

**WOMEN IN THE CHURCH IN AFRICA, CONTINUITY IN
CHANGE: THE CASE OF THE EVANGELICAL
LUTHERAN CHURCH OF CAMEROON FROM ITS
INCEPTION TO PRESENT DAY, (1923-1999)**

By

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Abstract

The thesis aims at bringing to light the immense, yet ignored, contribution of women to the establishment of Christianity in Northern Cameroon.

Northern Cameroon has a quite different historical development from the south of the country, with a significant difference being the presence of Islam in the north, which dates back to the beginning of the eleventh century. However, the situation of women in the church and society in Northern Cameroon today is no different from that experienced by women throughout centuries of male domination and, indeed, still experience in most of the traditions and cultures of the African continent.

In highly patriarchal societies, like the African traditional societies of Northern Cameroon, in which Islam and Christianity have increasingly silenced and isolated women, it is very difficult to see clearly the contribution of women in social, economic and cultural domains. In Northern Cameroon, as elsewhere, women's contribution to the country's development, as well as their involvement in planting Christianity has not been, and still is not being, properly acknowledged. Everything achieved for the advancement of the well being of society, even if achieved by a woman, has been attributed to a man. Yet, as my interest in the historical development of Christianity in Northern Cameroon grew, I realised that women were at the forefront of bringing Christianity into the region, and remain the main contributors in its spread throughout the region, even though official records do not mention them as the main contributors. Hence, this oral history study has made it possible to bring to light the role of not only the women missionaries, but also the African women in a major area of public life, the church, when their contribution to it has been denied for years.

Therefore, the thesis is based mostly on oral interviews since nothing is written about the work of women in the church in Northern Cameroon, apart from the reports by missionaries for their mission societies. Hence, the aim of this study has been to explore both the past and the present of Christianity in Northern Cameroon in order to make known to a wider public the extent of women's contribution to social, cultural, and religious change.

Thirty-five people were interviewed for this study in three different countries, Cameroon, Norway and South Africa. Twenty-seven interviewees were women, eight were men and interviews were conducted in French, *Fulfulde* (an African language spoken by most people in Northern Cameroon), and in English. Fifteen interviewees either served or were still serving as missionaries in Cameroon, the remaining twenty were non-missionary Cameroon nationals, except for one person from Madagascar.

Most of the women who contributed to this study were involved in the women's movement in the Lutheran church in Cameroon. Apart from a group of regional leaders of the Women For Christ (WFC), who were interviewed together during their annual meeting in 1999 in Ngaoundéré, all interviews took place individually, and interviews were conducted in the form of free conversation so as not to limit the informant by a question and answer format.

Despite telling their stories to myself, a man, the women were enthusiastic and openly willing to relate their experiences as church members, as well as their thoughts about how they believed relations between men and women should be. An explanation for this attitude is that most of the women knew me as one of the very few Lutheran ministers in the church

in Cameroon with a concern for the position of women in both church and society.

The thesis concludes with proposals in favour of the women's full participation in the ministries of the church, which include the ordained ministry, and some suggestions on the necessary mutual collaboration between men and women in social, economic and political domains in Northern Cameroon.

Acknowledgements

A thesis is never just the work of an individual although it is the responsibility of he or she who first undertakes such a journey in the field of academic research.

As I present this work which results from my first steps in the highly complex, controversial, and constantly changing domain of research in human sciences to the public, I would like to thank a number of individuals and institutions without the assistance of whom this research would have not been completed, the mistakes and shortcomings in this work are naturally mine.

First and above all, I would like to express a heartfelt thankfulness to Professor Philippe Denis, the supervisor of this thesis who, thanks to his high qualities of social scientist and researcher, and his permanent availability, encouraged me by his advice and constructive remarks throughout the writing process of this thesis.

I am grateful for the manifold help I received from the lecturers and staff members of the School of Theology, namely Professors Jonathan Draper,

Gerald West, Neville Richardson and Isabel Phiri, Dr. Anthony Balcom, and Mrs. Lindiwe Mhlaba.

A very especial thank you to Dr. Beverly Haddad whose help in the early stage of the confection of the proposal of this work, by indicating to me appropriate documents on women studies and by editing the first draft of the proposal, speeded up my registration as full PhD student in 1999, and to Dr. Andrea Froechtling for her readiness to give scholarly comments on each and every single chapter of a work done on women by a man.

My thankfulness goes also to all my friends of the History of Christianity and the Postgraduate seminars of the School of Theology who, thoroughly discussed and commented on my chapters throughout, either during our various sessions of the postgraduate meetings or through email messages.

I would have been ungrateful if I failed to acknowledge how important the financial aid and the spiritual support of my home church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC) and its partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), sponsor of my studies, were throughout the process of writing this thesis. For me, to say thank you to the institutions is no other thing than expressing my gratitude to the people who, legally acted on behalf of these institutions. In this sense, my thankfulness goes to the following individuals who, although they acted according to the rules of the above-mentioned institutions to grant me support in my studies, remain personal friends through the encouragement of whom I was enabled to undertake these doctoral studies.

May the Rev. Dr. Thomas Nyiwé, President of the EELC, Rev. Dr. Thomas Christensen, a missionary from the ELCA and lecturer at the Lutheran Theological Institute of Meiganga in Cameroon, Rev. Y.

Franklin Ishida, Director for International Scholarships and Inter Communications of the ELCA, Ms. Susan Laeder, Coordinator for International Scholarships Team of the ELCA, find here my sincere and friendly gratitude.

Last but not least, I also want to express my gratitude to the English editor of this thesis, Mrs. Gail Fehrsen, for her professional and well done work, and my wife Marie Claire Frouisou, my children Nathalie F. Lassang, Emmanuel Lawa, Ezéchiél N. Bayangsou, and Antoine B. Mamé, for being supportive to me during all these years of struggle to complete this work.

