There are two types of churches in Cameroon today: mainline churches and other churches. The former are churches that were founded in Africa, for Africans, by missionary societies. These churches – Reformed-Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian – were run initially by western missionary societies such as the Basel Mission, the London Baptist Mission and Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, in the case of the Protestants, and are now independent. Among the other churches are the new Pentecostal churches. This article focuses first and particularly on the mainline churches: the manifestation of ecumenism among them, the way they live this out with other African churches, and their relation to western churches. These churches have inbuilt ecumenical characteristics that can be of universal benefit to other Christian churches in the search for ecumenism worldwide. Secondly, the article focuses on the relation between the mainline churches and the Pentecostal churches. Here a brief reading of Acts 10.1–11.18 helps to suggest a way in which mainline churches might improve their practice of Christian ecumenism.

Keywords: mainline churches in Cameroon; Pentecostal churches; ecumenism in Cameroon; ecclesiology in Africa

1. The context of the study

The missionary period in Cameroon ran from the 19th century (1841) until the 20th century (1957), as far as Protestant churches are concerned and, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, from the end of the 19th century (1890). During this period, many churches, referred to today as mainline churches, were set up all over the country. Beside these churches, there is a second category which I will present under the title of ‘other churches’.

Mainline Churches

Protestant Churches

The missionary societies which succeeded one another in Cameroon created ten churches which are independent today. These are:

The Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC)
The Baptist Church of Cameroon (l’Eglise Baptiste Camerounaise – EBC)

1 For detailed information on how these churches came to Cameroon, see Messina and Van Slagere, Histoire du Christianisme au Cameroun, 27–65.
2 Principally the London Baptist Mission (1841–1884); the Basel Mission (1886–1915); the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (1917–1957); the Presbyterian American Mission (1879–1890). See Tchuindjang, Les expressions Œcuméniques d’une jeune église, 12, 13 and 272.
The Evangelical Church of Cameroon (l’Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun – EEC)
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (l’Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun – EELC)
The Fraternal Lutheran Church (l’Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne – EFL)
The Cameroonian Presbyterian Church (l’Eglise Presbytérienne Camerounaise – EPC)
The African Protestant Church (l’Eglise Protestante Africaine – EPA)
The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC)
The Union of Baptist Churches of Cameroon (l’Union des Eglises Baptistes du Cameroun – UEBC)
The Union of Evangelical Churches of North Cameroon (l’Union des Eglises Evangéliques du Nord-Cameroun – UEENC)

These ten churches are Lutheran, Reformed, Lutheran-Reformed and Baptist and are mainline churches in Cameroon. Alongside them in this category is also the Orthodox Cameroonian Presbyterian Church (l’Eglise Presbytérienne Camerounaise Orthodoxe – EPCO), a church which originated in the Cameroonian Presbyterian Church and is in fact a dissident branch of that church. Anti-Ecumenical and anti-fusion, it left EPC in 1967 during a general assembly in protest against EPC’s entry into the World Council of Churches (WCC).3

All the above churches, except the CBC, are members of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and each of them belongs to organisations related to their theological outlook, such as:

The World Baptist Alliance (WBA)
The North American Baptist Convention (NABC)
The Baptist General Conference (BGC)
The World Team (WT)
The All African Baptist Alliance (AABA)
The Evangelical Lutheran Church Division of Global Mission in America (ELCDGMA)
The Stavanger Missionary Society (SMS)
The Lutheran Church of Canada (LCC)
The American Presbyterian Mission (APM).

Many of them are also members of the WCC; the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). At the national level all these mainline churches are members of the Council of Protestant Churches of Cameroon (CEPCA) which replaced the Federation of Churches and Evangelical Missions of Cameroon (Fédération des Missions et Eglises Evangéliques du Cameroun – FEMEC).4

The Roman Catholic Church

Roman Catholic Missions in Cameroon began in 1890. In 1990, this church celebrated the centenary of it settlement in the country. Although there is no official Cameroonian organisation similar to CEPCA that includes both the Roman Catholic Church and the

---

3 Tchuindjang, Les expressions, 265.
4 The Anglican Church in Cameroon also belongs to CEPCA, but for the purposes of this article it is placed in the ‘other churches’ group.
Protestant Churches, these churches maintain a close relationship with each other, as I shall stress below.\(^5\) It is, however, important to note that the term ‘close relationship’ does not mean that there is no doctrinal problem or division between them. I use it simply to indicate that, in spite of their differences, they have decided in many respects to walk together.

