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**ECUMENISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN CAMEROON: ATTITUDES AND STRATEGIES**

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEF: Afrique Equatoriale Francaise

AEPC: Assemblée des Eglises Protestantes du Cameroun

CEPCA: Conseil des Eglises Protestantes du Cameroun

CCMWS: Central Committee for Missionary Work in Sudan

DMS: Danish Mission in Sudan

EELC: Eglise Evangelique Lutherienne au Cameroun

EELCRC: Eglise Evangelique Lutherienne du Cameroun et de la Republique Centrafricaine

EPC: Eglise Presbyterienne Camerounaise

FEC: Federation des Eglises du Cameroun

FEMEC: Federation des Eglises et Mission Evangeliques du Cameroun

FPC: Femme pour Christ

JEELC: Jeunesse de l'Eglise Evangelique Lutherienne au Cameroun

LHM Lutheran Hour Ministry

PADI: Pragramme d'Appui au Developpement Integre

NMS: Norwegian Mission Society

SM: Sudan Mission

UPC: Union Pentecotiste du Cameroun

CHAPTER ONE

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Historical background

Created in 1941 the FEC, (Federation Evangelique du Cameroun), was to defence the interests of protestant missions to native English speakers to a administration embracing the countries of the former French Equatorial Africa AEF in 1960 (*Afrique Equatoriale Francaise*): Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Congo and Gabon. With the Independences of the countries of the AEF, the evangelical federation was structured and became FEMEC, (*Federation des Eglises et Missions Evangeliques du Cameroun*), whose objective were the establishment of unity between evangelical churches and missions, working in Cameroon, sharing experiences for mutual enrichment, the joint management of some projects, and working with low-evangelized areas.¹ FEMEC again later, became CEPCA (*Conseil des Eglises Protestantes du Cameroun*), which now has eleven protestant member churches, including EELC. CEPCA is the institution that coordinates the protestant ecumenical movement in Cameroon. In fact, the unity of the churches and mission is not organic, but spiritual because, as they see it, they can do things differently and work for the same Lord who, in his priestly prayer insisted on the unity of Christians by these words: " They may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one".² Church unity has been an important agenda in ecumenical councils through the history of the church ever Jerusalem council (Acts 15: 1-35). Even before that Jesus prayed for the unity of the disciples. It is due to this that in the early church (after Jesus' death and resurrection/ascension), the disciples were always found to be together in one accord.³ As Paul said in his letter to the Galatians "It is one God who has called all, the one Lord Jesus Christ to whom all belong, the one Spirit who fills all and unites them in the one body of Christ, the one baptism in which all become one in Jesus

¹ www.missionchretienne.org/page0001073e.php, opened 19.08.13

² John 17: 21-22

³ Elioth, Mtelesi Methali, Church and Unity: Interpreting Ephesians 4: 1-6 in the Contemporary Globalization Context, School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, May, 2006, 1.

Christ" (Gal 3: 27-28). The ecumenical movement today is a worldwide movement of reconciliation; a reconciliation of Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches.⁴ Now through this rediscovery of the need of a united church, the ecumenical movement in Cameroon (CEPCA), has given the churches an open forum for achieving the goal of unity.⁵

1.1.2 Purpose

In this project our main vision is also to try to see what are the strategies adopted by the EELC to promote unity with other churches. The focus will be put on the unity among protestant churches, their attitudes and strategies. I chose this topic not only because it is of importance in the world of theology, but mostly because of its affects on the spiritual life of faith, social organization of church, division within the churches, leadership conflicts, corruption, and exclusion.⁶ In general terms, the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is a part in this wider perspective.

1.1.3 Statement of the problem and motivation

At the global level, the unity of the church is more an aim and an idea of theology, than a reality. At the local level, of Cameroon, EELC is a victim of division. Since 2003, the EELC had the project to change the appellation. The Evangelical Lutheran Church **of** Cameroon became the Evangelical Lutheran Church **in** Cameroon. But after the election happened at Bankim, the crisis came out. Some members want to maintain the old appellation which is Evangelical Lutheran Church **of** Cameroon. But the official church today is the Evangelical Lutheran Church **in** Cameroon. The Episcopal system adopted in 2007 in the general synod caused misunderstanding with other protestant churches. Some believed that the EELC was going over to the Catholic system.⁷ Groups and ethnical associations, ethnical separation, and party are factors which caused the problem to the true unity of churches. The World Council of Churches (WCC), which promotes unity, is defined as an association of churches which confess Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour. This definition reveals the existence of plurality of

⁴ Loka, Rachel Sara, Church Unity in the Sacrament of Eucharist, School of Mission and Theology, December 2010, 5.

⁵ Loka, Rachel Sara, Church Unity in the Sacrament, December, (2010), 5.

⁶ Loka, Rachel Sara, Church unity in the Sacrament, December, (2010), 9.

⁷ Djingeu Jean-Jules, interview taped, in Tibati, 31/07/13.

churches: Orthodox Lutheran Reformed, Methodists Anglican⁸ and others. Also at the local level, especially in remote areas, we today find many new churches and sects side by side with the so-called historical churches.⁹ In major Cameroonian cities, stand billboards, indicating different places of worship. In this way, religious diversity also in local community in Cameroon is expressed in a conspicuous manner. Some are imported, others, have adapted to the reality and aspirations of the community. For ordinary people the choice for instance between the Apostolic church, the Meeting of God, Full Gospel, the True church of God, the Living Faith church of Jesus Christ and Witness of Jehovah is confusing and difficult.¹⁰ Unity of the churches in Cameroon remains problematic, also due to schismatic tendencies caused by ethnocentric instincts and selfish and political ambitions. The first question raises the problem of unity in this denominational plurality. In this context how can we talk of unity with respect to these many faiths? The second question is an effort to identify strategies used by the EELC to promote unity. So the question I will ask in my thesis is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon as member of the ecumenical movement in Cameroon has strategies to consolidate the unity with other protestant churches? The last question is if ecumenism in the context of EELC is not a simple cultural meeting where there is no spiritual commitment.

1.1.4 Delimitation

It is more than 80 years ago that Norwegian and American missionaries brought the Gospel to Northern Cameroon. Today, it is right to underline that, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is the fruit of their works and sacrifices.¹¹ For the time being, EELC is growing from the rural into urban areas. Today, the EELC covers all the ten regions of Cameroon. This study will then concern the urban areas: Ngaoundere, Tibati all located in the Adamaoua province in North of Cameroon and the capital city; Yaounde where are located all institutions of Cameroon and where the ecumenical movement is effective. I did the researchs by making interviews with Pastors of EELC, because I need to see effectively what they are doing to promote unity with other denominations.

⁸ Joseph, Ngah, *Etre Temoin de Jesus Christ Aujourd'hui en Afrique*, Edition Cle Yaounde, 2005, 17.

⁹ Churches which are founded by Missionaries: The Catholic Church and Protestant Churches.

¹⁰ Joseph, Ngah, *Etre Temoin de Jesus Christ*, (2005), 17-18.

¹¹ Moise, Ngayap, *Christian witness in pluralistic context: Missiological reflections on religious challenges facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in urban zones with reference to the city of Ngaoundere*, School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, 2005, 9.

1.1.5 Sources and methods

This study is a study of ecumenism based on the main theological and theoretical concept of unity among churches. The materials will be concentrated on ecumenism particularly in the context of the EELC. First, I have to take into account the lack of document which dealing with the topic in the context of EELC. I will therefore have to build upon relevant document related to the topic in more general terms and in the wider context. I will also use selected texts from the New Testament, especially the epistles of Paul regarding the unity of the church. In addition, I have consulted some informants, all leaders of the church or pastors on relevant data on the EELC policy. Thus this work is a result of interviews during the summer holiday, principally in chapter five which deals with the ecumenical context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon and other protestant churches. I will also consult some works of my predecessors who wrote thesis related to the topic to fulfil this project. Commentaries, dictionaries, articles will be helpful among these contributions.

1.1.6 Disposition

The present thesis has seven chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction about the formal approach and methods of this study. It starts with historical background of the first initiative of ecumenism in Cameroon. Chapter two will focus on the concept of unity and church in theological term. A brief presentation of the EELC and its historical background will constitute the third chapter. The fourth chapter presents an analysis of ecumenism and collaboration as actually practised by EELC in his relation to other protestant churches and Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon.¹² Obstacles and difficulties for promoting ecumenism in Cameroon is the key point of the fifth chapter. The chapter six will deal with some suggestions in order to promote effective ecumenism. The general conclusion will end this work as the seventh chapter.

¹² Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in the Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 50.

Chapter Two

2.1 MAIN CONCEPTS

2.1.1 Concept of unity

Throughout its history, the church always and everywhere maintained a basic and awareness of its unity. The church has spread to many different lands and races and cultures and taken many different forms. It has been split by innumerable dissensions and disagreements. It has passed through many crises and vicissitudes and ages of violent individualism as well as submissive collectivism. The unity of the church to which all believers are called is a communion which is given in the apostolic confession of faith, in which all share a common sacramental life based on the one baptism. In principal all Christians take part in the Eucharistic community of the body of Christ in the world and the church is expected to live together in mutual recognition and reconciliation of members and ministries. The church also has a common mission as a witness of the gospel of the grace of God to all peoples' and in serving the whole creation. The purpose of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches will be able to recognize each other in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness.¹³ In such communion, churches are related to each other in all areas of their common life by the same faith in the celebration and the testimony. The true unity of the church is not the mythological magic of the members, it is not a simply natural entity, is not moral unanimity and harmony. The true unity of the church is what Hans Kung remarks as:

“A spiritual entity. It is not chiefly of the members among themselves, it depends finally not on itself but on the unity of God, which is efficacious through Jesus Christ in Holy Spirit. It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and the same Christ who through his word and his Spirit unites all together in the same bond of fellowship. It is one and the same baptism by which all are made members of the same body of Christ, one of the same Lord's Supper, in which all are united with Christ and with one another. It is one of the same confessions of faith in the

¹³ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in the Pluralist Context*, (2005), 19.

Lord Jesus the same hope of blessedness, the same love, which is experienced in oneness of heart, the same service of the world. The church is one and therefore should be one."¹⁴

In this sense, every local Church is a community in its own way is part of the one ecclesia, the people of God, a creation of Holy Spirit, the body of Christ. Thus spiritual unity of the church consists in history and in the present of a multiplicity of churches. The various churches are characterized by their origins and their specific situations, their languages, their history, their customs and traditions, their way of life and thought. Diversity in theology too: one God, one Lord, one Spirit and one hope; but different theologies, different systems, different style of thoughts, different order of life and different nations.¹⁵ The co-existence of different churches does not, therefore, in itself jeopardize the unity of the church; but unity is endangered by confrontation, mutual condemnation, lack of co-operation, support, and respect. So all the differences, however profound, between the individual churches are then encompassed up by the belief that all are one in the unity of the church in Christ.¹⁶

2.1.2 Visible and invisible unity

The unity of the church is something deeper and more enduring than a historical concept. The way in which invisible unity is asserted may vary considerably. It is rightly sought in Christ, though more particularly in Christ ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father. Sometimes it is characterized as spiritual, not so much in the older sense of unity in the Holy Spirit, but in the more modern and questionable sense of spiritual as opposed to material. Sometimes it is understood in emotional term. The visible experience and unity of Christian is expressed in the actual lives and practices when Christians meet for edification or unite in Christian enterprises of different kinds. Sometimes it is not given any very precise sense and does not convey any particular notion, but is simply understood as a vague, mystical unity to which appeal can be made when no other answer can be given to the pressing challenge of destiny.¹⁷ This invisible unity is grounded in the vertical aspect of the church in its *Koinonia* with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. The unity can be seen as a reflexion and the location of the participation in the work of God. However, this vertical dimension

¹⁴ Hans Kung, *The Church*, Search Press, Great Britain, 1968, 273.

¹⁵ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 275.

¹⁶ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 276.

¹⁷ Bromiley, G. W., *The Unity and Destiny of The Church*, Grand Rapid, Michigan, 1958, 32-33.

immediately and necessarily points to the horizontal or earthly aspects of the church's life.¹⁸ In this spiritually life, the essence of the universal church as articulated in article III of the Apostle's Creed that defines the church as the communion of saints, includes all those who live in true faith, hope and love so that the essence, life and nature of Christianity are not a physical congregation but the congregation of those who believe in their heart. The church as *ecclesia* of the faithful is, not simply invisible but both visible and invisible.

The visible unity is a believed church, a church of believers. The church consists of people and is therefore visible. Precisely because it is a building in the Spirit, it is true and invisible at the same time. I can clarify this assertion according to the teaching of the seventh article of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession:

“They teach that one holy church is to live forever. But the church is the congregation of saints, the assembly of all who believe; where the gospel is rightly taught purely preached and the sacrament rightly administrated according to the gospel ”.¹⁹

This unity is realised when believers gather to worship the Lord, and manifest this fellowship around the gospel. The members of a community share the faith in Jesus Christ their Lord. What one see here is a unity of faith and confession, a unity in the sacrament and in sacramental celebration, and a unity in ministry, mission, and love. A classic expression, interpretation, and affirmation of the goal of visible unity can be found in the fundamental statement on church fellowship or the so-called unity formula of the third WCC Assembly in New Delhi in 1961:

"We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that

¹⁸ Tjorhom, Ola, Visible Church- Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and " Great Tradition of the Church " Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2004, 69.

¹⁹ [www.hailandfire.com/library-creeds-const-Melanchthon \(Philip\). The Augsburgconfession1530.html](http://www.hailandfire.com/library-creeds-const-Melanchthon_(Philip).The_Augsburgconfession1530.html). opened, 22-08-13, at 16: 42.

ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people"²⁰

Such statements clearly indicate that within the ecumenical movement there has been a strong commitment to the goal of visible unity. It is lived both in the unity of the faith to which we jointly witness, and which together we confess and teach, and in the unity of hope and love which leads us to unite in fully committed fellowship. This is the unity of fellowship which covers all times and places and is summoned to witness and serve the world.