Dedication

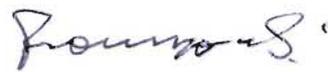
To my mother, Célestine Lassang, my wife Marie Claire Frouisou, and my daughter, Nathalie Fida Lassang, for what they all represent for me, as far as my awakening on women's issue in church as well as in society is concerned.

To the women of Africa and of the world at large who strive to free themselves from unjust religious and social systems for standing up against whatever denies them all that they are indeed, I dedicate this thesis.

Declaration

I, undersigned, declare that the thesis entitled, "*Women in the Church in Africa, Continuity in Change: The Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, (1924/5-1999)*", is my own work, and that all sources used or quoted here have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Name: Frouisou Samuel



Date: 28th March, 2003

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ALC: American Lutheran Church

BP: Boite Postale

CEPER: Centre d'Édition et de Production pour les Etudes et la
Recherche

CCAWT: Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

CLE: Centre de Littérature Evangélique

Cf.: Confere

CNRS: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

I Cor.: First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

CPDM: Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement

EEC: Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun

EAAT: Ecumenical Association of African Theologians

EATWOT: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

EELC: Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun

EFLC: Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne du Cameroun

EHES: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ENAM: Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature

DRG: Democratic Republic of Germany

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation

F.: Female

FEMEC: Fédération des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques du Cameroun

FLM: Fédération Luthérienne Mondiale

FPC: Femmes Pour Christ

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IEELC: Imprimerie de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun

LCA: Lutheran Church in America

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

M.: Male

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NMS: Norske Misjonsselskap or Norwegian Missionary Society in English

ORSTOM: Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-Mer

SM: Sudan Mission

SM/ELCA: Sudan Mission/Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

UN: United Nations

USA: United States of America

WCC: World Council of Churches

WFC: Women For Christ

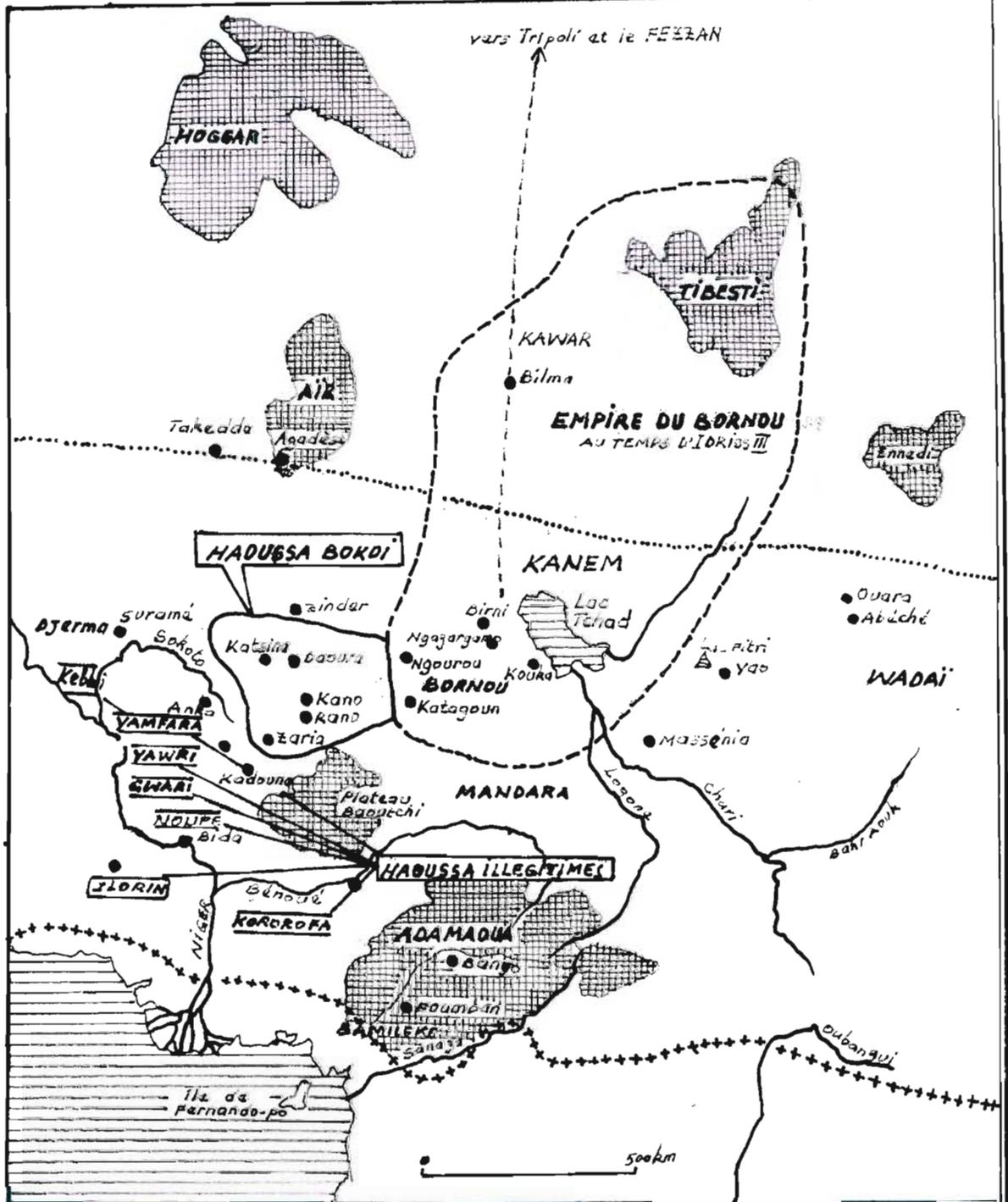
WYWCA: World Young Women Christian Association

Geographical Maps

LE SOUDAN CENTRAL DU XII^{ème} AU XIX^{ème} S.