Other Churches

I describe as ‘other churches’, the Anglican, Orthodox, and Pentecostal Churches which came to Cameroon after the missionary period. The Anglican Church was the earliest of this group of churches to be authorised in Cameroon.\(^6\) It currently has a Bishop in Yaoundé, whose diocese is part of the Anglican Province of West Africa. The Orthodox Church is organised on a territorial basis across the whole of Africa and is under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. Present across North Africa, including Egypt, Sudan (Nubia) and Ethiopia from early Christian times, Orthodoxy became known much later in Sub-Saharan Africa. Greek immigrants brought it to Cameroon in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century,\(^7\) and the present Orthodox Archdiocese of Cameroon, with its see in Yaoundé, now also covers Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and the Islands of St Thomas and Principe.\(^8\)

The Pentecostal Churches present in Cameroon today include Assemblies of God, Christian Assemblies, Full Gospel, and the Apostolic Church. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has been present since 1971.\(^9\) There are also the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who came initially from outside and had great difficulty settling in Cameroon: on 7 June, 1949, A.C. Attwood, the representative of the Nigerian section of Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, in Lagos, petitioned the Chief of Police of the Republic of French Cameroon for permission to send missionaries to the country and expressed the hope that they would be granted the same rights as the representatives of the other Christian groups from Europe enjoyed (the right to evangelize and the free distribution of literature). A negative reply was received some five months later, and in fact they were not recognized until 1955, and it was only on June 20, 1956 that the Chief of Police of the Republic gave his agreement for the organization of their first congress.\(^10\)

The Pentecostal movement really settled in Cameroon only after the introduction of the multi-party system: indeed, its emergence was hampered by the Muslim authorities and by the Christian churches already in place. The authorization and development of Pentecostalism in northern Cameroon took place only from 1980 to 1990. In 1982, the Pentecostals of the north put themselves under the protection of a church already recognized by the authorities, ‘the True Church of God of Cameroon’, whose head office was in Lagos, with its Cameroonian headquarters in Kumba, in the Anglophone zone. From 1990, the religious field opened up, as a result of liberalization and the enactment of laws on freedoms. At this time the Evangelical Messianic Church of Cameroon came into

---

\(^{5}\)See pages 358–9 below.

\(^{6}\)See Myazhiom, *Sociétés et rivalités*, 104: ‘The Church of England was to be authorized in 1916, in favour of the Crown of England’.

\(^{7}\)On 14 December, 1950, Father Nicodeme Galliatsotos requested the authorisation of the Orthodox Church in Cameroon, a request which was accepted on 13 January, 1951 (see Myazhiom, *Sociétés et rivalités*, 124).

\(^{8}\)See Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.

\(^{9}\)Myazhiom, *Sociétés et rivalités*, 134.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., 219–28.
being; it was to have great success before being submerged by a flood of new denominations: Apostolic Church, Global Frontiers Church, Assemblies of God, Full Gospel Mission . . .\textsuperscript{11}

In summary it may be said that in Cameroon, the configuration of the Church is as follows: the mainline churches, including both the Protestant Churches that stemmed from the missionary societies, and the Roman Catholic Church, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the ‘other churches’, such as the Orthodox, Anglican\textsuperscript{12} Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

2. Manifestations of ecumenism in mainline Churches

I understand ecumenism as the ‘desire to restore the unity of Christians and the visible action with a view to an eventual restoration’.\textsuperscript{13} Concretely, the method I use will include a record of various mutual efforts made by these different churches\textsuperscript{14} in order to come closer to each other and to promote the unity of Christians beyond different traditions. I shall mention this manifestation of ecumenism both between Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches, and also between the Protestant Churches.

Bilateral relations: Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches

Pastor Emmanuel Tchuindjang defined the relationship between the Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Cameroon as a relationship of courtesy.\textsuperscript{15} In my view, efforts made in that field today may be defined in some ways as going beyond courtesy. For example, during regional and national synods of churches or for the installation of pastors, archbishops, bishops of the archdiocese or the diocese situated in the area where the synod is taking place, priests who are located near the parish and Catholic choirs are invited and even associated in the services and festivities. Mostly, on these occasions, they are called to deliver a message on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. Roman Catholic and Protestant choirs meet each other quite often and sing together during thanksgiving services in Catholic or Protestant parishes. These types of celebrations are frequent and require both the participation of the priest and the pastor. It is also important to mention that, during baptism and marriage celebrations in Protestant Churches, Catholic godmothers and godfathers are accepted.