A crucial concern is that the visible unity is directed toward its mission and services, in the sense that the fellowship it offers calls for concrete manifestation, so that people become able to see the church and its unity and thus believe.²¹ The Lutheran church teaches that the church in its essence exists as a congregation of saints gathered around the gospel and the sacrament. This is what constitutes the true *koinonia*. Thus, true unity also has to do with each local worshipping community, as a locally demonstrated unity based on common understanding of the gospel. So, Lutheran involvement in the struggle for unity between different churches and denominations is to be manifested in the quest for a deeper understanding of the gospel.²² The process towards the realisation of visible unity presupposes, therefore a common life shared by all the local churches. It is indeed, true that members of the church of Christ are visible persons, present in this world, and their fellowship and unity is manifested by their assembling of themselves together to hear the preaching of the gospel and to use the sacraments in accordance with the institution of Christ. According to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for his church and its members, saying "I am not asking to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one". John 17:15. The word church or congregation is quite naturally used in the plural in the New Testament and linked with place-name, which in some cases also describe different worlds: Jerusalem, and Corinth, Antioch and Rome.²³ This unity, moreover, does not presuppose the multiplicity of churches, but describes a unity which flourishes in its outer appearance through the diversity of God's calling, through the

²⁰ Tjorhom Ola, *Visible Church-Visible Unity*, (2004), 20.

²¹ Tjorhom, Ola, *Visible Church-Visible Unity*, (2004), 71.

²² Andreas, AArflot, *Let the Church Be the Church: The Voice & Mission of the People of God*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1988, 112.

²³ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 274.

multiplicity of gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the church, through the variety of the members of Christ of their function.²⁴

2.1.3 Unity in Christ

Christians confess the church as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic (Nicene Creed). The ecumenical task, then, is to manifest this oneness, to make it visible and effective. The New Testament writings refer in a great variety of ways and images to the oneness or unity of the church in Christ.²⁵ For instance, the portrayal of Christ as the cornerstone of the edifice Eph. 2:20-22, and the description of the church as Christ's bride Rev 19:7 and 21:1ff, also Christ's body in the world is described as to consist of all believers within which each member is called to contribute to the growth of the body as a whole and to the common good. This affirms the social and communal nature of life in Christ Col 3:14. Apostle Paul also states that within the body of Christ "there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit" 1Cor 12:4, a clear implication that it is the unifying work of the Holy Spirit that keeps the one body together.²⁶

In his letter to the Ephesians and Colossians Paul describes another version of the body image when the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the body which is the church. Eph 4:15ff. And Col1:18 "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" Eph 1:22-23. In Eph. 4:4 Paul emphasises on the oneness, the unity between believers as a result of their experience of the Spirit, which they have in common with all others who belongs to Christ. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all ."

Another way in which Paul taught about the unity is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles as Christians. He emphasises the teaching about the food which divided this community. Gal 2:14. The context here Gal 2:11-21 is the church in Antioch where Christian unity was displayed by eating at the common table. Observant Jews were forbidden to eat

²⁴ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 274.

²⁵ Nicholas Lossky, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publication, Geneva, 1991, 1038-1039.

²⁶ Andreas, AArflot, *Let the Church Be the Church*, (1988), 45.

gentile meat and usually avoided gentile wine, but Jewish law did not prohibit eating with the Gentiles.²⁷ Paul insists on living according to the border-crossing perspective of the gospel. It was important to keep this as Christians. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians looked upon as part of the one church displayed by their unity. This unity is in terms of the "one body" shaped by God and consisting of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, male and female, all of whom are equally acceptable by God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.²⁸ According to Paul again, the church is a cultivated field, the tillage of God 1Cor 3:9. On that land, the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought. Rom 11:13-26. The true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to the faithful who see to it that, the church remains in Christ²⁹ without whom they can do nothing John 15: 1-5. In the letter to Colossians Paul has exhorted the congregation to compassion, kindness humility, meekness, patience, bearing one another in mutual love and peace Col. 3: 12-15. These are the qualities of life worthy of the calling, which Christians are expected to demonstrate. The main idea in the letter of Colossians is that the Apostle emphasized on the life of the church.³⁰ Paul here speaks of the mystery of Christ, referring to Christ's presence in the church. Christ is present in the church as the risen Lord.

2.1.4 Unity in the death and resurrection of the Christ

In the Apostolic Creed, Christians confess the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The son of God, by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection, redeemed man and changed him into a new creation Gal 6: 15; 2Cor 5: 17. For this reason the believers who have been made linked to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until they reign together with him, Phil. 3: 21; 2 Tim 2: 11; Eph 2: 6; Col 2: 12. They are associated with his sufferings like the body with its head, and with him they may be glorified Rom 8: 17.³¹ The unity of the church is a gift of God, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is not a human project to be managed and achieved by one's own efforts. The Church is made one by Christ's reconciling death on the

²⁷ Elioth Mtelesi, Church and Unity, (2006), 49.

²⁸ Elioth Mtelesi, Church Unity, (2006), 50.

²⁹ Alister E. McGRATH, The Christian Theology Reader (Third Edition), Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 529.

³⁰ Elioth Methai Mtelesi, Church and Unity, (2006), 51.

³¹ Alister E. McGrath The Christian Theology Reader, (2007), 531.

cross, joining all humanity to the life of the Triune God in faith. Paul explains this statement by the following text:

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, putting to death that hostility. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God " Eph 2: 13-22.

In Rom 8: 31-39 Paul states that no power, nor hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or swords will separate the believers from the love of Christ, because it is Christ Jesus who died and rose, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for the Christians. Another important aspect of Paul's use of unity in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is his description of the death of Christ as a sacrificial offering, removing human sin as a barrier to right relationship with God Rom 3:21-26, and as the ground of divine-human reconciliation 2Cor 5:18-21. Here Paul recommends to the believers to offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice, as an act of self-giving or sacrificial dedication³²

2.1.5 Unity in the sacrament

The Protestant churches have adopted in accordance with their interpretation of the Bible Baptism and Eucharist or Holy Communion as sacraments. These are the means of grace. In the small Catechism, Luther describes baptism not just as a momentary rite but as one that constitutes in its effect a lifelong way of life. Baptism signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that a new person is daily to come forth and rise up to live before God in

³² Kee, Clark Howard, *Who Are the People of God?*, University Press, New Haven and London, 1995, 122.

righteousness and purity forever.³³ In The Large Catechism, he writes, "Let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. Every day they should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new".³⁴ With faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism celebrated in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is regarded as the basis of the Christian life and membership of the one God's church on earth. Unity in baptism is thus the sign for Christian to recognize each other as members of the Body of Christ.³⁵ Administered in obedience to the Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of the common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, and with each other. The common baptism, which unites believers to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. they are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in the world. The union with Christ which they share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity. When baptismal unity is realized in one holy, catholic, apostolic, Church, a genuine Christian witness can be made to the healing and reconciling love of God. Therefore their baptism constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship.³⁶ Apostle Paul emphasised in many of his letters all Christians have received the same baptism in the name of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. By this emphasis, Paul wanted to say that humanity in the fellowship of the church is no longer to be divided on account of their differences. In Christ all Christians are believed to belong to God and to each other as brothers and sisters regardless of race, rank or sex. Paul insists that " There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" Gal 3:28. All members of the Church are under this perspective equal before God and in a sense in need of each other as they belong to God and to one another.³⁷ According to the mercy of God, he saved Christians by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on them abundantly through Jesus Christ our saviour. Having been justified by his grace, they should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Paul writes: "We are

³³ Senn C. Frank, *Lutheran Identity: A Classical Understanding*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 2008, 55-56.

³⁴ Senn. C. Frank, *Lutheran Identity*, (2008), 56.

³⁵ Lossky, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical movement*; 2nd edition, (1991), 86.

³⁶ Kinnamon Micheal, and Cope E. Brian, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 179.

³⁷ Elioth Mtelesi, *Church Unity*, (2007), 50-51.

buried with Christ by baptism into death, that just as he was raised up from the dead by the glory of Father, even so we also walk in newness of life" Rom 6:4.³⁸

The other way as seen from a Lutheran point of view is the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion. Since the very of the first gathering of Jesus with his disciples, the Holy Communion has represented unity and fellowship within the church. The church father Ignatius of the second century took special notice of the function of the Holy Communion or the Eucharist as it was called at the time.³⁹ He looked upon the Eucharist as the presence of Christ, human and divine as central to the being and unity of the church and as the source and goal for Christian life. For Ignatius, unity and the Eucharist are tied together. He maintains that it is God's will that the church be one in unity, represented by the one body of Christ, which is received at the altar.⁴⁰ Christians are called to fellowship with the Son, the Lord 1Cor 1:9. The Lord Supper is a sacramental fellowship with Christ, and as such a fellowship with other Christians. Their common union with Christ thus constitutes a union of those who share the Lord's Supper, a communion of Christians among themselves. As Paul declares in his letter to the Corinthians: "The one is not possible without the other, because they all partake of the same bread, Christ" 1Cor 10:17. For this reason the Lord's Supper has been called a "synaxis,"⁴¹ a joining together of Christians, which reveals the true nature of this special community, and Paul adds: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" 1Cor 10:17. By their communion,⁴² the sharers in the meal are made into the body, because the bread is the body of Christ. Those who eat the body of the Lord become themselves one body. In this way, all Christians are made members of Christ's body 1Cor 12:27, but they are divided and many amongst themselves Rom 12:5. The sharing of the common loaf and the common cup in a given place demonstrates the oneness of the sharers with the whole Christ and with their fellow sharers in all the times and places. By sharing the bread and the wine of the sacrament, they show their unity with the entire church.⁴³ When the church gathers together at the table of communion, the participants are being brought into fellowship. They are united together through the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ in the elements in which they partake. Reconciled in the Eucharist, the members of the body of

³⁸ <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/luthers-small-catechism/part-4-baptism>. Opened on 27-08-13.

³⁹ Loka Rachel Sara, Church Unity in the Sacrament, (2010), 24.

⁴⁰ Loka Rachel Sara, Church Unity, (2010), 24.

⁴¹ Hans Kung, The Church, (1968), 222.

⁴² Hans Kung, The Church, (1968), 223.

⁴³ Loka Rachel Sara, Church Unity in the Sacrament, (2010), 44.

Christ are called to be servants of reconciliation among men and women and witnesses of the joy of resurrection. As Jesus went out to publicans and sinners and had table-fellowship with them during his earthly ministry, so Christians are called in Eucharist to be in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself in the Eucharist.⁴⁴ The communion in this way is established in the church is the gift of unity from God and with God through Christ. The Eucharist belongs to the universal church. In the Eucharist, there is in principle no division of congregation, because believers assemble with the Son before the Father and in the Spirit, these believers are one. Their fellowship is thus founded in the one God, there can finally be only one such fellowship: one people, one body and one temple.⁴⁵

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH

2.2.1 The Ecumenical creeds⁴⁶

In this section I do not intend to study different Christian creeds in general or in detail, but analyze how these confessions have contributed to unify the early church. At the beginning of the early church, the New Testament shows that Christians developed shorter or longer confessions that serve to epitomize some of the central elements of the Christian faith (Phil 2: 6-11; 2 Tim 3:16). During the period of ancient church, three ecumenical creeds are formulated: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the so-called Athanasian Creed. Besides these three Ecumenical creeds the Lutheran church has the Augsburg Confession composed in 1530 which has set a standard for the Lutheran teaching about the unity of the church.

● The Apostle's Creed

It is called Apostles' Creed (*Symbolum Apostolorum*) because according to legend it was attributed to the twelve Apostles. The creed was in use in the early church as the confession of the faith or symbol professed in the Western churches by those receiving baptism. From the beginning of Christianity, the content of the profession of faith at baptism has been

⁴⁴ Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement*, (1997), 187.

⁴⁵ Kinnamon and Cope, (1997), 71.

⁴⁶ Seen C. Frank, *Lutheran Identity*, (2008), 36.

regarded as the heart of the apostolic tradition.⁴⁷ During the ceremony of baptism, candidates must confess God as the maker of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ as God's only Son and our Lord, and the Holy Spirit as the creator of the church in which sins are forgiven.⁴⁸ The simplicity of this creed should not lead one to think that it lacks depth, but each phrase contains substantial theological truths. The creed demonstrates the oneness of God through the Trinitarian dogma: God, Son, and Holy Spirit. The third article of this creed takes for granting that the church is one when Christians confess:

"I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy Catholic Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting".

Belief in the Holy Spirit entails belief in the holy Catholic Church. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit to unify the church. The Holy Spirit enables communication among Christians who are separated from each other for instance, by language, culture and ethnicity. The Holy Spirit unites church as God's people, as congregation of believers. The Holy Spirit has the power to found and form communions or congregations and to integrate their ethnic, gender, cultural, political and even religious differences. From a Lutheran perspective, the experience of the divine Spirit is very important in the formation of the Christian unity. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ gathers the church as his body on earth.⁴⁹ The communion of saints is simply a synonym for the holy Catholic Church, i.e. the universal church which has to be one. Christians confessing their joint belief in God the creator; manifested in His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit demonstrates that the church is one as being united in the Holy Trinity.⁵⁰ The Apostles Creed has a special ecumenical value. In the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888⁵¹, the Anglican Church deliberately added it to the four fundamental articles as a baptismal

⁴⁷ Lossky, *Ecumenical Dictionary*, (1991), 14.

⁴⁸ Senn C. Frank, *Lutheran Identity*, (2008), 38.

⁴⁹ Karen L. Bloomquist, *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*, Lutheran University Press, Minneapolis, 2008, 123.

⁵⁰ Senn C. Frank, *Lutheran Identity*, (2008), 39.

⁵¹ Nicholas Lossky, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, (1991), 46.

symbol. The Lausanne faith and order conference of 1927 placed the Apostles' Creed as the common expression of the Christian faith.⁵² So, doing the ecumenical celebration in Cameroon, for instance, led by a Roman Catholic leader and a protestant leader, they invite all the attendants to stand up to be united in the Apostle creed. There is no confession of faith which belongs to Catholics in the one hand exclusively and to the Protestants in other hand. Both Catholics and Protestants feel that they have something in common; they belong to one God and as people of God they are one.

● The Nicene Creed

Unlike the Apostles' Creed, which emerged in widely scattered local congregations for use by candidates for baptism, the Nicene Creed was written at a specific time and place to deal with a specific situation. Summoned by the Emperor Constantine in 325 in the town of Nicea, the purpose of this gathering was to agree on what the church teaches and what Christians are to believe in the face of conflicting beliefs that were discussed among the faithful and which threatened to divide the church. The crucial point in the creed is to affirm the full divinity and humanity of Christ as well as to affirm God as triune God. The text confesses Jesus Christ as God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. The creed reaffirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit which also had become disputed at the time.⁵³ The purpose of the creed was to establish the tenets of Christian faith, not to explain the mystery of the Godhead or of incarnation. This creed has been more universal than any other symbol of the faith, as a normative expression of the essential content of the apostolic faith. The Nicene Creed thus serves to indicate whether the faith as set forth in modern situations is the same faith as the one church has confessed through the centuries.⁵⁴ The Nicene creed emphasizes important terms like *one*, *apostolic*, *holy* and *catholic* as marks of the church. There can be only one church if there is one truth, and this truth is founded on the apostolic witness.⁵⁵

⁵² Nicholas Lossky, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 46.