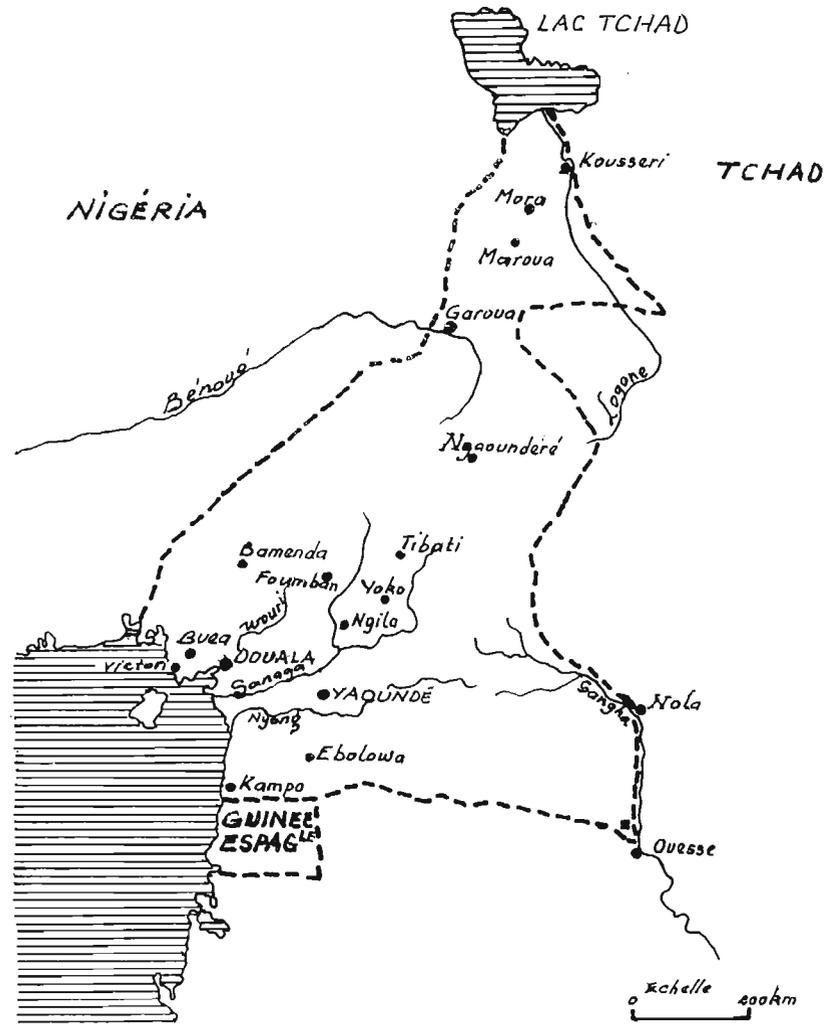
LEGENDE

- > Routes Sahariennes
- +++++ Limite Nord de la Forêt dense.
- Limite sud du Desert
- ▨ Régions montagneuses

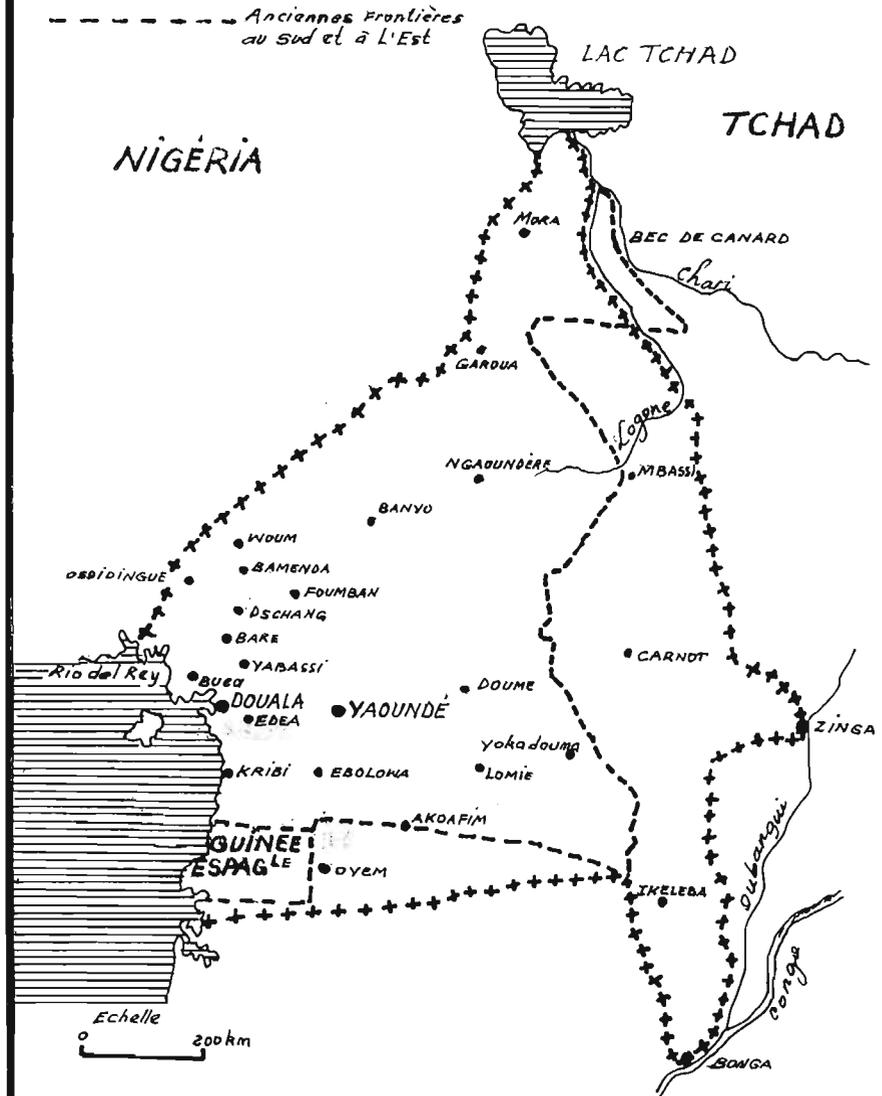


Source: J. KI-ZERBO, HISTOIRE DE L'AFRIQUE NOIRE, MATISK, PARIS, 1978.