Catholic and Protestant institutions have respectively organised their own secondary school chaplaincies. However, on neutral ground—for example, in the State secondary schools—the two confessions work together: Tchuindang, a member of EEC, relates that one day when they were celebrating an ecumenical service with Catholics within the

\textsuperscript{11}Lasseur, ‘Cameroun’, 103.
\textsuperscript{12}The Anglican Church has a longstanding presence in Cameroon. Normally, it should be classified among the mainline churches, but its profile has been very low. Although it is a member of CEPCA, it has not been visible in the activities and meetings of churches which are members of the Protestant Council. As I am considering here the manifestation of ecumenism, and particularly the visibility of this ecumenism, I think it right to stress this non-involvement. However, since the beginning of 2008, there has been an Anglican Bishop in Cameroon, which will surely enable a new beginning as far as Anglican relations with other churches are concerned.
\textsuperscript{13}This is a personal translation of ‘le de´sir de restaurer l’unite´ des chre´tiens et l’action en vue de cette e´ventuelle restauration’: Tavard, L’ecumenisme, 3.
\textsuperscript{14}The actions of the churches include also those of individuals: pastors, priests and lay people.
\textsuperscript{15}Tchuindjang, Les expressions, 283–5.
context of a secondary school chaplaincy, the priest declined to wear his soutane because the pastor came without his robe. It was a kind of solidarity with the pastor.\textsuperscript{16} What is important to stress here is that the priest put aside his tradition to create an atmosphere in which students would be enabled to understand the gospel.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is also celebrated annually in Cameroon, as it is in many other countries, and the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches take part. This contributes to the \textit{rapprochement} between Christians of both churches: each Protestant parish organises the event with its Roman Catholic neighbour. Prayers are organised on both sides, with the pastor first moving to the Catholic parish and the priest then coming to the Protestant parish. Both pastor and priest usually bring members of their congregation and choir with them. In addition to church services and prayers, conferences are organised on themes proposed at the international level; sometimes parishes (Roman Catholic and Protestant) decide to work on a theme which is related directly to their own situations, relevant precisely to where they are.

In Cameroon many families have both Roman Catholic and Protestant members. This situation also has direct consequences for the celebration of some events. For example, priest and pastor officiate together at many burial services. This type of activity, especially in the villages, has developed the dialogue between the clergy members of these churches. The consequences of this dialogue are important: it progressively normalises the relations between members of these churches who in the past demonised each other. Though differences are still visible at the doctrinal level, the WCC objective of working together beyond differences is being put into practice.

**Ecumenism in the mainline Protestant Churches**

\textit{FEMEC}/\textit{CEPCA}

Ecumenism in the mainline churches was advanced by the creation in 1968 of FEMEC (Federation of Churches and Evangelical Mission of Cameroon) which put them together. Now known as CEPCA (The Council of Protestant Churches of Cameroon, the purposes of FEMEC\textsuperscript{17} were:

- To reinforce the links of solidarity which exist between various church members in the search of unity.
- To develop activities and coordinate efforts for evangelisation and Christian service.

A number of departments were set up to achieve the goal: these covered the areas of Health; Education and National Representation of Protestant Education; Development; Christian Witness; Women; Social Affairs; Youth, and Communication.

Each department is responsible in its own field of activities for the implementation of the programmes drawn up by CEPCA. CEPCA acts as a platform for meetings of church leaders, not an organisation whose aim is to fuse churches together.\textsuperscript{18} It militates essentially in favour of their \textit{rapprochement}; the result today is visible. In their dialogue these different churches do not stress their theological or doctrinal differences. They know, respect, help each other and interpenetrate in one way or another.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{17}Leaflet: 'Ce qu’il faut savoir sur la FEMEC' (‘What should be known about FEMEC’), 3.
\textsuperscript{18}Tchuindjang, \textit{Les expressions}, 307.
**Synods and church assemblies**