⁵³ Nicholas Lossky Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 40-41.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Lossky, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 38.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Lossky, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 41.

● The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed was used in the early church as a canticle i.e. (liturgical song). Thus, it does not begin by saying "we believe" but, "we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God."⁵⁶ What is important in this creed is the second part where the church confesses the two natures of Christ as both God and man, "begotten before all worlds from the being of the Father." Christ exists fully as God and fully as man, yet the two natures are not to be confused. It is the creed in which the equality of the three persons of Trinity is more explicitly stated. For the Father is neither made nor begotten, the Son is not made but is begotten from the Father; the Holy Spirit is neither made nor begotten but proceeds from the Father and Son.⁵⁷ The ecumenical character of this creed appears for instance when Nicholas Lossky mentions that:

"In the Carolingian period, the Athanasian creed entered the breviary and from there passed into Anglican tradition for feast day. In the book of common prayer of the Church of England it is placed before the litany; in that of the Episcopal Church in USA it is among the historical documents. Lutherans retained it as a statement of faith in the book of Concord of 1580, and it appears in the 1978 Lutheran book of worship."⁵⁸

● The Lutheran Augsburg Confession

The Augsburg Confession was presented at the national assembly in Germany in 1530 summoned by the Emperor Charles V in attempt to reunite the Reformers with the Roman Catholic Church.

"The preface of the Diet of the Augsburg Confession refers explicitly to the Emperor's summoning and the task he assigned to the Diet to employ amicably and charitably to hear, understand, and weigh the judgements, opinions, and beliefs of the several parties among believers to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth, to put aside whatever may not have been rightly interpreted or treated by either side, to have all of us embrace and

⁵⁶ Nicholas Lossky, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 41.

⁵⁷ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasian-Creed#content, internet accessed on 04-09-13.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Lossky, Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, (1991), 72.

adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted on Christ."⁵⁹

The question of the unity of the church was in the centre of debates during this period. The Lutherans define clearly what they understand as the church in the seventh article where they state:

"They teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. And the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all Eph. 4:5-6."⁶⁰

Thus, there is no true unity of the church where the pure gospel is not taught and the sacraments are not administered according to the gospel. It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel may be preached in conformity with pure understanding of it and that the sacraments administered in accordance with the divine word. The Lutheran churches of the world consider their communion as an expression of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Thus they are committed to work for the manifestation of the unity of the church given in Jesus Christ. This communion is rooted in the unity of the apostolic faith as given in the Holy Scripture and witnessed by the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessions. It is based on united witness before the world to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation and it is based on agreement in the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments.⁶¹

2.2.2 The church as People of God and Body of Christ

The immediate difference between the two concepts in the headline of this chapter is obvious. In the Old Testament the Israelites are referred to as the people of God in (Judges 14:13; and 2 Sam 14:13). The equivalent phrases "the people of the Lord" and "the people of the Lord your God" are also used in Deut 27:9. In some biblical texts, God is also represented

⁵⁹ Meter Harding, *The Augsburg Confession in Ecumenical Perspective: With Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox, Reformed, and Roman Catholic Contributions*, December 1979, 2-3.

⁶⁰ www.bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php#article7, internet accessed, 14/09/13.

⁶¹ Andreas Aarflot, *Let the Church Be the Church*, (1988), 113.

as speaking of the children of Israel Ex 3:7; 2Sam2:29; 9:16-17. The people of God were a term first used in the book of Ex 6:7 "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians." which tells about the establishing of a covenant between man and God. God promised deliverance; in return the people owed obedience. The special relationship of the people of God is also expressed in the words of Mal 3:16-18, where the reconstruction of God's people is described in the so-called "book of remembrance" in which the names of the members are recorded as God's "special possession".⁶²

In the New Testament, the expression "His people" that is "God's people" appears in Apocalypse 21:3; and 2Cor 6:16 where Paul states "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they will be my people." Recently, in his series of weekly talks, on the nature of the church, Pope Francis I spoke about the phrase people of God which was a central notion on the agenda of the Vatican II. By referring to the church as the people of God, the Pope remarked that the Vatican II fathers emphasized the reality that God does not belong to any particular people because He is the one who calls all the Christians.⁶³ It is fundamental to see the church as people of God. This idea is found not only in Paul, but is the oldest term to describe the *ecclesia*, and it emphasizes the continuity between the church and Israel of the Old Testament. By seeing the church as the people of God they can understand the idea of the church as the body of Christ; then they shall see that the concept "body of Christ" describes very fittingly the new and unique nature of this new people of God.⁶⁴ The church is only the body of Christ insofar as it is the people of God; but by being the new people of God constituted by Christ it is truly the body of Christ. The emphasis on God's presence among his people by Paul is often linked with a variant version of the city as the model for the community: the Temple as the place where God dwells. This perspective is explicit in 1Cor 3:16-17, where the community is told, "you are God's Temple, and God's Spirit dwells in you. There can be only one Christian family, only one Christian faith, hope and baptism, and one Christian body, because there is only one God. This means that the church is the result of God's work, God who makes the decision, who has power, and

⁶² Kee Clark Howard, *Who are the People of God?*, (1995), 129.

⁶³ www.en.wikipedia.org/People-of-God#Old-Testament accessed on 29-08-13.

⁶⁴ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 225.

performs the deed of making one new man. The members individually and corporately are the residence of the Spirit of God in the midst of his new people.⁶⁵

2.2.3 The Church as the body of Christ

The concept "body of Christ" is found principally in the writings of the apostle Paul. With Paul, we found the words "body of Christ" to referring to Jesus' body hanging on the cross to the body made present in the Lord Supper, as mentioned in a previous chapter and also to the church which consists of the church. As a consequence Paul considers the local community as the body of Christ, as stated in 1Cor 10:16f; 12:13; 12:12; 6:5-17. In 1Cor 12 and Rom 12, the members are always seen as united with different functions.⁶⁶ According to Paul all Christians are part of the body of Christ, of the community. But it is right to underline the fact that all Christians are members of the one body does not mean uniformity, but on the contrary a variety of gifts and callings 1Cor.12:4. When unity becomes uniformity, it contradicts the basic idea of unity and diversity as taught in the New Testament and becomes destructive.⁶⁷ A clear implication is the unifying work of the Holy Spirit that keeps the one body together. Apostle Paul explained this idea in his letter to 1Cor 12: 12ff "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."

In Eph and Col there is another description of the church as body of Christ when Christ is described as the head of the body, Eph 4:15ff. and Col 1:8. The cosmic range and eschatological nature of the church are stressed: "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."⁶⁸ The accent does not relate the church as the body which represents Christ, but on Christ as the living and active head of the church. The overarching perspective is to stress the unity of the body, given by the head through the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ As the head of the church Christ is believed to be present always and everywhere in the church. This is fundamental since Christ is entirely present in every congregation of worship. Every

⁶⁵ Kee Clark Howard, *Who are the People of God?*, (1995), 121.

⁶⁶ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 227.

⁶⁷ Enns Fernando, *The Peace Church and the Ecumenical Community: Ecclesiology and the Ethics of Nonviolence*, Pandora Press, 2007, 51.

⁶⁸ Tjorhom Ola, *Visible Church Visible Unity*, (2004), 45.

⁶⁹ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 234.

congregation of worship held by the local community is in the fullest sense God's ecclesia, Christ's body.

2.2.4 The church as Catholic

The word catholic is derived from the Latin word *catholicus*, which again comes from the Greek word *Katholicos* meaning universal or general, regarding the whole. The church is called Catholic because it is to be spread throughout the world, from end to end of the earth; also because it teaches universally and completely all the doctrines which man should know concerning things visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and also because it calls to worship all mankind, rulers and ruled, learned and unlearned; further because it treats and heals universally every sort of sin committed by soul and body, and possesses in itself every conceivable virtue, whether in deeds, words or in spiritual gifts.⁷⁰ According to the New Testament, the church saw its calling as essentially universal and missionary, it was to serve the world through its proclamation of the Gospel: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" Mk. 16:15, to "all nations" Mt.28:19, as "witness to the end of the earth" Acts.1:8. The church unites various, strange and multilingual nations from all over the earth, into one peaceful and redeeming faith and relation with God. Hans-Peter Grosshans states that redemption; healing, enlightenment and peace are the connotations of Catholicity for most Church Fathers of the classical era.⁷¹ People can see that from its very origin and by its very nature, the church is world-wide, thinking and acting with reference to the world, to all peoples of the earth.⁷² So the catholicity of the church, therefore, includes a notion of entirety, and universality as part of its basic identity. As Hans Kung states: "All men are called to the new people of God. Thus this people, while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the purpose of God's arrangement may be fulfilled."⁷³ The unity of the church is not based on some legal principle, or organisational but on a primarily theological conviction about its members living in union with one another as a fellowship of believers in Christ. To support this idea, From this it is clear that unity and catholicity go together; if the church is one, it must be universal, if it is universal it must be one. Unity and catholicity are two interwoven dimensions of one and the

⁷⁰ Nicholas Lossky, *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd Ed. (1991), 152.

⁷¹Hans-Peter Grosshans, *One Holy Catholic Church*, (2009), 79.

⁷² Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 302-303

⁷³ Hans Kung, *The Church*, (1968), 303.

same church. The one church embraces all believers, whether gathered locally in large congregations, or scattered in lonely places, in all the world, in various kingdoms, islands, lands cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting.⁷⁴ The catholicity has its reality in the rule of the one Christ. The catholicity of the church is the catholicity of its commission with which the Lord sends his people to all nations, and the catholicity of its Lord, who is present and active wherever the gospel is preached according to his commission and the sacraments are administered. The unity and the catholicity of the church are identical in the unity of the son of God to whom all men are subject, and therewith also the unity of the Holy Spirit who creates every faith in Jesus Christ and without whom there is no saint on earth.⁷⁵ In summary, the catholicity of the church can be defined as follows:

"Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord in order to profess faith in him publicly, [...] including through baptism and the Lord Supper, and which is open to all churches of God and to all human beings, is a church in full sense of the word, since Christ promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God. Such a congregation is a holy, catholic, and apostolic church. One may rightly expect such a congregation to grow in unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity."⁷⁶

2.2.5 Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have been dealing with the concept of unity and the concept of church. It is noticeable that the true unity of the church is based on Jesus Christ and is considered as his body. This unity among the members is accomplished through baptism and Eucharist. The church is the community of believers, who gather around the gospel and fellowship, and these fellowships constitute the visible unity of the people of God in the world, in many forms, but still one. The death and the resurrection of Jesus is the way in which the faithful are one with him. We have in this chapter tried to show that, through different creed, the unity of the church is reinforced. As our topic concerns the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, we are going to present this church in the next chapter.

⁷⁴ Schlink Edmund, *Theology of the Lutheran Confession*, (1961), 208.

⁷⁵ Schlink Edmund, *The Theology of the Lutheran Confession*, (1961), 209.

⁷⁶ Volf Miroslav, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids/ Cambridge, U.K., 1998, 158.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 PRESENTATION OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON

3.1.1 The Historical Background

3.1.2 The works of the Missionaries

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon traces its beginning to the work of the Independent American Mission (IAM), known as the Sudan Mission (SM) led by Adolphus Gunderson, and the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), led by Jens Nikolaisen respectively in 1923 and 1925.⁷⁷ The Sudan Mission established itself among the Gbaya people, while the (NMS) worked among the Mbum and Dii people. Gunderson worked in Nigeria from 1912 to 1916 under the umbrella of Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). It is from there that he felt the call to also preach in Cameroon. Because of the insecurity that existed after the First World War, his church in America refused to back him up. He convinced a certain number of people to form an independent organization called the Sudan Mission, and he spent some years to present God's challenges to Christians in America. Gunderson got an authorisation and reached Cameroon on April 8th 1923 with his wife Anna Maria and two nurses, Olette Berntsen and Anne Olsen.⁷⁸

The Sudan Mission urged on by its promoter Gunderson developed its missionary's work first among the Gbaya people in Mboula, in the countryside of Meiganga the capital city of Gbaya people in January 1924. Soon Gunderson began to learn the local language and started producing materials for teaching and reading. The teaching was based on the word of God. Gunderson had a class of 40 pupils.⁷⁹ There were already organised arrangements of missionary work at Mboula: a school operating in local language, care to the sick, and

⁷⁷ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical-Lutheran-ChurchofCameroon#History, accessed September 05-09-2013.

⁷⁸ Tientcheu Djongoue Marie Bessong, *The Church in a poverty Stricken Society: An Agent of Development in Relation to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon*, Stavanger, May, 2009, 13.

⁷⁹ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 14.

evangelization by words and through written materials.⁸⁰ Soon the missionary's work reached the whole Gbaya territory. In the south of Meiganga they reached: Garoua-Boulai and Betare-Oya. In the East part they worked in Djohong, and in the West in the countryside following the road that goes to Ngaoundal. The evangelization even reached some Gbaya villages out of Cameroon namely in the Central African Republic (CAR): Baboua and Abba.⁸¹ Early the church was called the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Central African Republic (EELCRC).

In Norway the international movement which aimed at the evangelization of Sudan also gained supporters. The board of the school of biblical Mission of the Interior (MI), launched the appeal in 1916 after a visit to Denmark. Two years after, Pastor Anton Pederson, the chairman of the steering committee of the Danish Mission in Sudan, (DMS) began a tour in Norway with a Norwegian company agronomist Mr. Karl Flatland to present the idea. Many support groups were formed and on 28 December 1928, the Central Committee for Missionary Work in Sudan was constituted (CCMWS). The same month of December, Flatland went to Numan in Nigeria as missionary.⁸² In 1919 Johannes Thrana and Kristian Skulberg were recruited as missionaries by DMS. It was in March 1925 that a crew of Norwegian missionaries composed of Flatland, Sverre Oseland, and Jens Nikolaisen arrived at Ngaoundere. Thrana was a member of the team but he remained at Numan in Nigeria due to his ill health.⁸³ The first year their work was concentrated to the building of houses, and the study of local languages. Five temporal houses were built, and five languages were taken into consideration: Mboum, Peul, Haoussa, Pidjin, and Baboute.⁸⁴ Finally the Peul was selected and it was in this language that the Bible was going to be translated. The local People were not free at that time to seek jobs. Workers were mostly offered by the Lamido.⁸⁵ Many of them were slaves and their masters claimed their salaries on the payment day. During the year 1928, the missionaries arranged 49 meetings at Ngaoundere with 1370 attendants. Up to 1931, the number of participants at the meetings solely depended on the

⁸⁰ Kare Lode, *Appelles a la Liberte: Hitoire de l'Eglise Evangelique Lutherienne du Cameroun*, Improced edition, Amstelveen, Pays-Bas, (1990), 17.