LE KAMERUN AVANT 1911



LE CAMEROUN APRÈS 1911



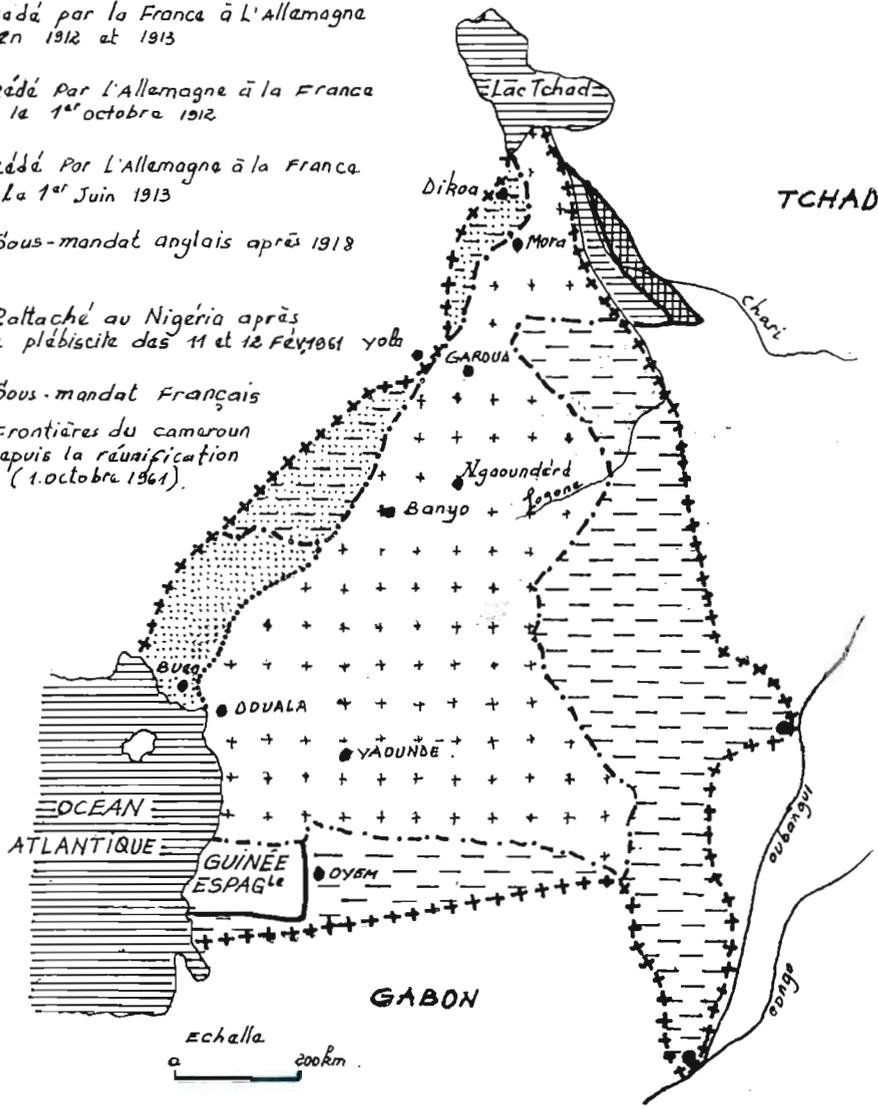
E. Houyanné

SOURCE: Gélbert MVENG, Histoire du Cameroun, CEPER, YAOUNDÉ, 1978.

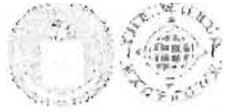
EVOLUTION DES FRONTIÈRES DU CAMEROUN

LEGENDE

-  Cédé par la France à l'Allemagne en 1912 et 1913
-  Cédé par l'Allemagne à la France le 1^{er} octobre 1912
-  Cédé par l'Allemagne à la France le 1^{er} Juin 1913
-  Sous-mandat anglais après 1918
-  Rattaché au Nigeria après la plébiscite des 11 et 12 Février 1961
-  Sous-mandat Français
-  Frontières du Cameroun depuis la réunification (1. octobre 1961).

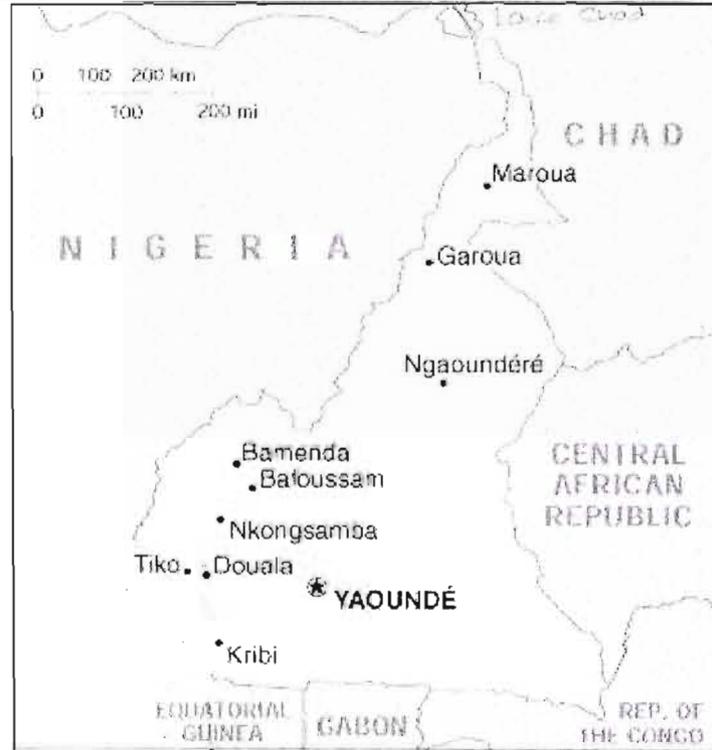


Source : E. MVENG, *Histoire du Cameroun*, CEPER, Yaoundé, 1978.