In Cameroon, the general assembly or the synod of a church belonging to CEPCA is always an event affecting the other members of the organisation. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church sent the Archbishop of Yaoundé, André Wouking, as its representative to the 45th General Synod of EEC; the UEBC representative was Pastor Teke Teke, and the PCC representative Pastor Anyambod Emmanuel Anya. Across Cameroon, the Protestant Methodist Church of Benin sent Pastor Marguerite Fassinou, the Protestant Federation of France was represented by Pastor Markhoff, that of Holland by Pastor Johannes Haffkens, and the United Evangelical Mission by Pastor Hendje Toya. All these churches and organisations delivered their messages of encouragement to EEC, especially messages on the unity of churches and the consolidation of ecumenism.¹⁹

The EEC periodical, *L’Appel*, always carries a section headed ‘News from Sister Churches’. In issue no. 7, March-April 2001, this included the following titles: the 50th General Conference of UEBC; the 39th Congress of the Fellowship of Baptist Women of Cameroon; the ordinary Annual Council of FEMEC (pp. 28–33). The paper also carries international news: for example, information on the seminar on the retrocession of schools to the Evangelical Church of Congo (pp. 34–5). These examples are signs which testify that collaboration among Protestant Churches in Cameroon, in Africa and in the wider world is not only theoretical; it is expressed through common actions and very important events in church life.

**At the grass roots level**

CEPCA has units all over the country, and the mainline Protestant Churches are organised in such a way that the structure which brings them together is represented in each province. Its objectives are thus transmitted and assured across the whole area. Each province has its own Council of Protestant Churches, where matters are organised in the same way. Here the official organisation of the dialogue and the private or individual initiatives come together.

**Official planning within CEPCA**

Church celebration is an important area of activity within the CEPCA Churches. There are regular activities such as the exchange of pulpits: on one Sunday in the year, pastors are transferred from their own parish to another one in a different church. Thus, the pastor of the Protestant Church of Africa may be transferred to a parish of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. All the pastors are systematically invited to leave their usual place to discover another tradition, where they are fully the pastor of the day. The text of the sermon is chosen by CEPCA so that the same message is extended to all the churches. The great advantage of this exchange of pulpits is that it is good training for Christians who are called to welcome a pastor who does not officiate in the way they are used to. Initially, this practice met with a lot of problems, such as the exclusion of female pastors CEPCA had sent to a church where women are not ordained. Today the situation has considerably moved on: many of the churches have sent women to theological institutions and even if

¹⁹For the text of the messages of these representatives of sister churches and organisations to the General Synod of EEC, see *L’Appel*, no. 7, March-April 2001: 7–11.
they have not yet decided to ordain them, they now receive female pastors from other churches for the church service.

Reformation Week is celebrated annually in the Protestant Churches, and CEPCA organises this event all across the country. In each province, the week is full of activities: conferences, prayers, films and concerts in a chosen parish in the town. On Reformation Sunday, a very big service with the Lord’s Supper brings together all the churches in all the provinces. The President of CEPCA and his colleagues choose a different province every year, where they take part in the closing ceremony.

Each church has its own hospitals and schools, and chaplaincy work there is done by their respective pastors. But at the State level, there is a common structure in which CEPCA organises pastors from all its member churches to work together in prisons, in State hospitals and schools. Each year medicines and food are offered to the hospitals, prisons, orphanages and leper-houses, but this is organised by CEPCA and not by individual churches. On such occasions there is always an ecumenical service.

Individual initiatives carried out by pastors and other church members in the parishes

All over the country, pastors in these various churches are free to organise services with a pastor of a different church: we are accustomed to joint celebrations at baptisms, marriages, anniversaries and other occasions, on the initiative of individual pastors and church members. Pastors of EEC, where baptism is by aspersion are invited to UEBC where they practice baptism by immersion; and when invited EEC pastors baptise by immersion although they do not do this in their own church. This is similarly the case when a Baptist pastor within CEPCA is invited to baptise in EEC. It is also quite normal to see a pastor of a particular church calling his friend from another church to replace him in his parish when he is not available. Many pastors have been so involved in this way of functioning that they have brought traditions from other churches into their own churches.

Theological institutions

In CEPCA, each member of the mainline churches has its own theological seminary, and one of the seminaries, the Institute of Protestant Theology in Ndoungue, founded by EEC and UEBC, belongs jointly to those two churches. In addition to these institutions, the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Yaoundé brings together all the mainline churches in Cameroon. It is an international and ecumenical faculty which is ‘at the service of the entire evangelical Christianity of the countries of francophone West Africa, between Senegal and Congo. Because its aim is to serve all the churches, it is not tied to a particular church’, and its board of directors is made up of one representative per member church or per founder. The manifestation of ecumenism at the Faculty of Protestant Theology can be observed between Protestant families, between Protestants and Catholics and between Christians and Muslims.