⁸¹ Denis Betare Ndoe, *Christian contextualization of the Gbaya Traditional Ritual of Ordainment of the Chief of the Village: A description and analysis of the Gbaya Ritual in the Garoua-Boulai precinct in Cameroon together with a Discussion OF THE Relevance for Developing a Christian Liturgy of Blessing the Chief of the Village in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon*, Stavanger, May, 2007, 16.

⁸² Lode Kare, *Appelles a la Liberte*, (1990), 13.

⁸³ Kare Lode, *Appelles a la Liberte*, (1990), 15.

⁸⁴ Kare Lode, *Appelles a la Liberte*, (1990), 40.

⁸⁵ Tientcheu Djomgoue *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, 14. The Lamido is a traditional ruler who has important power and rules over a large territory.

number of workers at the mission and people from the South; and it was a clear indication that the pagan Mbum who was the target group, was much more influenced by Islam than first assumed.⁸⁶ In December 1930, Paul Gonon and his son Ahmadou who are from Dii tribe were baptised at Ngaoundere, and in 1931, a parish was organized. There were also 100 medical consultations a day at the dispensary, the school had 20 pupils. The first church building was inaugurated in December 1934 at the station in Ngaoundere and could host roughly 300 persons. In 1939, nine boys were baptized: four from Yoko, and five Dii.⁸⁷ The work extended to the Dii land, Tibati, where they found Gbaya people and Mbum. The missionaries established a biblical school in order to train catechists, evangelists for service in the church. The work also extended to Yoko, Bankim, Galim/Tignere, Gadjiwan, Banyo and Mayo Darle. It was, however, only in Bankim and in the Dii land that the inhabitants showed particular interest in the work and the teachings. It was a period of social transformation among the Dii. They took active part in the encounter with the missionaries and through this, they became politically independent, they received Western education and strengthened their ethnic identity.⁸⁸ In 1925, both the Sudan Mission and the NMS cooperated in their mission and a hospital was created in Ngaoundere, while a seminary for the training of pastors was established in Meiganga. With a framework of collaboration finally established, discussions were initiated for the establishment of a national Lutheran church in Cameroon. In 1955, an agreement was reached and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Central African Republic (EELCRC) was established. In 1960, the church was registered as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, and in 1973, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic formally separated as an independent national church.⁸⁹

3.1.3 The growth of the EELC and the negotiations towards autonomy

At the beginning, the strategy of the missionaries was to form a parish whenever the number of the baptized people reached 20 in a particular place. The local parishes were planned to have the responsibility over finances, church discipline, choice of candidates for training in the Bible school, sending of catechists to the different districts, and also where the church was not yet existing. The purpose was to evangelize and preach the gospel to those who had

⁸⁶ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 14.

⁸⁷ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 15.

⁸⁸ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 15.

⁸⁹ www.en.wikipedia.org/Evangelical-Lutheran-Churchofcameroon#History, accessed 05-09-2013.

never heard the Word of God. This local administrative arrangement remained only at the level of the parishes. For the evangelists, they were sent as local missionaries far away from their region. This practice contributed to develop the idea that Christians were live together as one people through the Gospel.⁹⁰ Each year Christians gathered from different districts of regions to listen the word of God, and also to discuss matters of common interest; like the report of each district on their activities during the end of the year. The NMS formed committees at the parish and district levels, which were headed by missionaries.⁹¹ In December 1960, a meeting was held in Ngaoundere where a church constitution and a cooperation document between the two missions were signed. The name of the church became the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Centre African Republic (EELCCCAR). The church was divided into four regions:

- South-West region (Yoko, Banyo, and Tibati sub-division).
- South-East region (Meiganga, Betare-Oya, part of Batouri and Baboua in the Central African Republic).
- Centre region (Sub-division of Tignere, Ngaoundere, Mbe and part of Rey-Bouba)
- North region (Sub-division of Poli, Garoua and part of Rey-Bouba).

In reality, the church was a federation in which most of the power lay in the hands of the missionaries. As a result, the ELCCCAR was not recognized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). During the following decade, there were constant negotiations on church organisation and the relationship between the church and the two missions. In 1963, Pastor Paul Darman was elected president and Pastor Jan Walle vice-president.⁹² This was the beginning of the independence of the church. In fact the big problem for the church remained the power of the missionary board and the financial situation. The question was how and where the independent church could provide the financial support to take care of pastors, evangelists and catechists. The indigenous members wanted to address their requests and issues directly to the board at Stavanger and Minneapolis without passing through the missionary board. But this possibility was not granted by the missions.⁹³ The SM and the NMS had never come to an agreement as far as funding given to the districts are concerned.

⁹⁰ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009),15.

⁹¹ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 15.

⁹² Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 17.

⁹³ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 17.

The SM was against while the NMS and the Cameroonians favoured the idea. This caused an increased tension between the two missions as well as the suggestion to dissolve the missionary board.⁹⁴ During the May 1975 general synod, a new agreement was signed by the president of the EELC, Pastor Joseph Medoukan; the secretary of the American Lutheran Church, pastor James Knutsen; and the superintendent of the NMS, pastor Iver Fageli.⁹⁵ Twenty years of negotiation had led to the integration of the missions into the EELC from January 1976. All the institutions were also integrated into the church and came under its control. Even though the church had authority over all activities, it was still dependant financially for workers salaries, church building and houses, and the running of the institutions.

3.1.4 The state of the EELC today.

The EELC includes congregations, parishes, districts and Episcopal region. The overall administration of the EELC is conducted by the Executive board, convened by the National Bishop. The Executive board consists of: the National Bishop, the Assistant Bishop, the Secretary General, the Financial controller and the coordinators of the national departments; evangelism and Christian education, communication and diaconal services. The highest decision making body is the General Synod of the EELC, composed of delegates from the various congregations. At the beginning the church was concentrated only in the Adamawa region with the capital of Ngaoundere. Now the EELC covers all the territory of Cameroon. It has extended in eight of the ten regions of Cameroon. It seems also soon be implanted in the two remaining regions and preliminary works have been done already to start the church in those areas. According to the report of the general synod held in Garoua in May 2007, the EELC has ten Episcopal regions, 65 districts, and 1300 congregations, 253000 members, and 147 ministers.⁹⁶ But seven out of ten Episcopal regions together with most of the districts are found in the northern part of Cameroon where the EELC is still largely represented.

It is also to be noted that most congregations of the EELC are based in rural areas. This raises a question of income funding and self support of the church since the rural areas are generally

⁹⁴ Kare Lode, *Appelles a la Liberte*, (1990), 162.

⁹⁵ Kare Lode, *Appelles a la Liberte*, (1990), 17.

⁹⁶ www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical-Lutheran-ChurchofCameroon#History, accessed 05-09-2013.

rather poor.⁹⁷ The independent EELC has grown substantially since the period of missionary management. It has changed in number of buildings with many social institutions such as hospital, dispensaries, primary and secondary schools, and many literature centres. Today the EELC has three district hospitals, 15 health centres, one secondary school, 35 primary schools, one centre for the blinds, one theological school, three bible schools, translation centres, literature and radio centre and development projects.⁹⁸ The EELC is today passing from the state of a regional church to a national church with many parishes built in different provinces. Its growth toward the southern part is a strong evidence of its new rapid growth. To use the word of Bishop Thomas Nyiwe quoted by Moise Ngayap in his thesis, that the EELC has become a "vast and complex organization and its administration raises many challenges."⁹⁹ The EELC has undertaken reform in 2007. The presidential system was replaced by the Episcopal system. His title is National Bishop and his vice the Assistant to the National Bishop. Both the National Bishop and the Assistant to the National Bishop are elected at the general synod after every four years, renewable once. Today the EELC is in crisis, the crisis began in 2007 after the general synod at Bankim where the first National Bishop was elected. This situation put the church in the leadership conflict, where discrimination, tribalism, and corruption, and weak management are factors that hinder the internal unity of the EELC. We believe that the election of Dr. Ruben Ngozo as the new Bishop of the EELC will allow a reestablishment of the EELC unity.

3.1.5 Partial conclusion

This chapter has drawn up an outline of the main element of the historical background of the present EELC. It comes out that The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, is the fruit of the works of two great Missions: The Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society. It is thank to the work of the missionaries that EELC is born in the Northern part of Cameroon, at Ngaoundere. Today the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is not a regional church but a national church covering all the regions of Cameroon. But the question is what the relation between the EELC and other churches is? The next chapter will deal with the ecumenical relationship between the EELC and other churches.

⁹⁷ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 19.

⁹⁸ Tiencheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 19-20.

⁹⁹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic context*, (2005), 22-23.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIP OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON AND OTHER PROTESTANT CHURCHES

4.1.1 The Evangelical Lutheran church in Cameroon member of CEPCA

The CEPCA is an ecumenical body whose objectives are: the search for unity of churches and Evangelical missions working in Cameroon, with the aim of sharing mutual enrichment, common management of certain projects, evangelization of less evangelized areas and promotion of ecumenical movement. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is member of FEMEC since 1969, which became CEPCA in 2005. The EELC cooperates with other denominations at the national level as well as the local. In each of the main cities, the CEPCA has a council. In Ngaoundere, for instance, one can find the *Conseil des Eglises Protestantes de Ngaoundere*, (CEPN) which is the council of protestant churches,¹⁰⁰ in Tibati the local council is the *Conseil des Eglises Protestantes de Tibati*, (CEPTI),¹⁰¹ which is composed by EELC, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon (PCC), Cameroon Baptist Church (CBC), Evangelical Church of Cameroon (EEC) and the Adventist Church of Seventh Day. In the case of this thesis I have to underline that the ecumenical relations are also between the protestant churches members of CEPCA and the Roman Catholic Church. One of the reason of these relations may be that at the national level, these two great churches have developed ecumenical structures which are CEPCA for the protestant churches and the Episcopal Conference of Bishop for the Roman Catholics. The relationship and communion between protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church is expressed through many ecumenical celebrations as for instance, ecumenism through Easter celebration, Reformation, celebration of Christmas period, partnership through evangelisation and social assistance, and collaboration among Pentecostal churches.

¹⁰⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 54.

¹⁰¹ Smith Tah Kwe, interview, Tibati, 31-07-13.

4.1.2 Ecumenism in Easter celebration

The Easter celebration is the most important feast of the church all over the world in general. In the ecumenical context of the EELC in Ngaoundere particularly, this celebration is called Fespaques meaning Easter festival. During the period of Easter, the protestant churches and Roman Catholic Church gather to worship and witness to the resurrection of Christ in words, in music and in art under the patronage of both the Protestant Churches and Roman Catholic Churches of Ngaoundere.¹⁰² On the Easter Sunday, more than fifteen chorals from different churches of Ngaoundere organize a mega-concert in the festival place where administrative authorities and leaders of Muslim communities are also invited to take part. Usually there is a sermons, poems, and several testimonies about Christ's resurrection and Christian unity. It is a big moment to witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ to thousands of people, especially Muslims. As stated above, ecumenical issues are going on solely between the Roman Catholic Church and the CEPCA Churches. In some cases there is a sharing of pulpit during which a Protestant or Roman Catholic minister is asked to preach at the gathering place.¹⁰³ In Ngaoundere for instance, the ecumenical issues between the Roman Catholic and the CEPCA members take the form of public gathering for social assistance or for Christian feast celebration. The fellowship characterized by the sharing of Eucharist and the mutual recognition of ministers for instance, is not yet established.

4.1.3 The celebration of the Reformation

The Reformation week is celebrated every year by the Protestant Churches. The historical background is to celebrate the excommunication of Martin Luther by the Pope during the Reformation period. In Cameroon the month of October of each year is reserved to celebrate this feast which takes one week and is called the week of Protestantism. It begins on the first Sunday and ends the second Sunday of October. Many activities are organized all over the country by the Protestant Churches. In Ngaoundere the different activities consist in organising conferences on Protestantism, presenting music concerts, discussing the burning subject of Christian unity¹⁰⁴ and to explain to ordinary church members the historical background of the Reformation. This is also an opportunity to explain in a good way that the

¹⁰² Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 53.

¹⁰³ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 53.

¹⁰⁴ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 55.

Roman Catholic Church is the Church from which the majority of other churches are born, even the Lutheran Church. In Tibati, activities begin in September every year. According to one of my informants, they organize a conference, round table debate and music concerts instead of religious festival to include Christians, Muslims and even pagans.¹⁰⁵ During this period, all the leaders of different churches gather young Christian adults and children of Sunday school in the same place to receive teachings in the Bible. The goal is to promote active participation of young people in the life of the church and their community. In the domain of prayer said my informant, the door is broadly opened to all people who need the mercy of God especially the sick persons. They pray for, Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and Pagans all are invited to take part.

4.1.4 Ecumenism in the Christmas period

During each Christmas period, all the churches which are members of CEPCA join their effort to organise a Christmas celebration for prisoners called "the Christmas prisoner". The purpose is to bring the gospel to these persons who also need the mercy of God and forgiveness. Each church sends some of its elders and its pastor to the prison. Food, clothes and some copies of the New Testament are offered to the prisoners. Baptism is done on that day if there is a need. This is a yearly occasion for Christian churches to do the mission together.

4.1.5 Ecumenism through "Christian unity celebration and social assistance"¹⁰⁶

The month of January every year is the period which the CEPCA members and the Roman Catholics celebrate the feast of Christian unity. There are four fundamental reasons that bring Roman Catholics and Protestants to express Christian unity.

The sacerdotal prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21 where he wants to see the entire Christmas become one as the Father and the Son

Our common and unique faith in Christ since there is one faith; one baptism and one hope
Eph. 4:6

¹⁰⁵ Djingue Jean Jules, interview taped in Tibati, 31-07-13.

¹⁰⁶ Moise Ngayap, Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context, (2005), 52.