Cameroon

Introduction Geography People Government Economy Communications Transportation Military Transnational Issues



Map 5

Cameroon

Introduction

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Background: The former French Cameroon and part of British Cameroon merged in 1961 to form the present country. Cameroon has generally enjoyed stability, which has permitted the development of agriculture, roads, and railways, as well as a petroleum industry. Despite movement toward democratic reform, political power remains firmly in the hands of an ethnic oligarchy.

Cameroon

Geography

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Location: Western Africa, bordering the Bight of Biafra, between Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria

Prologue

The prospective reader of this work could ask him or herself what could lead a man, brought up in a society dominated by men, converted to Christianity and trained as a church minister in a Christian tradition where the leadership of the women is largely neglected, if recognized at all, to write a doctoral thesis on the importance of the role of women in the church in Africa.

The reflection I conduct in this thesis is the result of the very long process of my personal awareness of what women represented and continue to represent in my life as a son, a husband and father and a minister of the church, which for me, is a community of equals.

1. My Experience of Women as a Son

As a first-born child to my parents, I grew up without any idea of how important my mother was for the well being of my father's household. As other fathers and husbands in the village, my father along with my mother farmed and went fishing in order to provide for our needs in food.

The first time I realized that my mother was not only the person who did everything in her power to provide for our physical needs, but she was also and above all, our educator and our defender against all the evil forces that threatened our lives was when one of my younger brother became sick and eventually died of that illness. I was then eleven years old. During the period of my brother's sickness, my mother tried everything for his healing. She consulted all the traditional healers she knew in the villages around but did not receive any help. Finally she took my brother to the Roman Catholic priest, the only person in the village who had a car to help her transport her sick son to the hospital in a town situated about fifty

kilometres away from our village. The priest agreed to take them to the hospital and I was the only person who could go accompany them, since my father refused to go despite the insistence of the other members of the family. On the day after our arrival at the hospital, my brother died and my mother and I had to carry his body back to the village. He was only three. All the way back from the hospital to the village with his corpse, my mother did not stop weeping. From time to time, I joined her in the weeping. When we finally reached our village with the body, all the villagers gathered at our home for mourning. I could hear some women as well as some men commending my mother for her courage, love and dedication to her children and the criticism they voiced against my father who, according to them, did not play his role as a father of his family, when he refused to take his son first to the traditional healers and thereafter to the hospital.

From this time on, I started to admire the qualities revealed to us by the woman who was our mother. I also began to understand more clearly the great role my mother played, and still continues to play, in our lives as a family. The stories of a life relationship between a mother and a son told by the well-known Senegalese writer and novelist, Camara Laye, in his *L'enfant noir*,¹ became for me a life reality that is worth making known to the others.

After the event of my brother's death, I became aware of the fact that my mother was the most important person in my life. Was it because she cooked the food for us, since cooking the food was said to be the business of the women first? Without any doubt, this could be one of the reasons. This, however, was not all. It was also that my mother was very conscious of the fact that she should bring us up in such a way that we might behave

¹ See Décote G. and Rachmuhl, (eds.), *Une oeuvre, L'enfant noir de Camara Laye*, chapter 5 on "une femme respectée", Hatier, Paris, 1992, pp. 35-42.

well in society and be successful in all we did. She gave all she could: her time, her energy, her knowledge, everything that she could to provide us with an education, so that we may become respectful and respected men and women of our society.

Even though she had never attended any school, my mother was the first person in the family to support my registration at school when for the first time a primary school was established in our village in 1971. My father did not want me to enroll in the school because he wanted me to help him with the farming and in looking after the sheep and the cattle.

Again in 1978 during my baptism, my mother decided to start going to church with my brothers and sisters in support of what she then referred to as the new religion of her son, in order to continue to be a united family. At the same time, my father was opposed to her following me and taking the other children to church. Her conversion to the Christian faith, her dedication to learn and to serve the needs of the church, as well as her life of prayer later on impacted my own Christian life. And today, I can say without any hesitation that my mother's life has served and continues to serve as a life model for anything that I do, be it in my life as a husband, a father or a minister of the church.

2. My Experience of Women as a Husband and a Father

I became a husband and a father in 1987 and 1988 respectively. Before I married my wife, Marie Claire, in 1987 during my first year in theological training, I had been engaged for years to a girl who belonged to the same ethnic group² as I did. That girl was only two years old when one of my nephews, the son of my father's cousin with whom I went to school

² My wife Marie Claire is not only from a different ethnic group than I, but she comes from a region, the region of littoral on the south coast of Cameroon, which was not even known to the people of my region in the far north before we married.

together, proposed me as her future husband. From that time on, everything was arranged between the two families in order to work out our future union. However, in 1986 when I was preparing myself to start my theological training in order to become a pastor, the one who was supposed to become my wife was only fourteen years old and could not decide whether or not she wanted to become a pastor's wife. At the same time, her father who had been the strongest supporter of our plan to unite in marriage became Muslim in 1984 and thereafter, started to oppose the idea of seeing his daughter marrying a pastor. He openly stated that for a Muslim to give his daughter in marriage to a non-Muslim husband is a great disgrace. Therefore, I was simply asked by her father, the one who had wanted me to marry his daughter, to leave her alone if I still wanted to continue with my Christian faith and my plan to become a pastor of the church. This is how my engagement to my fiancée, whom I was supposed to marry at the end of my theological training, ended.