Since its creation, the Faculty has trained Reformed, Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, Kimbanguists and Adventists. It has also received students from Switzerland, Germany and France. It is thus a place where students from various religious confessions are trained. Professors are also from various Protestant and

---

20 Statutes of the Faculty of Protestant Theology, 1.
21 Ibid., 2.
Catholic areas, and the lectures have the advantage of opening the mind of future pastors in such a way that they can understand the different confessional positions and work in favour of dialogue in the field. Church services at the Faculty are ecumenical and are based on the affirmation that no particular church tradition has a special privilege: it is a veritable place of learning, mutual understanding and respect. Students who are trained in Yaoundé are the pillar of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. Additionally, at the level of different theological institutions, there is a meeting of Deans to discuss programmes.

The first student to register on the PhD programme in the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Yaoundé was a Roman Catholic. As far as teaching is concerned, there are exchanges between the Protestant and Catholic Faculties: Protestant lecturers are invited to the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Central Africa, to the Saint Cyprian Institute in Ngoya, to lecture, to deliver conferences and to participate in the defence of theses and dissertations. At the same time, lecturers from these Catholic institutions are invited to the Faculty of Protestant Theology for the same reasons, and before the building of Protestant structures, the spiritual retreats of the Protestant Faculty took place in the Catholic centres and monastery. There have also been examples of interchange between Protestants and Muslims. In the academic year 1982–1983, the Faculty of Protestant Theology received a Muslim student as well as lectures on Islam; interdisciplinary weeks were very often the occasion for the Faculty to invite Muslims to discussions.

At the literary level, Catholics publish in Flambeau, the journal of the Protestant Faculty, as Protestants also do in the Catholic journals. Nowadays, there is a partnership between students from both families of institution: once a year, and alternately, students move from one place to another on the occasion of a friendship day, during which a lecture is given by a professor of the host institution, followed by discussion and agape. Nor is ecumenism limited to the theological institutions: in 1958, in Libamba, the CEPCA Churches founded a secondary college, the Libamba Inter-Church College. Ecumenical dialogue also takes place within the framework of book publication, through a common publishing house.

In 1962, with the help of the Netherlands and Germany, many Protestant Churches of the francophone countries of Africa founded a publishing house, the Centre de Littérature Evangélique (Centre of Evangelical Literature). Its aim is to serve the God revealed in Jesus Christ by encouraging the production and diffusion of Christian literature in francophone Africa. It is an ecumenical publishing house, and its board of directors is drawn from churches in Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Yaoundé, CEPCA and the Netherlands. Today it publishes the work of writers from all the denominations.

At this stage of reflection, it is clear that ecumenism is officially visible specifically among the category of mainline churches. Between them – both Protestants and Catholics – there is a real will to walk together, in spite of difficulties encountered practically in the field. Ecumenism is still an ideal to perfect. Signs are visible and the

---

22 See Keller, Franck, ‘Jean Keller de 1900 à 1993’.
23 It is important to note that, as far as ecumenism in the field is concerned, doctrinal differences and differences which are related to church traditions sometimes raise problems. For example, among CEPCA churches, only three ordain women as pastors; the majority have not yet done so. Practically, when pulpits are exchanged, female pastors are excluded by some of the CEPCA
hope of mutual acceptance will be perfectly realised when people understand that it is not a matter of destroying differences, but of walking together with those differences which are the multiple faces of God.

The manifestation of ecumenism is official between the mainline churches, but there is another category of churches with which relations are rather strained. Collaboration with the Seventh Day Adventists is limited, though, in relation to secondary school chaplaincies, they work with the department of CEPCA responsible for this, and, at the training level, there is also contact with some of their students at the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Yaoundé. The relationship with the Pentecostal Churches is very difficult. It is characterised by two main attitudes: the demonisation of the mainline churches by the Pentecostals, and the sectarianisation of the Pentecostals by the mainline churches.

3. Mainline and Pentecostal Churches in Cameroon

The Pentecostal churches of Cameroon are recognised by the government, but are not taken into consideration by the mainline churches, which continue to interact among themselves, without including the Pentecostal churches in their common activities. It is also clear that, for their part, Pentecostal churches have made statements which point to the fact that they cannot work together with mainline churches. In fact the situation is characterised by mutual accusation.