The universality of charity found in all those who recognize themselves as Christians

The fact of living in the same city and carrying mission to the same population.

In the big cities where the EELC is present, she co-celebrates this Christian unity with other churches. In Ngaoundere, for instance, Roman Catholic parishes have 12,000 members.¹⁰⁷ During the celebration, of the feast of unity, each of these parishes chooses some of its elders and sends them as their representatives to attend common worship with Protestants. The following year, the CEPCA gather in one place of the Roman Catholic parishes to take part in same worship service. This celebration of Christian unity constitutes an important ecumenical encounter during which Protestants and Roman Catholic become one body in the prayer, songs and worship.

Another remarkable case of ecumenism with the Roman Catholic Church is in the field of social assistance to people of desperate needs. In Ngaoundere, there is a program of social assistance through the community of Santo Julio¹⁰⁸ which works within the Roman Catholic parishes as an ecumenical instrument. The members of this community collaborate with Protestants to assist the poor, street children, sick people and prisoners. There is a close partnership between the one Roman Catholic Church cathedral congregation of "Notre Dame de Victoire" and one of the biggest Lutheran parishes in Ngaoundere called Bethany. These two parishes have settled an agreement in joint effort to take care of prisoners by teaching, praying and providing food. On Sunday, the 11th of June 2004, an encounter was organised at Bethany Parish between members of Santo Julio community and Protestants in order to seek the means of addressing the needs of a large majority of sick and homeless people.¹⁰⁹ The kind of assistance took place every year when I myself was a pastor at Yoko. At the end of the celebration of the feast of harvest, the Lutheran community and the Roman Catholic Church organized the gifts for sick people, widows, orphans, and prisoners. The service took place in the public place where we have worship, prayer for our country, concert of religious music, and sermons.

¹⁰⁷ Moise Ngayap ,Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context, (2005), 52

¹⁰⁸ According to Moise Ngayap, this community was found by Andrea Ricardi in Italy in order to assist people in their daily needs, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Moise Ngayap, Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context, (2005), 53.

4.1.6 Ecumenism through youth and *Femme Pour Christ* (FPC)

Youth in general and women in particular constitute the key pillars in the life of churches in Africa today. In the EELC today young people and women play an important role in evangelisation. In the EELC, there are both the youth movement: *Jeunesse de l'Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne au Cameroun*, (JEELC) and Women for Christ "*Femme pour Christ*" (FPC). Both of these movements have their day of celebration marked by different arrangements during the preceding week. According to one of the informants that I interviewed at Yaounde,¹¹⁰ this is the great moment in which they organise many activities such as: Bible study teachings, round table talks, conferences. During this period, the JEELC and FPC invite young Christians of other faiths to take part. They also organise evangelisation campaigns where all the pastors of Protestant Churches being members of CEPCA and priests of the Roman Catholic church, even those who are located in the countryside of Yaounde to gather in the same place to teach and preach for the peace all over the world and especially in our country. A group choirs of CEPCA are also arrange a tour in different parishes of Yaounde to offer concerts of religious songs.¹¹¹ Sport being a real factor of national unity in Cameroon, they during the youth week also organise activities as football, handball, volleyball, race. The same thing is done during the celebration of the feast of mother which takes place every year in the month of May. What is important in this women celebration is that women do not preach in their own congregation during their Sunday service. According to their agenda, they use to change, for instance, women of protestant churches come to Roman Catholic parishes, and communities of protestant churches receive the women from the Catholic church.¹¹²

4.1.7 Relation between EELC and Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostal churches in reality do not have a national body to coordinate their activities as FEMEC for other protestant churches. Since 1990 in Cameroon, there is a growth of the Pentecostal movement all over the country. Established churches experience the phenomenon of proselytism adopted by these so-called "awakened churches." There is no real collaboration between protestant churches member of CEPCA, the Roman Catholic Church

¹¹⁰ Yaounde is the political Capital city of Cameroon

¹¹¹ Baiguele Jean, interview taped, in Yaounde, 06/08/13.

¹¹² Baiguele Jean, interview taped, Yaounde, 06/08/13.

and the Pentecostal churches. One aspect is that they feel themselves more free in acting than the workers of established churches.¹¹³ Although there are some circumstances which bring Pentecostal churches to collaborate, the general picture is that there is limited collaboration among themselves, nor with protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. This is probably due to some obstacles that I will analyse in the next coming chapter. However, among the Pentecostal churches, there are some different alliances through which they cooperate with each other. In Ngaoundere, the Pentecostal churches work together to organise evangelisation campaigns, conferences, and seminars. In this city, they also have their common radio station called "*Radio Bonne Nouvelle*" from which they send out their teachings and sermons. In Garoua, one finds the *Union Pentecotiste du Cameroun*, (UPC) which is an association¹¹⁴ formed by the Pentecostal churches to do mission together. But the situation is critical this year (2013) when during the month of August the Cameroonian government has decided to close dozens of Pentecostal churches due to accusations of "criminal practices". President Paul Biya of Cameroon ordered the closing down of several Pentecostal churches in the name of public safety: "We will get rid of all the so-called Christian Pentecostal pastors who misuse the name of Jesus Christ to fake miracles and kill citizens in their churches. They have broken they liberty" said Mbu Anthony Lang as reporter by BosNewsLife.¹¹⁵ And the Communications Minister added that: "The dozens of churches, including around 10 in the capital Yaounde, were guilty of "extortion", "repeated nocturnal noises", and "proselytizing."¹¹⁶ In Ngaoundere Pentecostal often gather around Lutheran Christians and Catholics to ask them critical questions such as: Are you born again? Have you received the Holy Spirit? What kind of baptism have you received? Their aim is to win these Christians as new members of their church. Another strategy of Pentecostal churches is to denigrate other churches, stating that there is no Holy Spirit in established churches, and criticise their way of worship and teaching. In addition they use mass media extensively with the intention to win other new adherents.¹¹⁷ This occurs in Ngaoundere where many sects criticise the spiritual life of members of the established churches. As Moise Ngayap noticed

¹¹³ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 56.

¹¹⁴ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 56.

¹¹⁵ www.christianpost.com/news/dozens-of-pentecostal-churches-being-shut-down-in-cameroon-103774/, accessed, 14/09/13.

¹¹⁶ www.christianpost.com/news/dozens-of-pentecostal-churches-being-shut-duwn-in-cameroon-103774/, accessed 14/09/13.

¹¹⁷ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 47.

in his thesis: "One of their criticism is that the leaders and pastors of established churches are led intellectually not spiritually and because of this fact, they need to be re-evangelised".¹¹⁸

4.1.8 Partial conclusion

The main objective of this chapter has been to present activities which describe how the EELC maintains its ecumenical relation with other churches. One main aspect deals with celebrations, such as Easter celebration, Christmas celebration, evangelisation by the youth and women. As general conclusion from our analysis here, we can say that collaboration between the EELC, the Roman Catholic Church and other established churches is good. The same is, however not the case with the Pentecostal churches. By their aggressive and proselytizing policy towards established churches, they constitute obstacles and barriers for promoting ecumenism. This will be examined in the next chapter.

¹¹⁸ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 48.

Chapter five

5.1 OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES OF PROMOTING ECUMENISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EELC

The differences between the churches are far to overcome as remarked Lukas Vischer in Berlin in 1967.¹¹⁹ The various confessions are still more or less identifiable entities, and all attempts toward a consensus or a common confession have so far failed to make any significant change. In the context of Cameroon in general, and the EELC in particular there are many obstacles which prevent the promotion of true ecumenism: tribalism, leadership conflict, corruption, proliferation of new churches, proselytism.

5.1.1 Tribalism

Cameroon is one of the countries in Africa where there are 252 ethnic groups and tribes who cohabitate together. One of the most important points of view in the question of concept of unity is how one sees the relation of unity and diversity. This diversity is normally richness for the churches in Cameroon, but in reality this is only partly true. The phenomenon of ethnic division is accentuated among different churches in Cameroonian cities. The churches in Ngaoundere, Tibati and Yaounde for instance, have also experienced this fact. In Ngaoundere for instance, during the colonial period there were only two established churches: the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church were first found in Ngaoundere and its country side among such tribes as the Gbaya, the Dii, the Mbum, and Laka.¹²⁰ Later when the FEMEC came into existence, in 1969, it was decided that the members of this organisation can attend service in one of the participating churches if they find themselves in a place without their original church. However, around 1990 with the liberalization of the law in Cameroon, the constitution opened the way to Cameroonians to believe in whatever they want and to express their religious life wherever they want. Today different protestant churches and religious movements are found in the same city and the situation is very complex.¹²¹ In addition to

¹¹⁹ Meyer Harding, *The Augsburg Confession*, (1979), 69.

¹²⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 43.

¹²¹ Moise Ngayap *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 44.

these more general features, tribalism is a factor with strong impact in most of the churches. A result of this is the strong focus that we find on ethnic differences in the Lutheran Church in northern Cameroon, with different services, different choirs, and different women's groups for the various linguistic and ethnic entities.¹²² In most of the churches, people from the major tribe most often dominate the minority by imposing their language and by their occupying high posts. This situation also describes the reality in the EELC today. Some voices among the Gbaya¹²³ people claim to create their own church because one of the pastors of Gbaya origin lost an election four years ago. As mentioned already in the introduction of this thesis, EELC is facing different challenges related to tribalism within her organisation. In reaction to the influence of the major group, tribal and ethnical associations are created in some churches. Sometimes, these are pressure groups, constituted by minority tribes who organize to influence or controlling others and make their right and their political interest. Sometimes they are secular and culturally structured associations made up of people of the same ethnic group. Their main goal is often to help provide for the well being of their members. Such associations, however become problematic and challenging when they in this way accentuate ethnicity within the setting of the church and when they advocate the preponderance of ethnic solidarity before religious solidarity and want to impose their particular interest and political visions in the church. Each cultural and tribal association are based on ideologies that are not always compatible with the church. Although these associations are initiated by the Christians, they do not escape the pitfalls of ethnocentrism.¹²⁴ Most of these churches found in Ngaoundere are members of CEPCA but this does not stop their members to follow their tribal division. Tribalism is a factor in Cameroon in general among churches and in Ngaoundere in particular. It breaks the unity of the church and causes division and departure of people into other confessions. For instance, in 1998 the Boulou¹²⁵ people went split from EPC Hermon to create a parish of EPC Philadelphie.¹²⁶ Later the Bassa of Babimdi departed from the same church to create EPC Carmel. The phenomenon of tribalism also occurred within the EFLC (Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne du Cameroun), which is located in the North region of Cameroon with the massive departure of the

¹²² Thomas Sundnes Dronen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam in Northern Cameroon: Megachurches in the Making?*, Brill, Boston, 2013.

¹²³ This is one tribe in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon who is the majority.

¹²⁴ Joseph Ngah, *Etre Temoin de Jesus Christ*, 26.

¹²⁵ One tribe found in the centre of Cameroon.

¹²⁶ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 44.

Moundang Christians who created their own church formed only by their tribe.¹²⁷ The established church members of the CEPCA have over the last years become more tribal than ever when other churches came from South, North, East to be settled in Ngaoundere and Tibati. When some of these churches reached Ngaoundere, they actively appealed to tribalism to gain Christians to their community. Many Christians from different tribes originally from South Cameroon abandoned attending church service in the EELC parishes. The same scenario happened when the EFLC arrived in Ngaoundal, a country side city of Ngaoundere, and all the Moundang and Toupiri Christians of the EELC were enticed to join their original church. The Bamoun, the Bamileke and the Bassa, which constitute the traditional tribes of EEC (Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun), were drawn from the EELC to the EEC by their pastor in 1991.¹²⁸

Worship in local language has become a tribal factor leading to exclusivism. As Moise Ngayap stated, "In translating the Bible in local languages the main idea of missionaries was to bring the people nearer to the gospel. But later on the tribes into which the Bible was translated, came to use their language as a fact of tribalism excluding or attracting people. That is why in Cameroon there are tribal churches in the big cities."¹²⁹

Today in many of the EELC parishes, there are two or three services in one and the same parish per Sunday because each tribe wants to worship in his own tongue. Today in Cameroon, when new churches are getting located in cities they just follow people belonging to their traditional tribes. The strategy of the more pure tribal churches is to send someone to allure people from his own tribe to become church members. For instance, a Bamileke person is sent to invite the Bamileke, a Moundang is sent to invite the Moundang and so forth. It is true that tribal proselytism is also practiced among established churches, also called mainline churches. It constitutes an obstacle to authentic ecumenism and therefore renders the ecumenical work difficult.

Another fact which supports the development of tribalism is that in certain parishes some people insist to have as pastor someone from one's own tribe. This also happens in the EELC when catechists, evangelists and pastors finish their training at the biblical seminary and school of theology are being sent into the regions of their own tribal belonging. This practice reinforces the attitude of tribalism when the church in certain cases wants to move one pastor

¹²⁷ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic context*, (2005), 44.

¹²⁸ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 46.

¹²⁹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 46.

to a region of another tribe than that of the pastor's own. As a church serving in a context of many tribes, ethnic groups and languages, the EELC in one way or another is experiencing the phenomenon of tribal conflicts. For instance, the Dii and the Gbaya people, who constitute the major tribes of the EELC often, consider the rest of tribes as some kind of strangers.¹³⁰ So, what Paul says in Gal.3:28 is relevant to overcome tribalism when he states "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

5.1.2 Regionalism

Ethnic or territorial distribution of different confessions, which is the result of the missionaries work, has contributed to ecclesiastical fragmentation and the habit of churches to live apart one from the other, often ignoring each other. The genesis of this problem is the historical background of the work of missionaries in different regions of Cameroon. Today in Cameroon each region gives an impression that one traditional church belongs exclusively to one region, and not to be shared with another region. For instance, the EELC is considered by people of the South region as a "church of northern people" because the missionary activities to settle this church took place in the North region of Cameroon. The same way of thinking also characterizes the people of the North when they consider EPC (Eglise Presbyterienne Camerounaise), EEC (Eglise Evangelique du Camroun), BCC (Baptist Church of Cameroon) as churches which belong to Bamileke people, Bassa people and English speaking people in South-West and North-West of Cameroon. These churches are reformed churches and have their geographical basis in the mentioned regions. Ecumenism is not a high priority in some denominations because some leaders do not want to share their ideas, strategies and experience with others. Certain churches are considered as new in some regions of Cameroon. This is for instance the case of the EELC which is facing serious problems to acquire a site to build a church in big cities like Douala, Yaounde and Bafoussam. The inhabitants of these areas consider the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon as a Norwegian church or the church of the Gbaya and the Dii people because the majority in EELC belong to these tribes and also because they are people of Northern Cameroon.