The Church, however, wanted a guarantee that I would not remain single, before agreeing to send me to study theology. The Church required candidates for ordination to the pastoral ministry to be married men. So an engagement to be married was the prerequisite laid down for entry into theological training.

I remember having shared this concern with Marie Claire shortly after having been disappointed by my fiancée's father. At that time, Marie Claire was still a student at our church high school where I had completed my secondary school and was working as an accountant. I told Marie Claire of my fear of losing my opportunity to enter theological studies because of my inability to find the person I would marry between completion of my studies and my ordination. Marie Claire encouraged me to not abandon my dream of becoming a pastor. When, however, I asked

her whether she would become my fiancée so that I could present her to the Church leaders who wanted to see my fiancée before endorsing my enrolment in theology, she immediately replied in the negative, because her father would never allow her to marry, and even if he did one day, it would never be to a man from that far, a man from the far north of Cameroon.

To tell the full story of my marriage to Marie Claire, which had a real impact on my vocation to become a pastor in the Lutheran church, may be too long and unnecessary for the reader. It, however, worth noting that a year after I ended my engagement with my fiancée, I was nevertheless admitted to theological studies and finally married Marie Claire from whom I had required support in prayer when I was going through the difficult time of making the decision as to whether or not I should go for theological training in order to become a pastor.

The advent of my marriage with Marie Claire in 1987 constituted one of the moments in my life when I became conscious of the crucial role a woman can play in the life of an individual. Soon after our marriage, my prayer to God was that He might give us a girl as our first child if our marriage was to be blessed with the gift of children.

On January 6, 1988, Nathalie was born and she is now our first-born child followed by three boys with whom God blessed our family. Nathalie is the pride of the whole family not because we do not love her three brothers, but because we see her as special gift from God to us. Personally, I see Nathalie as God's answer to my prayer.

The decision to ask God to give me a girl as the first child came after all the struggle I went through before I eventually became a husband, a father

and a pastor thanks to the presence of women, like my mother and wife, in my life.

3. My Experience of Women as a Pastor in a Church Dominated by a Male Leadership

As a student in theology and future pastor of a church where women are denied any opportunity to serve in a leadership position, the starting point of my conversion of attitude towards women's role in the church took place far away from my own country. In April 1989, while attending a conference organised by the Lutheran World Federation in Bagio City in the Philippines, I was shocked by the attitude of a Lutheran pastor from the ex Democratic Republic of Germany (DRG). That Lutheran pastor walked out of the meeting room as a sign of protest against another Lutheran pastor from his own country who happened to be a female pastor and convener of the meeting. She presided over the Holy Communion service, which we had at the end of our conference and the pastor from the ex-DRG refused to partake. It was also the first time I had seen a woman pastor presiding over the Holy Communion in the Lutheran confession.

Immediately after I had partaken in that Holy Communion service, I felt guilty like I had done something wrong. But what had I done wrong? Why should I feel guilty after partaking in a Holy Communion? Had I been influenced by the protest of the German Lutheran pastor who went out during the service or was it because we too, in my own church back home, we did not allow women to become pastors?

The answers to such questions were not easy to find at that time. However, once I was back home from the meeting, I went to my Church leader to give him a report about what happened in the conference. I told him that I had done something wrong by partaking in the Holy Communion presided

over by a woman pastor during the meeting I attended in Baguio City in the Philippines.

The fact that this meeting was organised by the LWF, showed to me that it was actually the practice of discrimination against women in my own Church that made me think that I was guilty of wrongdoing by participating in a service led by a woman pastor. My Church leader did not act differently when he put the blame on what he called “the liberalism of the LWF”. He then asked me simply to take it as an act void of meaning and not to worry about it no longer.

Fortunately, during the same year 1989, which was my third year in theology, I attended a lecture on feminist theology given by the late professor David Immanuel³ of the Faculty of the Protestant Theology of Yaoundé. Those lectures on feminist theology opened my mind up to the issues related to women’s studies and eventually changed my whole perception of the women in church and in society. Therefore, the woman became for me an equal partner in the fulfillment of our vocations as human beings in church and in the society as a whole.

Hence, my dedication to write this thesis which derives from personal experiences which I had and still continue to have with women, so that the readers of this may be enlightened in their endeavour to correct the wrongdoings that our mothers, spouses, sisters and daughters have suffered for years because of our oppressive social, cultural and religious systems.

³ David Immanuel was professor of History of Christianity at the Faculty of the Protestant Theology of Yaoundé from 1988 to 1994. In his lectures on feminist theology, he mostly used Fiorenza’s scholarly book, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, published by the Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1984.

In 1996, while visiting the Lutheran church in Canada as an exchange pastor, I was invited to take part in the laying of the hands on a woman who was being ordained as a pastor. Without any hesitation, I accepted the honour of participation in the ordination, knowing that my home church was still denying women this opportunity to serve as ordained ministers.

In short, this thesis is the result of the long process of personal conversion started through the relationship I had with my mother when I was only eleven or twelve years old, going through my difficult years of choice in the domain of marriage as well as my vocation to become a pastor until the first experience I had in the beginning of my pastoral ministry.