Officially, one of the accusations that Pentecostal churches make against mainline churches concerns baptism. The problem is at two levels: on the one hand, the division is not related to the meaning of baptism, but to the form, since, for Pentecostal churches, the real Baptism is by immersion, where the candidate is totally submerged. On the other hand, Pentecostal churches are opposed to infant baptism, which is practiced by many mainline churches. It is important to note that many of the mainline churches do practice baptism by immersion, especially the Baptist Churches, which are also opposed to infant baptism. But curiously the latter also do not relate well with the Pentecostal churches with which they share the same form and define the same age for baptism.

The mainline church members of CEPCA are members of the WCC and have ratified the WCC document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM). They are more open and can integrate all forms of baptism: by aspersion as well as by immersion. They also recognise both adult and infant baptism. The example of EEC is important: in its liturgy which was authorised in 2001, and in its constitution, this recognition is pointed out.

In my view, the continuing difficulty of the dialogue between mainline and Pentecostal Churches in Cameroon today is that, these latter churches are not always open enough to recognise that there are diversities in the House of God. At the same time, mainline churches are not open to studying the Pentecostal Churches, to get to know and understand them. It may be irritating for the mainline churches to admit that these Pentecostal churches point out the weaknesses of mainline churches, and in Cameroon, we hear statements such as: ‘Pentecostal churches are the result of mainlines churches’ unpaid bills’.

With the Roman Catholic Church, there are also problems at the moment of the Holy Communion; however, if the priest refuses to take part in the Holy Communion in a Protestant Church or vice versa, this situation does not prevent them from being present and showing to church members the Christian liberty which consists in being together even if one does not share the same ecclesial practices.
In Cameroon in the 1990s, we lived in open rivalry between these two families of churches as far as theological training is concerned. Mainline churches are organised in such a way that their ministers can be trained for many years in scholarly exegesis and critical, historical methods of reading the Bible. For the Pentecostals at that time, training was not important because they saw God as the one leading the preacher. This declaration was made by one of the senior leaders of a Pentecostal Church in Yaoundé during a conference organised in the EEC parish of Nlongkak where I was invited as a student in Theology in 1998. This leader, who was the third lecturer began his talk by comparing his way of lecturing with that of the two who had spoken before him. ‘See’, he said, ‘I have not written something like these two university professors’ (here he pointed at Kâ Mana and Kangue Ewane who are respectively Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroonian authors) ‘and I don’t need to be trained, because God is the one who gives me what I am going to tell you today’. The reality is that he did not speak on the theme of the conference and people were disappointed: the conference was a big event in the country, and in the parish in which it took place EEC is the biggest Protestant Church and one of the founder members of CEPCA.

A second incident in Cameroon is related to the same man; after one of his declarations of a similar kind on the national television (Cameroon Radio and Television [CRTV]), one of the best Christian broadcasting programmes Lumière des étoiles was suspended and remains so to this day. Nowadays, however, such statements on training have begun to change, and we can see that Pentecostal Churches have created their own theological institutions, and some of them are progressively opening up. At the Theological Faculty of the Protestant University of Central Africa, which is ecumenical and international, we sometimes have a few Pentecostal students, but their reading of the Bible is on a fundamentalist basis, which is not conducive to ecumenism.

One thing is true in the statement of the Pentecostal pastor I quoted: The Holy Spirit is the one who leads the reading of the Bible. The essential point to raise here is that one of the Pentecostal Churches’ accusations is that mainline churches do not take into account the importance of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This is in some way true, because the Holy Spirit is the one who renews the Church, and mainline churches sometimes have the appearance of old churches. We need, however, to be trained in the Bible because we need to understand the biblical text before interpreting it for other Christians. Reading the Bible in a scholarly manner does not destroy faith, rather it is an effort to understand an ancient text – which at the beginning was addressed to other people – before interpreting it for the Christian today and in a specific context.

1990 is a very important date for Cameroon: it is the year in which people demonstrated openly against the fact that only one political party had been ruling the country since independence in 1960. The result of this situation was the authorisation and creation of many opposition parties, and the liberalisation of religions which are now regarded more as associations (Cameroon is a secular State). As far as religions are concerned, the national television and the national broadcasting radio station provide space for them. Some members of the Christian clergy have used this opportunity to stress what, according to them, is wrong with other confessions: mainline churches against Pentecostal churches. So we participate, on television and radio in the kind of conflict which was manifested in concrete form in the declaration I mention below of the Pentecostal pastor at the 1998 ecumenical gathering.

