the others mentioned above (“What are the Abrahamic Religions?”). It is because the early Christians were Jewish, and the Jews’ patriarch is Abraham (Abraham was their patriarch or forefather) Besides, Jesus, whom the Christians refer to the Son of God, was the ‘descendant’ of Abraham. Throughout the ages, the Jews have always observed a sacred day, on which they worship their God; they call the day ‘Sabbath’. The observance of Sabbath is clearly written in their ‘ten commandments’, a law that has been strictly regulated, ordered by God to be completely done, either by all of them, or even by the strangers who live with them. God said, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the

Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20.8-11). The observance of Sabbath is one of the ten strict regulations ordered by God Himself. Any violations against the law can result in the death of the violators (Exodus 31.14).

Jesus Himself had a habit to go to the synagogue, “a building where Jews meet for religious worship and teaching” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary) - a church, to Christians, in comparison- , on the Sabbath day (Luke 4.16). However, Jesus, as what is written in the Bible, was accused many times by the Pharisees, “member(s) of an ancient Jewish group who followed religious laws and teaching very strictly” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary), of breaking the Sabbath law (Luke 6.2; John 5.18). Confusion now exists among the Christians. They all wonder whether Jesus really was against the Sabbath law. Some assume that the Sabbath was actually made for the Jews, not the Christians. Therefore, it is written in the Bible that there should be no one be judged regarding to a Sabbath day (Colossians 2.16). Other Christians might also argue that Sabbath still exists, yet it is observed on a different day among the Christians, emphasizing that Christians should be different from the Jews, and after all, did Jesus not rise on Sunday (the resurrection day or the day when Jesus resurrected)? Thus, these Christians believe that resurrection day is a day of victory (victory over death) that all Christians must celebrate it as the true Sabbath of all Christians, which is on every Sunday. The other Christians, however, believe that Sabbath, which originally on Saturday as they believe, remains forever since it was set by God Himself, given to all humans to be observed. The latter group believes that the observance of the Sabbath day is not only regulated for the Jews, but it is for

all human beings, and that those who observe the Sabbath love God, worship Him and be the children of God (“Sabbath Observing Denominations- Sabbath Churches”).

Due to the varieties of beliefs among the Christians, the writer realizes how people have been trying to make words mean whatever they want the words to mean. As a linguistic student, the writer realizes how risky it is to just interpret something based on individual understandings without any solid evidences and further study of the very word, either semantically or pragmatically; moreover, the words that are being interpreted are religious terms and considered sacramental. Therefore, for this very reason, the writer is aware of the importance of analyzing ‘the Sabbath day’ linguistically together with the historical proofs.

1.2. Statement of the problem

“In spite of the fact that Christians have the same source of teaching, which is the Holy Bible, there are so many denominations of Christian, each of which holds to its own interpretation of the words in the Bible, two of which are ‘baptism’ and ‘the Sabbath’.”

It is very important to know what the true baptism is according to the Holy Bible. Even though it is clearly written in the Holy Bible that there is only one true kind of baptism, yet ironically there are so many kinds of how baptism is performed. By investigating it linguistically and finding the historical proofs as well, it is highly predicted that the true meaning and form of the word ‘baptism’ are likely to be found.

Baptism itself comes from a Greek word “βαπτίζω” (baptidzo). It is “a religious act of purification by water usually associated with admission to a Christian church” (“baptism”, newworldencyclopedia.org). There is no doubt that one of the semantic properties of the word baptism as a Christian ordinance is undoubtedly (+water) (*King James Bible*, Acts 8.36), apart from the fact that “baptism” does not always mean as it does literally.

Furthermore, Jesus has also assured the Christians that “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (*New International Version Bible*, Mark 16.16). Hence, baptism has always been important as a manifestation of faith in Jesus and as a formal admission to a Christian church; still, the main question remains: How must it be conducted? Unfortunately, the present time is about 2000 years after the first Christian baptism was performed. The Holy Bible, which has been translated into many languages, has somehow been differently misinterpreted, making it not easy to find the meaning and the correct form of the true baptism, which is being argued intensely in the present time.