¹³⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a pluralistic Context*, (2005), 106.

5.1.3 Doctrinal controversies

Not all the Christian churches in Cameroon cities share the idea of ecumenism and that of collaboration. The traditional doctrinal questions appear in different forms and different nuances. Between the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church the old debate on traditional issues is still blocking the process of ecumenism.

First the number of sacraments divides Protestants and Catholics. A number of churches stand firmly on their doctrinal background and are reluctant to collaborate with others.¹³¹ For instance, in Protestant churches there are two sacraments which are recognized, whereas in the Roman Catholic Church they have seven; the question of the form of baptism, the infant baptism, Holy Communion and women ministry constitute the issues of obstacle, disagreement and division among churches. According to Baptist churches, baptism was reserved for repentant believers who are aware that their sins had been forgiven, not unknowing infants. This argumentation is supported by the following statement when they declare:

"Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be resurrected with Him and to all those who demand for it for themselves."¹³²

For the Lutherans, they bring the child with the purpose and hope that he may believe, and they pray God to grant him faith. Lutheran churches baptize children solely on the command of God "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them"(Mk 10:13-16). The practice of infant baptism emphasizes the corporate faith and the faith which the child shares with its parents. The infant is born into the broken world and shares in its brokenness. Through baptism, the promise and the claim of the gospel are laid upon the child.

Pentecostal movements also bring confusion in the mind of Christians when they propose them to be re-baptised. An example described by Thomas Drønen described about a Catholic student who had serious problem at school illustrates this. During a difficult time in her life, as she was preparing for her high school exam, she went to see her neighbour who was a

¹³¹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 57.

¹³² www.en.wikipedia.or/wiki/Theology-of-Anabaptism#Baptism, accessed 20/09/13.

member of the Assemblée Evangelique des Freres du Christ (AEFC). And this was the recommendation of her neighbour:

"My sister, if you want to succeed in this town you must allow Christ to enter into your life. If he is with you, you will never ever have problems at school. I told him I was a Christian who was baptised and confirmed but he told me that it was not enough. I had to confess my sins and be baptised again, and this time by immersion [...] I left the Catholic Church in order to join AEFC."¹³³

The question of the presence of the body and the blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, divides the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. The body and blood which are offered in the Lord's Supper are not the body and blood of man in general but the body and blood of the incarnate Son of God. Again, the Lord's Supper is not the body and blood of Christ in material independence, as Roman Catholic taught, but the body and blood of Jesus Christ which are not for a moment to be separated from the person of the incarnate Son of God.¹³⁴ The doctrinal teachings of each church also constitute a controversial point among churches. The consequences are that during the ecumenical events, Christians of both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches do not share Holy Communion together even in the rural congregation.

5.1.4 Proliferation of Pentecostal movements

The increase of Pentecostal churches in Cameroon has brought a serious confusion among churches. The situation seems to be complex and the Cameroonian government is making efforts to assure the security of Christians. In Ngaoundere as well as in other cities of Cameroon, one can find that many Pentecostal movements form a distinct group from other churches. Their presence in the north is sometimes a result of planned missionary activity, where a pastor or evangelist has moved north in order to create a new congregation. However, more often, Pentecostal missionary activity is the result of migrant workers in search of a spiritual home.¹³⁵ During ecumenical events such as marriage, baptism, and other celebrations, Catholics and Evangelicals are together. Pentecostals, however have chosen to be absent since they raise many kinds of critiques against the others saying that Christians

¹³³ Thomas Sundnes Dronen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam*, (2013), 189.

¹³⁴ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confession*, (1961), 159.

¹³⁵ Thomas Sundnes Dronen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation and Islam*, (2013), 185.

from the established churches are not born again and that they cannot have fellowship with pagans.¹³⁶ According to most of the pastors of the established churches, members of CEPCA, there is no way to collaborate with Pentecostals since all their effort is to criticise the doctrine of the Evangelical churches. For instance, in 1993 the Pentecostal movement named Full Gospel arrived in Tibati and their leader organised a kind of general campaign of getting new members during which they invited Christians of Evangelical Churches and the Roman Catholic Church to change their denomination in order to join their church which was presented as the true one. Many Christians are confused and some Christians are baptised anew. Even one of the pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroun with all his family went to this new church that they consider as the true church. All his family, wife and children, remain in this church till today, but after many years that the pastor himself decided to come back in his origin church. For their part, Pentecostal leaders support the opposite of what ministers of the established protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church are saying and teaching. Pentecostals put more emphasis on the experience of the reception of the Holy Spirit. They teach that the event of Pentecost when the disciples received the Holy Spirit is also happening in their worship. They pray aloud, making noises and singing all the night to witness the presence of the Holy Spirit among them. Some of their elders sometimes fall in trance to prove their union with the Holy Spirit. They also put more emphasis on healing. When their members are sick or have injuries, they refuse to bring them to the hospital and spend time to pray. But very often there is no healing. This kind of doctrine is a serious contradiction to what the Bible according to the established churches teaches.

Another strategy of Pentecostal churches is to denigrate other churches' way of worshipping and to criticise their teaching. In addition, they make extensively use of mass media with the intention to win members from other churches. Proselytising activities are carried out not only towards established churches, they also compete among themselves each trying to attract the members from another. As Moise Ngayap remarks:

"Proselytism in Cameroon urban zone is one of the facts, which break up unity among churches and lead them to permanent tensions and conflict. It constitutes an obstacle to church witness because, instead of evangelising non-Christian believers, different churches' members are fighting among themselves, each trying to win the other to his own church."¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 57.

¹³⁷ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 48.

Winning adherents of other denominations has become the aim of many churches instead of evangelising the non-believers who are found elsewhere. Such atmosphere characterised by competition, conflicts and divisions among churches render the Christian witness difficult in Ngaoundere where many Muslims live.¹³⁸

5.1.5 Sects and religious movements

According to the "*Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*", edited by Nicholas Lossky, the word "sect" from Latin *secta*, to follow, a translation of Greek *hairesis*, a choice has acquired a special meaning and force in Christian language, particularly in the context of ecclesiology.¹³⁹ The sect is a group that has separated from an established church; a religious group or faction regarded as heretical or as deviating from orthodox tradition. In many parts of the world in general, and Cameroon in particular, the churches are experiencing the proselytising activities of sects and new religious movements. In Cameroon there are numerous sects and religious movements such as Franc-Macon, Rose-Croix, Meditation Transcendentale, Baha'i Faith and Jehovah Witness.¹⁴⁰ The main factors to favour the proliferation of sects and similar religious movements in Cameroon are poverty and underdevelopment. Because of underdevelopment, churches are born every day and some turn out to be sects. Most of the city people in Cameroon face a number of difficulties in their daily life such a poverty, unemployment, illness, disappointment, hardship and misfortune. In such a desperate situation, they do not hesitate to embrace any kind of religious practices and sects that might solve their problems. The multiplication of sects is creating confusion among Christians and they are no longer able to look at each other as children of one God. The influx of new churches is creating a lot of disorder and it is a threat to social cohesion and unity among the churches.¹⁴¹ The aim of many of the sects is to re-evangelise baptised but non-practising members of other churches. This occurs in Ngaoundere where many sects criticise the spiritual life of members of the established churches. Moise Ngayap remarks that: "One of their main criticisms is that the leaders and pastors of the established churches are led intellectually not spiritually and because of this fact they need to be re-

¹³⁸ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 50.

¹³⁹ Nicholas Lossky, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, (1991), 1030.

¹⁴⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian in a Pluralistic Context*, (200), 48.

¹⁴¹ www.leffortcamerounais.com/2012/what-do-some-cameroonians-think-are-the-factors-that-threaten-social-cohesion.html, accessed 25/09/13.

evangelised".¹⁴² Some sects seek the extraordinary speaking in tongues, visions, miracles, in short, what strikes the eye. In the sects, the Holy Spirit seems to be an impersonal force that can be manipulated at will which is unrelated to the purpose of the other persons in the Trinity. These teachings contradict traditional theology of the established churches, that the Spirit is the Spirit of God, that it was sent to us to enlighten our minds and sanctify us, and that God does not always manifest itself in a sensational manner. For instance, in the early church, the gifts of the Spirit were not provoked or researched. The gifts were always sudden, spontaneous and free.¹⁴³ Lutheran churches and Roman Catholic Church do not fight *glossolalia* in the Pentecostal services. The problem is that among sects and religious movements, speaking in tongues is the sign of someone having been saved. Karen Bloomquist states: "that is a mockery of God. Glossolalia is not God's only gift."¹⁴⁴

5.1.6 Leadership conflicts

In Luke 22:24 a dispute arose among the disciples as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. This is a wrong question according to the New Testament, but one asked all often within the different churches. Thus, ecumenism depends to a great extent on the local clergy, the priests and pastors of the area. In the context of Cameroon, for instance, leadership conflicts are based on the question which church is the "greatest"? According to Protestants, Bishops and Priests of the Roman Catholic in general give the impression that they are superior to pastors of protestant churches because of their apostolic succession. The same is true for church leaders. Hence, the evangelical pastors repeatedly maintain that the Catholics are not interested in genuine ecumenism, but always want conversion in the sense of "returning to Rome".¹⁴⁵

Another point of conflict among churches in Cameroon is the problem of the number of members. Some churches think that they are the "greatest" churches by showing to the number of their attendants, and maintain that decisions in the ecumenical meeting must pay attention to members, and give priority to those who represent the more numerous churches. This situation often contributes to the boycott of ecumenical meetings. Leadership conflicts are also observed in the aspect of mutual criticism among churches. It is important to mention

¹⁴² Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 48.

¹⁴³ Joseph Ngah, *Etre Temoin de Jesus Christ*, (2005), 111.

¹⁴⁴ Karen L. Bloomquist, *Lutheran Respond to Pentecostalism*, (2008), 94.

¹⁴⁵ Andre Birmele, *Local Ecumenism*, (1984), 6.

that Christian churches in Cameroon cities criticise each other so strongly that a gap has developed between them. The idea of an effective ecumenism is not possible in the climate of such critique and tension. One example of this gap is between Pentecostal and established churches in Ngaoundere. There is no real ecumenical collaboration between these two blocs of churches. As it is underlined in the previous section, that Pentecostal leaders consider often protestant leaders as not having received the Holy Spirit, they consequently think that pastors of these churches must be re-evangelised again, along with their church members and that their teachings are wrong. Established protestant leaders on their hand also criticise Pentecostal leaders, saying that all Pentecostal movements are sects and they refuse to accept them in the ecumenical movement which is CEPCA. It is important to notice that the evangelisation efforts implemented by Pentecostals is not towards non-Christians, but they use to go door to door of Christians of established churches who already are baptised and try to convince them to change their denomination. This kind of proselytism brings discords and tensions between leaders of each church. Some Christians abandon their former churches to adhere to other different churches because they are persuaded by the new teachings of Pentecostals.¹⁴⁶ Using psychological pressure, tribal influence, or inducements such as offering, gifts to gain members of other churches is a proselytising activity that puts a strong barrier to peaceful and constructive ecumenism.¹⁴⁷ The observable ecumenical reluctance and indifference is strengthened in many places in Cameroon by fear of the loss of denominational identity. In these contexts, the concept ecumenism has not been sufficiently thought out or clarified. It is misunderstood as the surrendering of one's identity into some not yet precisely defined identity in which all confessional churches will be dissolved. Such an unfortunately widespread picture of ecumenism is "obstructive rather than liberating".¹⁴⁸ The majority of pastors and parish members believe that ecumenism means that they must sacrifice some of their teaching and their belief. Another more pragmatic point is that many of the leaders find it problematic to share the possessions of the mission and institution such as schools, colleges, and hospitals. In Cameroon the majority of confessional churches have their own institutions, dispensaries hospital and school.

¹⁴⁶ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 109.

¹⁴⁷ Moise Ngayap *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 110.

¹⁴⁸ Andre Birmele, *Local Ecumenism*, (1984), 6.

5.1.7 Corruption

The term corruption comes from the Latin word *corruptio* means the destruction or spoiling of anything, especially by disintegration or by decomposition, putrefaction. In addition, it has moral significance, in that it is regarded as moral deterioration or decay, perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery or favour.¹⁴⁹ However, corruption can take place in relation to money and projects that are administered by church-institutions, hospital, schools and church foundations. In certain churches, some preachers charge for handshake, and one has to pay more if he or she wants them to pray for him or her. Some of them ask members to give up their jewellery and other precious possessions to the church. Corruption in the church occurs in different levels such as: the misuse of church properties, unfair labour standards for church employees such as failure to pay competitive salaries and pension fund contribution of church staff, appointment of church leaders because they are founders of the church but do not have any theological training and embezzlement of funds meant for church projects. On the ecumenical level in Cameroon, this situation contributes to prevent the unity of churches, because of a lack of trust. Leaders of churches thus, do not give the totality of the fund to the general board in Yaounde to fulfil their activities. The majority of congregations are based in rural zones, and so it is not easy to collect the money because the financial transactions are made hands by hands without any paper-documentation. Some of the catechists, evangelists, and pastors after collecting offerings during the reformation week, sometimes put a share of the collected gifts into their own pockets. The consequence is that many meetings are cancelled, because there is little money left to pay the employees of CEPCA and often it seems that the ecumenical movement does not exist in Cameroon. EELC operates according to democratic principles; however, corruption and fraud has proved difficult to eradicate. Cameroon's high ranking regarding corruption and the fact that the churches in Cameroon have had problems with their own staff, have led to negative attention around the churches. The leadership in EELC, for instance, is currently taking action, and the church is involved with number of churches in Africa countries to establish rules and regulations for open and accountable stewardship to prevent corruption. At the national level, both EELC and the CEPCA, however, seem to have taken passive role towards the government and other authorities in relation to corruption.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Transparency International, (2009) Corruption and Human Right: Making the Connection International Council on Human Rights Policy, P 15.

¹⁵⁰ Tientcheu Djongoue, The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society, (2009), 74.