By conducting this research, my first goal is to give an answer of assurance to those of my mentors, both from the society in which I grew up and from the church, who think that they have been betrayed by my choice to work for a full inclusion of women in the leadership of the church as well as in the society as a whole, that as human beings and most importantly as Christians we can no longer afford to continue to support systems that perpetuate segregation, be it on the basis of race, gender or social status.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Framing the Problem: Social Evolution of the Condition of Women in Northern Cameroon

Any human society is by nature dynamic. Long before the encounter between the African culture and the Western culture, African societies were dynamic and subjected to changes. Yet, some Western writers of the 19th century, like the German philosopher Hegel, pretended that African societies were 'immobile' and the African people themselves, characterised by a type of primitive spirit, were unable to evolve. The African peoples' condition, Hegel pointed out in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*,

is capable of no development or culture, and as we [the Europeans] see them [the Negroes] at this day, such have they always been. The only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery. (...) In this the Negroes see nothing unbecoming them so, we may conclude that slavery has been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the Negroes.⁴

Distinguishing between the northern and southern regions of Africa, Hegel concluded that Africa, as far as its Black populations were concerned, has no history.

For it [Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – argued Hegel, belong to the Asiatic or European world. (...) What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as the threshold of the World's History.⁵

⁴ *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* by G. W. F. Hegel, translated from the third German Edition by J. Sibree, London, Bell and Daldy, 1872, pp. 102-103.

⁵ Hegel, G W F, *Ibid.* pp. 102-103.

For centuries, Western scholars have discussed African philosophy and culture, often in disparaging, condescending terms, and always from an alien European perspective. Many Africans today share this perspective, having been trained in the western, empirical tradition. However, after the scholarly work done by the learned Senegalese, Cheikh Anta Diop⁶ on *The African Origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality*, work in which he exposed the contradictions of European theses that tried in vain to find a “White origin for Egyptian civilization”, the above-mentioned perception of the African peoples proves to be totally wrong. Therefore, to demonstrate that Africa as an inhabited continent has a history which is intrinsic to the cultures and traditions of its peoples, both Whites and Blacks, is a waste of time and an unfruitful task to be undertaken by any researcher. To say whether or not the African contribution to the world’s historical development has been substantial is a different issue all together. This is not to say that we do not recognise the accelerated character of the changes that are taking place within African societies today due to the encounter between African culture and other cultures of the worldwide society. In this sense, the encounter between various civilisations of the world in Northern Cameroon, namely the Western Christian and Islamo-Arabic civilisations in the beginning of the 19th century, has caused significant changes, both negative and positive. Therefore, the women’s situation in society in general and in the Lutheran church in particular in Northern Cameroon can be referred to as one of the typical examples of rapid social changes that are affecting African societies today, due to both internal and external factors.

⁶ Anta, Ch D., *The African Origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality*, Edited and Translated by Mercier Cook, Lawrence Hill and Company, New York, 1974.

In a paper presented during the pastoral retreat of the Church in Ngaoundéré in 1978, Verna Syverson⁷, then coordinator of the women's work within the Church in Cameroon, rightly pointed out the important changes that were taking place within the church and the society in Northern Cameroon since the beginning of the missionary work, as far as the women's condition was concerned. It was therefore a satisfactory thing for a women's work coordinator like her to note the step ahead made by the Church 'to acknowledge the rights of the women' in a society known before for its patriarchal structural organisation. However, Verna Syverson did not miss the opportunity to warn the Church's leaders about the implications of these changes:

It is pleasant to note the step ahead made by the EELC⁸ to recognize the rights of women, she pointed out. A change in many stages of our work [women's work] will be necessary, and this may lead sometimes to some disturbances.⁹

In this way, Verna Syverson tried to draw the attention of the church leaders in Cameroon to the issue of the women's inclusion in church's activities.

Furthermore, in the introduction of her book on the image of the woman in the Black Francophone African novelists, Kembe Milolo pointed out that:

The fundamental obstacle to a full equality between sexes resides in traditions and people's mentalities. (...) They [women] do not accept

⁷Syverson, V., "The Role of Women in the Church and Society", Unpublished paper, presented during the pastoral retreat of the Church held in Ngaoundéré, June 25-July 8, 1978.

⁸ EELC stands for Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun, which is the official and French name of the Church under discussion in this study. In the following chapters, I will use interchangeably the terms "Church" and EELC to refer to the same thing.

⁹Syverson, V., *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

discriminations, vestiges of received ideas and habits of the past anymore; that which, for centuries, had been presented, lived and psychologically integrated as realities regulated by norms of nature. More and more women want to be judged according to their competence, their talents, their spirit qualities and their heart than according to their physical appearance. They want to act because they believe that everyone, of whatever sex it may be, has the right to choose his or her role in society. They want to be spouses of equal value with the men, free, and enlightened educators.¹⁰

Since the early 1980s, when the national government of Cameroon began to enroll women in the army, there was a major change in the mentality of people towards the role of women in society. From that time on, new opportunities were granted to women in terms of job opportunities and wider responsibilities within the society. The opportunities, in hitherto male-preserved domains, began to open up for the women.

Presented as one of the fast changing societies in the world, the African societies in general and the Northern Cameroonian society in particular, are the places of both fast and profound social changes today. Among these changes, the ones that affect the lives of women in family and conjugal life, in social, and even in political and economic domains, are the most prominent. This explains why the situation of the women in Northern Cameroon today is different from the one in which their foremothers lived a century ago.

At the time of the arrival of the first missionaries from the West in the early 1920s, the normal role of a woman in Northern Cameroon was that of wife and mother in the household. However, this situation was not unique to African women. The social perception of a woman as a wife and mother was a worldwide-shared reality. As pointed out by Syverson, the usual role of a woman in the White society was also that of a wife and a mother. As a consequence of this ideology of the confinement of women

¹⁰Milolo, K., *L'image de la femme chez les romancières de l'Afrique noire francophone*, Editions Universitaires, Fribourg Suisse, 1986, p. 2.

to domestic and motherly roles, those among the women in the West who chose a different career, like working as missionaries overseas instead of choosing to marry, for most of the women missionaries in both the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Sudan Mission fields in Northern Cameroon remained single, were considered as “abnormal” by the rest of the society.¹¹

Given the social context of the time, women were not offered many alternatives for their social and cultural performances as members of the society as a whole. Instead, they were limited to specific domains of activity and could not perform in other spheres of life apart from the ones in which society confined them in their roles of wives and mothers in the homes. Thus, the family life appeared to many as the only reason of being for women, the principal goal in life that each and every woman was supposed to reach in order to be considered as a true woman in African traditional society.