I stress this point because the difficulties that we have in the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Yaoundé with the few students from Pentecostal and Adventist Churches is mostly in relation to the course on exegesis.

I am thinking here of students who focus on the details of an event, for example, the Resurrection, to the exclusion of its meaning and symbolism, and who take an exclusively literal view.
Officially, there is no dialogue between mainline and Pentecostal Churches in Cameroon, but in reality, things are different: in fact, in all families, there are people who belong to these two categories of churches. We define the family here in its extended and nuclear sense. Cameroonian are religious and everyone is also defined according to their belonging to a Christian Church, even when they are a follower of traditional religion. The result is that, in a particular household, members of the same family who are from mainline and from Pentecostal Churches are called to live together, to interact in all the situations of life. In other words, there are even religious events which bring them together. Occasions like birth, marriage, death and baptism in the Cameroonian context are related to church, but are also family events. Accordingly, when a member of a family is getting married, for example, all the members come together, irrespective of their religious confession. This is why it is easy to members of mainline churches attending church services in Pentecostal churches and vice versa.

This established fact leads me to say that, at the grass roots level, at the family level, conditions of ecumenism are settled naturally, because people are defined according to their belonging to a community: the family is very important here, because a person is identified first according to his position in a family. The struggle for the preservation of the family is so important and so strong that many members are able to transcend their confessional differences, as far as Christianity is concerned, in order to live and to remain together. Officially the division of the two families of churches in Cameroon is still a live issue, but in reality, ecumenism is visible among Christians even if tensions sometimes occur among them.

**The New Testament and Ecumenism: Acts 10.1—1.18**

Acts 10.1—11.18 is an answer to Jesus’ word to his disciples, that they would be his ‘witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1.8). In this text of Luke, the carrying out of this mandate creates links between separated houses, particularly the house of Simon the tanner, a leader at the beginning (10.6,17—18.32;11.11; cf. 9.32) and that of Cornelius the pagan (10.2,22,30;11.12–13). The story took place between the house of a Gentile (Cornelius) and that of a Jew (Simon, where Peter was staying temporarily). Peter offers hospitality to Cornelius through his messengers (10.23), and Cornelius does the same to Peter (10.48). In this reciprocal exchange of hospitality, Simon is Peter’s host (10.6,17,18,32; 11.11); Peter and Simon are the hosts of the messengers of Cornelius (10.17–23a), and Cornelius and his household are the hosts of Peter and his companions (10.24–48;11.3,12–17). In this way, the house of Cornelius, like Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2.1–42) is the place where the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues are experienced; it is the place where, as in Jerusalem, Cornelius and his family are baptised and are legitimised as members of a group of people belonging to the community of those who are joined or brought together by the Holy Spirit (10.48;11.14–17). The house of Cornelius symbolised the pagan or the Gentile world. I think that here, the world of Gentiles, like the world of Jews, experienced the Holy Spirit and consequently entered the new Covenant of God’s people. Now Jews and Gentiles form a unique people in Jesus Christ, the community of persons who are saved by faith without ethnic distinctions.

The rapprochement of Cornelius and Peter is the breaking of the identity of the ‘People of God’, because what Peter is called to infringe—‘In it were all kind of animals, reptiles, and wild birds. A voice said to him, “Get up Peter; kill and eat”’ (10.12–13)—is
the essence of the identity of the ‘people of God’, his capacity to communicate with God: kashrut or the distinction between the pure and the impure. This breaking of kashrut is the result of many interventions through which God defined a new way of communicating with Him. This new way—the violation of kashrut which includes the consideration of others—does not destroy the identity of Jews. The kashrut must be redefined by removing considerations that drive away those who are different. The purpose of the intervention of God in this story of Peter and Cornelius is to eliminate in Jewish traditions things that prevent them from recognising the dignity of the Gentiles. So the most important thing in a tradition can be put aside if it degrades the human being.