5.1.8 Poverty

A major problem of African churches in general and Cameroon in particular is poverty. In the context of the EELC, the majority of congregations are located in rural zones. Christians are poor and unable to contribute for the development of their church and for the ecumenical movement. There is a lack of coordination and strategy with other church structures. Also some churches who have money do not want to invest because they advice that ecumenism is not only their affair. There is a real lack of collaboration because all the established churches and the Roman Catholic Church do not want to sit together and discuss how and what policy and planning they must adopt to get money for their activities. The only resource they have is the offerings of all congregations during the celebration of the Reformation week. But, as it was highlighted in the discussion on corruption section (5.1.7) it is not all leaders who give their part of offerings to CEPCA to accomplish his activities. For instance, within the EELC, five years ago the church noticed bad financial management and embezzlement which plunged the church in crisis. But the question of poverty in the churches in Cameroon is not only a problem of mentality and lack of will of the leaders, but the problem of natural resources. For instance, in the North of Cameroon, people are submitted to a long dry season without rain, and the majority of Christians are farmers. Consequently, they have nothing to give to their church because sometimes they have poor harvests, epidemic diseases and natural catastrophes. In 2012 there was a flood which destroyed the majority of the north and far-north of Cameroon. This is the contrary to the South region of Cameroon, where there is plenty of rain every year. Christians give to their church without anxiety. At the level of CEPCA, the members of the board have to wait all the contributions before planning what they will do.

5.1.9 Summary

In this chapter we have shown that the ecumenism among churches in Cameroon is facing many serious problems which constitute obstacles and barriers to promote true unity. Among these obstacles one can notice the diversity of ethnics and tribes. Regionalisation inherited from colonialism and the early works of missionaries has also drawn up borders against the church unity in Cameroon. To every region in Cameroon, corresponds one church which in the mind of the inhabitants cannot be shared with another tribe. In addition Pentecostal movement sects and other religious movements create confusion among Christians in their

search for the true church in Cameroon today. Corruption, poverty and doctrinal controversies are also elements of high relevance in this process. So, the question is what strategy and guideline the EELC can suggest to promote true ecumenism? The following chapter will deal with this question.

Chapter six

6.1 HOW TO PROMOTE ECUMENISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EELC: SOME STRATEGIES

6.1.1 Working for effective ecumenism

When looking at our analysis of the situation in EELC it should have become understandable that the aim of promoting ecumenism within this church and its relation to other churches in the area is great challenge with many difficulties in the way. However, EELC and other churches in Cameroon are called to identify ways of common witnessing in unity, partnership or by cooperation, and to establish responsible relationships. In order to reach such a mutual fellowship, the churches in Cameroon must work for effective means and platforms for ecumenism. It seems that there at the moment is a general lack of understanding of the concept of ecumenism among churches. Given the fact that of this lacking understanding both between the churches and also within each church, Pastor Felix Ndoiyama states that leaders at the top should put efforts in teaching the content of what ecumenism is and how it can become an enriching element in the life of the churches. Some protestant church leaders consider ecumenism as something that applies to the relationship and communion with the Roman Catholic Church only. Other leaders on the other hand think that the Roman Catholic Church is a totally separated body, thus, never to be included into the ecumenical strategies and programmes of the protestant churches. In the case of Ngaoundere, different kinds of ecumenical relation are possible to be built between established churches and Pentecostals as well as the Roman Catholic Church, but there are impediments. Some church leaders in Ngaoundere town are afraid of losing their personal influence by engaging their churches in ecumenism. Others have a negative view about it looking suspiciously at it as a means of the bigger churches to dominate and exploit the minority churches. However, to come to a mutual relationship among all the Christian churches, there is a need to explain the basic meaning of the word "ecumenism" and establish an agreement about its implications to different churches in Cameroon.¹⁵¹ In order to overcome the proselytism one step towards fruitful ecumenism is to stress that a common aim for the churches in Cameroon is to practise

¹⁵¹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 111.

a common witness as an act of ecumenical evangelism. The established protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church also have different possibilities to work together, despite their separation, especially through joint effort, by manifesting whatever divine gifts of truth and life they already share and experience in common. In order to implement such an aim as people of God, it is important to develop common steps of a process towards ecumenism. Such steps could be:

- Establish a joint forum for open conversation to repent past failures and reflect more self-critically on ways of relating to one another and methods of evangelizing;
- Readiness to renounce all forms of denominational competition and rivalry and the temptation to proselytize members of other Christian traditions;
- Help people who are in process of changing their church to discern whether they are being guided by worthy or unworthy motives;
- Learn to speak the truth to one another about proselytizing or dishonest practises in evangelism.¹⁵²

6.1.2 Stopping proselytizing among churches

Proselytism is, as we have seen above, a serious problem among churches in Cameroon. This is a method adopted especially by some Pentecostal movements and consists in approaching Christians of other denominations by drawing an erroneous and unfavourable picture of their teachings. This activity cannot be called evangelisation because the Christians from the other churches are already baptized and know Jesus Christ as their saviour. In such a context, evangelisation in Cameroon has lost its sense. Another unfortunate element in the case of Cameroonian cities today is that whenever a church crosses her own borders, she has tendency to follow people who come from the tribes which already constitute its members. This is in fact, a strategy for planting new parishes by different churches. But this strategy does not take into account that an authentic evangelisation should not be focused on only one particular tribe, but looked upon as cross-cultural, cross-racial and transcontinental.¹⁵³ What Moise Ngayap suggests here is that, churches in Cameroon in general and the EELC in

¹⁵² Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Edinburgh 2010 Witnessing to Christ Today*, Vol. II, Oxford, 2010, 213.

¹⁵³ Moise Ngayap, *Christiaan Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 108.

particular has a call to encourage ecumenism and common witness especially with regard to people of non-Christian religions or to those who have never understood the gospel and do not believe in Jesus Christ as their saviour. The EELC particularly should not limit evangelisation to win new members and planting churches exclusively, nor reduce it to social activities as focusing on fighting for injustice, peace, wellbeing, but the EELC is called to carry on holistic mission dealing with evangelism, social responsibilities, ecumenism and common witness with others.¹⁵⁴ Ecumenical evangelism is not conquering or winning against the other churches. Rather, it is a humble invitation to be unified in the name of Jesus Christ. The people of God are not conquerors, but humble servants called to invite all God's people to his banquet in the garden of life.¹⁵⁵ To stop the proselytizing activities Pastor Felix Ndoiyama suggests the following points to help the EELC to promote true ecumenism:

- A deepened understanding of what it means to be church in today's world (1Cor.12:12);
- Develop a greater common understanding and vision of ecumenical activities, and missionary role in contemporary society.¹⁵⁶

In order to accomplish these aims the EELC has to renew her determination to manifest together with other churches the one hope according to Eph. 4:4 in order to share fully in the plan of salvation for the reconciliation and gathering up of all peoples and all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10). Here a frank discussion between the EELC and other churches would be highly desirable, and necessary in order to obtain a clear understanding of each other, in the hope that it would help determine the possibilities "of cooperation, of common witness, of fraternal assistance."¹⁵⁷ At the didactical level, the EELC should include in the seminary curricula, for example, lectures on the issue so that future pastors can master the notion and the strategy necessary for developing the ecumenical vision of the church.¹⁵⁸

6.1.3 Stopping unfair criticism and leadership conflicts

Fruitful ecumenism cannot be obtained among churches in Cameroon if church leaders continue criticising each other and continue to maintain unfair conflicts. To come to terms

¹⁵⁴ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 109.

¹⁵⁵ Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today*, (2010), 212.

¹⁵⁶ Felix Ndoiyama, interview, taped, 09-12-2013.

¹⁵⁷ Micheal Kinnamon, *The Ecumenical Movement*,(1997), 352.

¹⁵⁸ Felix Ndoiyama, interview, taped, 09-12-2013.

with mutual criticism among churches, one possible step to be taken is that established churches such as the EELC refrain from reacting negatively when they are criticised by for example Pentecostals and respond objectively. The point of view of one of my informants who stated that although Pentecostals criticise protestant churches for not having the Holy Spirit, he uses sometimes to call them to take part in ecumenical activities such as: marriage, prayer, exorcism, and funeral ceremonies.¹⁵⁹ Each church should look backwards into its past and see where it may have failed in its relation to other churches. However, there are some fundamental doctrinal points which cannot simply be wiped out because they have been criticised. For instance, a Lutheran church like EELC can never abandon infant baptism nor accept rebaptism practice. What is to be encouraged among churches is to bring forth what unites them rather than over-focussing differences and continue criticising each other.¹⁶⁰

In Cameroon one can find more than two hundred ethnic groups. This means that, the perspective to encourage ecumenism has to be based on a proper understanding of the historical and ethnic background and setting of the practices of each church. As Moise Ngayap states, one of the main mistakes of established churches is to reject and condemn Pentecostal churches without approaching them and studying their way of worshiping.¹⁶¹ Also Pastor Felix Ndoiyama sees a need to approach Pentecostals, by studying their practices in order to know how to establish partnership with them, instead of stigmatizing and rejecting them. However, Pentecostals need to do the same towards the established churches. In our opinion, one unfortunate decision in the striving for ecumenism has been the rejection of Pentecostal churches in the setting of CEPCA, the institution which is in charge of promoting ecumenism in Cameroon. Some Pentecostal churches which want to become members of CEPCA are not accepted although they have applied many times and presented their will to join the eleven protestant churches which form the CEPCA. According to Pastor Felix Ndoiyama, it would be better to approach them, and accept them as members of CEPCA; in this way it will be easier to understand their ideology, theology, their worship, their teaching and their activity. One cannot run a common activity with other church without knowing or understanding more properly its faith and practises. So, even if CEPCA should, in the future open its doors to Pentecostal churches, a procedure of building mutual trust is necessary.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Djingue Jean Jules, Interview taped, in Tibati, 31-07-13.

¹⁶⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 113.

¹⁶¹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a pluralistic Context*, (2005), 113.

¹⁶² Felix Ndoiyama, interview, taped, in Ngaoundere, 09-12-2013.

The problem of leadership seems also to be a problem among members of CEPCA. Until now the CEPCA does not have a constitution, or basic rules which can help them to keep up discipline among church members. This is the first disagreement I faced when I asked those who are in charge of CEPCA if I could find the constitution to analyse in my thesis. I was surprised; that no such document had yet been produced because of disagreements between members on different doctrinal and organizational points. This situation leaves CEPCA weaker than necessary and prevents good decisions to be made. Given that the EELC is member of the CEPCA, she cannot escape attempts at superficial and ill-founded criticism or religious practises of others. According to my informant, Pastor Felix Ndoiyama instead of criticising each other, all Christian churches should work for a mutual acceptance of differences of doctrines and different forms of organization.¹⁶³ While recognising the nature of the many sources of their division, churches in Cameroon need to recommit themselves both to the ongoing struggle to overcome their divisions and also to engage in common witness whenever and wherever it is possible to do so.¹⁶⁴ Also the EELC should avoid behaviour such as unjust or uncharitable reference to the beliefs or practices of other religious communities in the hope of winning adherents. This includes the criticism which offends existential realities of members of other communities.¹⁶⁵ With regard to this, the EELC as well as the other churches are called to emphasize the idea of being co-workers for the sake of the gospel. It is imperative to understand that no spiritual leader is more important than the other. All workers in the garden of God are equal on the basis of their faith in Christ. Knowing this, can according to Moise Ngayap contribute to the process of stopping vain discussion about self-importance and bringing church leaders to co-operate.¹⁶⁶

According to Pastor Etienne Momttot, the founders of Christian communities should abolish unfair criticism against each other if based on some narrow interpretation of the Scripture. It ought to be an aim relevant for Christian associations to banish narrow views based only on their own practices as the main road to salvation and grace. The people of God should be able to realize the will of God, his kingdom in trust to the Holy Spirit and avoid division that prevents them from interacting and as one of my informant stressed: "Nothing can bring the people of God to work together if it is not the humble witnessing of the gospel that convicts

¹⁶³ Felix Ndoiyama, interview taped, in Ngaoundere, 09-12-2013.

¹⁶⁴ Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today*, (2010), 218.

¹⁶⁵ Micheal Kinnamon, *The Ecumenical Movement*, (1997), 352.

¹⁶⁶ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 115.

the creatures of God to love each other. Rejection, exclusion, hatred, or violence cannot help for a long life way for witnessing Christ together for the salvation of human being."¹⁶⁷

6.1.4 Emphasize on the relevance of the gospel

Evangelisation is the key factor behind the existence of the church all over the world. This is based on obedience to the calling of our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples to witness and teach all the nations. Since God's church in the world is in principle one; ecumenism demands partnership and collaboration. But as already outlined in previous chapter, true unity of the church does not exist if the gospel is not rightly preached and the sacraments administrated (cf. Augsburg Confession Art. VII). Regarding the context of Cameroon, churches are challenge to emphasize the explanation of biblical material in a simple and comprehensible way and meaning instead of involving into all kinds of fruitless debates which do not help Christians in their faith. It is a challenge for catechists, evangelists, pastors, and priests to know which picture of Jesus they should present to people. A basic point, on which all churches agree, is to present Jesus Christ only as saviour of humankind. The message of the cross will, however, always remain a stumbling block to proud mankind (1Cor. 1:23). Bearing the gospel to people is a privilege but it is important that whoever wants to share the gospel with others is personally convinced of its power for the salvation of humanity. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for Jews, then for the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16). According to Moise Ngayap the gospel to be preached is an incarnated word bringing Christ to the hearts of people, a Christ who lifts human burdens, a Christ who liberates, forgives and saves.¹⁶⁸ Based on the relevance of the gospel in the Christian life, Pastor Felix Ndoiyama suggests that the ecumenical bodies such as the CEPCA should encourage the creation of common social institutions, which can link churches together. For instance, the EELC has important instruments of collaboration with other churches such as radio, hospital, Lutheran Hour Ministry Cameroon (LHM-C). The aim of the LHM-C, for example, is to bring the gospel to people through different channels of communication such as radio, CRTV¹⁶⁹ (Cameroon Radio and Television), tracts, conferences and theatre. The LHM-C is acting in different towns and cities as an instrument of collaboration and

¹⁶⁷ Etienne Momttot, interview taped, in Ngaoundere, 05-12-2013.

¹⁶⁸ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 140.