Not less important, the Bible also teaches about the Sabbath. There are hundreds of “Sabbath” words found in the Holy Bible. The word “Sabbath” originated from the Hebrew word “shabbāth” (“Sabbath”, merriam-webster.com; Skeat). The observance of “the Sabbath law” has been done for centuries by some religious communities. The Jews are the mostly known for their observance of this very law until the present days. In fact, they have observed it before Jesus was born. Likewise, it is obvious that the early Christians also observed this Sabbath day. “As

Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ... On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (Acts 13.42-44). Jeremy Taylor, an English bishop, who was also a writer called the Shakespeare and the Spenser of the pulpit (“biography of Jeremy Taylor”), also clearly stated that the early Christians kept the Sabbath of the Jews continuously until the time of Laodicean council (qtd. in Thiel).

Nevertheless, as time passes by, this Sabbath observance has become one of the great controversies among the Christians. Whether Sabbath is still necessary to be observed and whether Sabbath observance makes the Christians similar to the Jews are debated. J. Douma wrote that there is a crucial polemic among the Protestant churches in the whole Europe and America regarding Sabbath, resulting in the separations of the churches. (qtd. in Ray 34) This kind of argument among the Christians over these two basic terms in Christianity has somehow encouraged the writer, as a student of University of Pelita Harapan (a Christian University) majoring Linguistics, to bring up these topics of “baptism” and “Sabbath” to show how essential it is to know the true forms and the meanings of baptism and the Sabbath according to the Bible, by looking at the linguistic and historical proofs behind the words.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions for this study generally will be:

- a) What is the core meaning of baptism by looking at the linguistic elements of it?
- b) Do the historical proofs indicating the early baptism contribute to the explanation of the true biblical baptism?
- c) What is the core meaning of the Sabbath by looking at the linguistic elements of it?
- d) Do the historical proofs indicate the true Sabbath, and how they can contribute to the value of the Sabbath itself?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research has some interests that those below may find appealing:

- all Christians:

It is indeed important to all the Christians to know what the deeper meanings of baptism and the Sabbath in the bible are, and how they should be performed or observed biblically in order to do what Jesus Christ, whom the Christians refer to the Son of God, has commanded them to do. “If you love Me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14.15)

- Christian leaders or the leaders of the churches:

It is absolutely important for all the leaders of all denominations of Christians to learn the original form of “baptism” and the true understanding of “the Sabbath” in

the Holy Bible so that by this knowledge, critical arguments can be answered and the present problems might be solved.

- English Department students

By looking at how two words, “baptism” and “Sabbath”, can be interpreted differently, the students of English Department, of linguistics concentration in particular, are encouraged to be aware of the fact that linguistic elements and historical elements of a single word may play a significant role in determining the real meaning of that very word. That a word does not actually mean what people think it does is many times not realized by the people. Consequently, the students are made more curious and critical of every single word.

1.5. Definitions of Terms

There are some specific terms that may be found here and that require the readers to comprehend those certain words, such as:

- Semantic property, which is “a component of meaning of a word, e.g. ‘young’ is a semantic property of baby, colt, puppy” (Fromkin 535)
- Semantic feature, which is “a notational device for expressing the presence or absence of semantic properties by pluses and minuses, e.g. baby is (+young), (+human), (-abstract).” (535)
- Pragmatics- “the study of how context and situation affect meaning” (532)
- Lexical- connected with the words of a language (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary)

- Holy Ghost, is also called Holy Spirit, refers to a divine Character of God. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Ghost appeared and blessed Him.
- Ablution, refers to the act of washing oneself. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)
- The annual Sabbaths, refer to the appointed feasts held only by the Jews every year, when there will be sacred assemblies in those days (recorded in Leviticus 23 of the Holy Bible), comprising: the Passover and Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacles.
- The Septuagint is “the first translation made of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. It was begun over two hundred years before the birth of Jesus. It was translated from a Hebrew Old Testament text-type that is older than the Masoretic text, from which most Old Testaments are translated today.” (“Septuagint”)
- Apostles – the disciples of Jesus, the first Christians who spread the gospel just right after Jesus' time.
- Exegesis- “the detailed explanation of a piece of writing, especially religious writing.” (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)