Acts 10.1—11.18 is the story of the breaking of geographical and ethnic barriers. Divisions that exist among different Christian confessions are due to traditions that people have developed over time and which today are part of their identity. At a certain time, these traditions function metaphorically like kashrut, in that they create separations and prejudices and are not able to promote the flourishing of all Christians. By asking Peter to kill and eat impure animals, the Holy Spirit, whose role is to unite (Acts 2.42–47; 4.32–35) invites Christians to transcend their structural differences and to work with the common aim of promoting the Kingdom of God, where they are called, without confessional distinction, to meet for the banquet of the Lamb. Border crossing was intrinsic to the New Testament understanding of the faith and it is necessary for ecumenical life today.

Toward the building of the Church of God

Nowadays in Cameroon it is difficult to find a family in which all the members can be defined as believers of exclusively one religion or confession. Usually, we have representatives of the main religions, such as Christians and Muslims; members of the mainline churches and of the Pentecostal Churches. Naturally, these members of a family who belong to different religious confessions are called to live in harmony together. They live together in a peaceful way and collaborate when problems related to their religious differences are not stressed, and especially when they pay each other respect. However, it usually happens that some family problems originate from religious traditions, particularly between mainline and Pentecostal Churches: religious differences can be the source of family problems because churches or members of the clergy orientate consciously or unconsciously the way people should live by stigmatising others. I think that it is the responsibility of the Church to encourage persons who live in the same area to live together in harmony, even if they are not from the same church. This is the reason why I agree with André Birmé when he says that

ecumenism at the local level depends to a large extent on pastors and priests, on those who are in charge of the ecclesial ministry (…) Independently of our feeling, and taking into account empirical facts, it is clearly stressed that ecumenical work can be possible in many places only with the help of the initiatives, the efforts and the engagement of the local clergy.28

27. State of being kosher.
28. ‘œcumenisme au plan local dépend dans une très large mesure des pasteurs et des prêtres, de ceux qui ont en charge le ministère ecclésial. (…) Que l’on s’en réjouisse ou pas, il ressort clairement de l’analyse des données empiriques que le travail ecuménique n’est possible en de nombreux endroits que grâce aux initiatives, efforts et engagements du clergé local …’. Birmé, ‘Les efforts œcuméniques au niveau local’, 94.
Taking into consideration the fact that in the same family, Christians of the mainline churches and those of Pentecostal Churches are naturally inclined to live together, it is up to the church and the clergy to take the initiative and to consider these new churches which work in the same direction: building the Kingdom of God on earth. The responsibilities of the mainline churches include also the encouragement of research on Pentecostal Churches in order to understand them and to be open to them. The Body of Christ can be built up again only in such conditions because: ‘God treats everyone on the same basis’ (Acts 10.34b).

Today in Cameroon, some Pentecostal churches – The Full Gospel Mission and the Cameroonian Evangelical Church Mission – have applied to be members of the Council of Protestant Churches of Cameroon. Their applications are still pending, waiting for some members of the mainline churches to propose them for membership.

**Conclusion: making visible the various faces of God in the Churches of Cameroon**

I would like to conclude this article by joining Maurice Carrez who, in his discussion on Protestant identity and Christian identity said that the resolution of disputes which at one time put Protestants of various confessions into opposition against each other went through the revelation of the existence of a legitimate plurality. In the policy statement ‘Towards a Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) of the World Council of Churches’, some important aspects of the CUV are stressed: among them, the emphasis on the fellowship of churches and the distinction between belonging and participation on the one hand, and membership and representation on the other hand. In Cameroon, this consideration is a call to mainline churches which are very well organised, to work with a view to integrating Pentecostal and other Christian confessions into the Protestant Council of Churches. This can be extended to the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, this last cannot be a member of the Protestant Council of Churches, but Catholics and Protestants are called to think in a way that builds up a visible unity of the various faces of God in Cameroon: this means to create an official and visible space which includes Protestants, Catholics, Pentecostals and the other Christian Churches because ‘the fellowship is not complete as long as the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches are not part of it’.

**Notes on contributor**

Priscille Djomhoué is a pastor of the Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun and Professor of Greek and New Testament Studies at the Protestant University of Central Africa in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Since 2005, she has been an official member of the Joint Commission of Dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and, since 2007, a member of the symposium of biblical scholars on the statement on Justification. She is also a member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians.

**Bibliography**


---

29 See Conseil des Eglises Protestants du Cameroun, 1.
31 WCC, ‘Background Document on the Re-Configuration of the Movement’. 


Statutes of the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Yaounde, 1992: 1.