¹⁶⁹ CRTV is the public Channel radio of Cameroon (Cameroon Radio and Television)

evangelisation and its activities touch many different churches. The goal of this institution is to work together with other churches in order to reach the large majority of the population with the gospel. There is a need for an ecumenical body such as CEPCA to encourage and support the creation of tools of collaboration among churches in order to bring them closer to each other. This could be a visible element to reduce the present gap between churches and lead them to more effective ecumenism.¹⁷⁰ Also within the context of the EELC there is a need for universal readiness to cooperation with other churches under the perspective of ecumenism. One possible step could be to set up agreements about abolishing unfairly blackening of the neighbour churches and focus on one's common belonging to the body of Christ.¹⁷¹

6.1.5 Avoiding the creation of hidden churches

The multiplicity of new churches in Cameroon today is very complex and a serious obstacle for the promotion of ecumenism. This situation seems to be favourable for proliferation of sects and new religious movements. Here the task of government is helpful by its statistical registration of all official churches as a precondition for granting permission for their worship and activities. It was highlighted in chapter four (see 4.1.6) that the Cameroonian government began to close some of so-called churches which were regarded to create confusion in the minds of Christians and threaten their spiritual life. Pastor Felix Ndoiyama suggests that Christians should be vigilant to denounce practises and teachings which are contrary to the Bible. But the obvious problem here is the disagreement about how the Bible should be interpreted. Hidden churches found in Cameroon are as already mentioned the consequence of tribal divisions among Christians. Often, the majority of a family or tribe see a need to create their own church due to tribal contest. Pastor Felix Ndoiyama suggests that the church should aim to transcend tribal borders by emphasizing the concept of unity and community.¹⁷² Pastor Etienne Momttot recommends that churches which are members of the CEPCA ought to make a declaration of communion between themselves to develop structures of unity which may provide common decisions to eradicate the proliferation of hidden churches. The crossing of geographical and ethnic borders for instance, was a factor that shaped the NMS and SM joint mission work in establishing the EELC. Openness towards

¹⁷⁰ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 114-115.

¹⁷¹ Felix Ndoiyama, interview taped, in Ngaoundere, 09-12-2013.

¹⁷² Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 105.

other church members without fear of losing one's own identity is a prerequisite for good cooperation. Christianity cannot find its voice in proclaiming exclusion but rather convention on all the aspects that unite them in all areas.¹⁷³

6.1.6 Defining good policies for financial resources

In the previous chapter, (5.1.8), we saw that poverty is a serious problem in African churches in general and Cameroon in particular. Poverty entails underdevelopment poor economic contexts within which churches in Cameroon are living. A burning question for the churches in Cameroon is how and where to find financial resources to improve the living condition of their workers and to what extent ecumenical cooperation can be adopted in order to fulfil their agenda and activities? One obstacle is what we could call a self-centred protection of one's own resources which is to be found in the majority of churches in Cameroon. It is a fact that all the churches do not have the same potentialities, or the same level of wealth. Some churches in Cameroon are rich while others stand in desperate need. For this reason Pastor Etienne Momttot suggests, for instance, that church members of CEPCA could put some of their material resources at disposal partnership generation. The apostle Paul gives an example on this point of the churches of Macedonia which, even in "extreme poverty", responded generously to the urgent need of other believers by arranging a collection (2Cor.8: 1-5). Paul's collection was an attempt to unify the early church; in order to demonstrate the partnership between Gentile and Jewish Christians within the one church.¹⁷⁴ Another biblical case of sharing material resources in partnership could be found in the community of Achaia, which was encouraged by Paul to contribute to the service of the Saints in Jerusalem. He stated the following opinion when he wrote:

"For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them. For if the gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (Rom.15: 26-27)

This aspect of sharing material resources is more or less totally absent among churches in the context of ecumenism in Cameroon. In Ngaoundere for instance, as in other cities, each

¹⁷³ Etienne Momttot, interview taped, in Ngaoundere, 05-12-2013.

¹⁷⁴ Jean Marc Baba Tonga, Paul's collection to the Poor in Jerusalem: An Attempt to unify the early Church, Stavanger, Norway, 2003, 143.

church struggles for its own survival.¹⁷⁵ The act of sharing material resources is a very appropriate field for increased ecumenical work among churches in Cameroon. For instance, the agricultural centres may contribute to improve the economy stand of many families; to increase and diversify the agricultural production; and in this way present the church as an organisation which takes seriously the daily problems people.¹⁷⁶ In the EELC, the recent development project of the church called "*Projet d'Appui au Developpement Integre*" (PADI) has a large spectrum of measures to help other churches to develop their financial resources. It does not limit itself on production; it deals also with the socio-cultural and economical activities of the communities, based on their needs and priorities, and playing the role of facilitator.¹⁷⁷ This instrument of development can be opened to other churches in order to improve their living conditions. Thus, one could lend out tractors to one another, machines to create build farms, fruits gardens etc, which in term can help people and churches to earn more money. Church members of CEPCA can in this way change their strategies to make and share financial resources, instead of waiting till the end of every year before receiving different contributions, Church members of CEPCA according to Pastor Felix Ndoiyama may to create a financial commission in charge to collect money in different congregations, parishes, and districts on the right time according to the agreed agenda. This could help the CEPCA to work for effective ecumenism, he states because if there is no financial resource CEPCA will have missed possibilities to play the role it is intended to.

6.1.7 Work for effective mission

Churches in Cameroon have a vocation to take seriously the notion of mission which is the first goal of their existence and the divine task that God gave them through Jesus Christ. Mission is based in the will of God with the goal to witness about Jesus to all the nations. To make clear this work for proper mission, churches in Cameroon should take in consideration what Michael Kinnamon states:

"The church is sent to every social, political, economic and religious community of mankind, both to those near at hand and to those far off. It is sent to those who deny or rebel against the

¹⁷⁵ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a Pluralistic Context*, (2005), 117.

¹⁷⁶ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 58.

¹⁷⁷ Tientcheu Djongoue, *The Church in a Poverty Stricken Society*, (2009), 58.

reign of Christ; and no weakness, persecution or opposition may be allowed to limit this mission."¹⁷⁸

The call to missionary service applies to any believer in any church anywhere. The purpose for which believers are called to unity is that the world may believe. It is a call to Christian churches to express unity in the midst of their diversities for the sake of witness as Jesus imposed on his followers. It means that despite their diversities, the different Christian churches are commonly called to witness to the same Lord. Since all churches claim to belong to Christ, they should also join efforts for the common witness about the triune God, Father of one mission. According to Moise Ngayap, unity among churches is therefore important also in the field of mission.¹⁷⁹ Churches in Cameroon need to strengthen their self-understanding as missional churches; which are related to the nature of the church, as being sent by God to the world. Churches in Cameroon are facing a challenge to become the communities in which all members equally encourage each other to discover and develop their gifts and ministries where transformation and renewal are needed.¹⁸⁰ The concept of unity is fundamental for the life of the church and for Christian mission in the world. In other words, the engagement in unity is an aspect connected to the churches. Christian mission is theologically speaking, involvement in the one body of Christ. Thus, to be called to unity in mission involves becoming a community that transcends in its life the barriers and brokenness in the world. This raises a challenge to churches in Cameroon to walk towards the process of unity in their mission as one body under Christ's sovereignty.¹⁸¹

In fact as partners of the same faith Christians of different denominations may also by virtue of their respective faiths cooperate in fighting for human rights, peace, justice and welfare. They may join the rest of the world in struggling against starvation, infant labour and violence against women.

The domain of cooperation is extremely wide and flexible also for believers of any religions to participate in. Interfaith partnership between Christians and others may be performed in solving social problems and in contributing to social development. For each group cataclysms and diseases can be focused on as common enemies. It may result in the building of health

¹⁷⁸ Michael Kinnamon, *The Ecumenical Movement*, (1997), 340.

¹⁷⁹ Moise Ngayap *Christian Witness in a pluralistic Context*, (2005), 96.

¹⁸⁰ Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today*, (2010), 120.

¹⁸¹ Moise Ngayap, *Christian Witness in a pluralistic Context*, (2005), 96-97.

centres for local people in partnership or separately according to situation and convenience. One may also put a joint interest in building schools to promote development of their land.¹⁸²

6.1.8 Partial conclusion

In this chapter we have been examined how churches in Cameroon and particularly the EELC deal with ecumenism. Some points are mentioned above as suggestions in order to fulfil this ecumenism. One of the measures points consists in explaining some basic principles of proper ecumenism in the local congregations in order to avoid proselytising among churches. The first commission of churches is to proclaim the Word of God, which is the good news given by Jesus Christ. In the situation of Cameroon we have shown that there is a need to emphasize the fact that the preaching of the true gospel by different churches will help Christians to grow in their faith. Some of the activity of Pentecostal churches and the creation of hidden churches is a factor we have seen threaten the spiritual life of Christians in Cameroon today. This chapter has also pointed to the recommendation to the Cameroonian government to take responsibility in order to close some irregular churches which are not open to the general public about their practices. This chapter has also dealt with the basic problem of African churches in general and Cameroon in particular of poverty and underdevelopment. One suggested step of action is a change of mentality in the member churches of the CEPCA to join efforts to create a financial commission in charge of collecting financial resources in order to fulfil their activities instead of waiting for the collection of annual offerings. The last point of this chapter dealt with the question of effective and cooperative mission as far as churches in Cameroon are concerned. Mission is the mission of God, therefore, churches in Cameroon can by cooperation in their efforts, to present Jesus Christ demonstrate to the world that the church as the visible body of Christ is one.

¹⁸² Etienne Momttot, interview taped, in Ngaoundere, 05-12-2013.

Chapter seven

7.1 GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1.1 Summary

At the end of this thesis, I will briefly sum up the main findings of my study of "Ecumenism in the Context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon: Attitudes and Strategies". After a short presentation and analysis of the historical background I continue in chapter two by describing and analysing the concept of church unity through key texts of the Apostle Paul. According to Paul there is a visible and invisible unity. Invisible unity is expressed in the vertical aspect of the church in its *koinonia* i.e. the unity that exists between the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The visible unity is the visible experiences of Christians in their actual lives and practices as a joint community of faith. Different understandings of the church unity according to Paul retain our attention:

Jesus Christ is the key stone of the church unity because He is the head of the church. Thus, in the New Testament writings there are great varieties of images of the oneness of the church in Christ. Through the death and the resurrection Christ, all believers are united with Jesus their saviour. Another image to describe the unity of the church according to Paul is by the sacrament. Through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, all Christians around the world are considered as one people of God. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Through the Eucharist, Christians through all ages and in all places continue to celebrate the eschatological gathering of all believers in the kingdom of God. To better understand the concept of church unity, I made in this chapter a brief analysis of the role of different ecumenical creeds in the church history. Thus, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession article 7 gives a basic definition of true unity of the church in order to dismiss all false ideas of division among different churches.

The brief presentation of the EELC in chapter three examines how the two great missions, NMS and SM brought the gospel to the Adamwa region where they planted the church (EELC). Through the NMS and the SM, Cameroonians in Northern region came to know Jesus Christ as their saviour for the eternal life. The work of missionaries contributed to unite

different tribes and ethnics (Dii, Gbaya, Laka, Mbum) as people of God, and contributed in their way to create a new unity among formerly separated tribes.

Having presented the EELC in chapter three, I carried my investigations forward in chapter four by describing the ecumenical activities of the EELC and other churches. In Cameroon, one finds the CEPCA which is in charge to coordinate ecumenism among different churches. Ecumenical activities are expressed in different celebrations such as Easter celebration which is the more important Christian celebration, the celebration of Reformation which is celebrated every second week of October every year to remember the excommunication of Martin Luther and the birth of the Lutheran church. Christmas celebration, social assistance, youth movement (JEELC) and (FPC) are other ways in which the EELC deals with ecumenism with other denominations.

These ecumenical activities do not take place without obstacles which constitute barriers for effective ecumenism in Cameroon. This is the main objective of the chapter five which describes the main factors which I found to constitute the most serious threats for unity of the churches. Among these obstacles, one notices first tribalism which divides churches. For instance, the EELC experienced a tribal crisis four years ago. Cameroon is a country with 252 ethnic groups and tribes. But this diversity which could have been considered a richness is rather a source of division among churches.

Other problems are doctrinal quarrels. For instance, the question of infant baptism is a strong dividing factor between Lutherans and Baptists. The understanding of the Lord's Supper divides Protestants and Catholics. But problems arise when leaders of protestant churches and the Catholic Church co-celebrate during ecumenical events without doctrinal clarification.

The proliferation of Pentecostal churches and religious movements causes confusion among Christians in Cameroon today because the situation is very complex. Many so-called pastors of these new churches are responsible of damaging the health of their attendants by practising mystical rites in the name of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, natural catastrophes, poverty and corruption are also sources of disunity among churches in Cameroon.

To improve the good relation among churches for effective ecumenism, some of my informants made some suggestions which may contribute to promote ecumenism in Cameroon. These findings are presented in chapter six. They state, for instance, that Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church should work more together, taking in

account their mission given by Jesus in Mat 28:18-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Thus, ecumenism ought to avoid proselytism among churches, and instead search for preaching the relevant gospel in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The leaders of churches should, according to my informants, refrain from unfair criticism and unfair leadership conflict which contradict the recommendation of the Lord Jesus Christ who emphasized to his disciples to love first God, and to love one's neighbours as oneself.

Poverty is a real and a serious social problem in Cameroon. While in the past, development was principally understood in terms of economic progress, it has now been realised that development must cater for the whole human person, to encompass also the people in the nation as a whole: by developing their spiritual religious, social, personal, moral, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions of life. Thus, for effective ecumenism, churches in Cameroon should define a good policy to provide financial resources to achieve their agendas.

To answer our main question, for the strategies adopted by the EELC to promote ecumenism, I have found that there is no real strategy and policy at the local level of the church. This was highlighted at the beginning of this thesis with the lack of relevant documents and reports in the archives of the EELC and CEPCA. At the national level, the CEPCA has not until now formulated a constitution because of disagreements among members. Ecumenism in the context of the EELC is however, manifested in the big cities but not in the rural areas. Pastors of the EELC do not in general put much emphasis on the question of unity. But ecumenism is taught in the theological seminary. Thus, pastors should have the necessary theoretical knowledge, but to a very limited extent thus practise ecumenism in their pastoral ministry.

The study of this topic enables us to understand the reality of the question of the unity among churches in Cameroon. Basically, Christians seem to belong together and to have a common conviction. But in the real life, there are discrepancies in their conviction. The unity and catholicity of the church have indeed always been different to realize as standpoint of church history. Since, whenever the church gives expression to her unity in the fellowship of the same order and even the creeds, believers are not united. The confession of the church as universal body is a call for her to work for real unity, and the unity of the church should be a

sign of her catholicity. But in real life this is difficult to realize. Of this, our study of the situation in Cameroon is a good example.

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