The woman’s performance in domestic work and farming was of utmost importance in keeping the home as a place where African solidarity and hospitality took place, since it was the duty of the wife to cook for friends and for extended family members who came in for a visit to the family. Furthermore, a woman’s ordinary activities as wife and mother in Northern Cameroon revealed itself in the maternity and the education of children. Numerous offspring assured a woman of joy, happiness and respect from her husband and her family; and her profound attachment to her husband and her children explained her sense of responsibility towards her family members.

¹¹ See Syverson’s paper mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter.

Customarily, the educational systems in Northern Cameroon aimed at training the women to a life of initiative, endurance, and foresight in the housework. According to missionary Verna Syverson, “One of the first responsibilities of the woman [in Northern Cameroon] was to give herself, her time, and her energy for her husband, her children and her house.”¹² However, this did not imply that such women could not hold other responsibilities outside of their homes.

In interviewing the women of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon, it clearly appears that some women find their fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers, while others realise themselves only through activities performed outside of the homes.

Since the beginning of the missionary work in Northern Cameroon in the early 1920s, and especially after the official launching of the women’s movement in the Lutheran church in 1975, husbands have been encouraged by the church members to take part in the housework, and to allow their wives also to take on jobs outside of the home like working in an office as secretaries, as nurses in hospitals or as teachers in schools. Within the women’s movement, there was a specific focus on the Christian teachings that “a good Christian husband was the one who helped his wife in the housework like cooking, cleaning up the house as well as bathing the children.” In their teachings, the church people as well as missionaries in Northern Cameroon, like Verna Syverson¹³, emphasised the fact that in the countries with a very long Christian tradition like Sweden, sometimes it was the husband who stayed at home doing the housework, cooking and looking after the children, while the wife was working in an office outside of the home in order to earn the necessary money for a living for her family.

¹² Syverson, V., *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹³ Syverson, V., *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

In 1990, when the national government of Cameroon adopted new laws to allow private initiative to play greater role in the economic and social development of the country, the Lutheran church started running some developmental projects¹⁴ in Northern Cameroon in order to enable its members, and more specifically the churchwomen to partake in the fights against poverty and ignorance.

With the financial assistance of international Christian organisations like the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), some projects of women's social development were realised. For instance, the sinking of a well in a village, in order to minimise the long distance, which the women used to travel to collect the necessary water for their family's needs. In other words, the time spared because of the closer proximity of the water to her home, affords a woman the opportunity of doing much more than before when she used to collect her water far from the village. This means that, even in the rural areas, the Church has various ways of impacting on the lives of both women and men in the sense of a positive evolution of their social, economic and political roles and responsibilities within the new context.

We, as Christians, however, are expected to critically examine the claims for equity in the roles and responsibilities of the women and the men in both the church and society. We must examine with close attention anything that can be profitable and determinant for the lives of the individuals and the families in our communities. We must also be careful about the social structures that we put in place, to make sure that they serve the needs of everyone in our society as a whole. Therefore, a thorough assessment of the contribution of Christianity towards the amelioration of women's conditions in Northern Cameroon, will require

¹⁴ The creation of Social Centres of the "Women For Christ" in Meiganga, Ngaoundéré, and Garoua are concrete examples of this new change. See Interview with Satou Marthe.

that the researcher not only be conscious of the fact that women often do not speak out easily about their plight, but also bear in mind what H el ene Yinda and Ka Mana¹⁵, in their excellent co-authored book, *For the New Theology of African Women*, refer to as “two ways which lead nowhere”. In other words, the temptation of an ideology of drawing up a balance sheet of what happened in Africa in the course of colonial times, and the temptation of falling into a false conscience are unfruitful ways of dealing with the contribution of Christianity towards women’s liberation in African societies today.

An intellectual debate aiming primarily at finding out whether or not Christianity in Northern Cameroon has contributed to the improvement of the social, political, economic and cultural situation of the women can be misleading. Therefore, all the current intellectual debates focusing on the struggles of the African peoples during the times of the colonial domination in order to draw conclusions on whether Christianity and Western colonisation had positive or negative impacts on African peoples, may constitute an obstacle to any attempt made by African people to understand and solve the problem of the exclusion of women from leadership positions in the African societies today.

In the section of their book dealing specifically with the contribution of Christianity to the women’s social awareness, Yinda and Ka Mana¹⁶ argued that African intellectuals in their evaluation of Christianity in Africa either blame the missionaries and the colonists for having robbed

¹⁵ Yinda, H. and Ka Mana, (ed.), *Pour la nouvelle th eologie des femmes africaines*, Yaound e, Editions CLE-CIPCRE, 2001. This book is an accurate response to the challenge that the churches are facing today, regarding the marginalisation of the African women in both the church and society. Well documented and based on surveys and researches conducted under the auspices of the WCC as well as the CCAWT, *For the New Theology of African Women*, analyses in depth the situation of crisis which exists between men and women in African society and church today.

¹⁶ See the chapters on “Mission chr etienne, conscience sociale et condition f eminine”, in Yinda, H. and Ka Mana, (eds.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 25-89.

African peoples of their personality, or commend them for their contribution to the amelioration of the conditions of life of the peoples of Africa. Such debates, according to Yinda and Ka Mana¹⁷, often end up by drawing proposals either relevant to the ideology of the easy defense and illustration of Christianity as the only way of improving the African peoples' life conditions, or in unfruitful attacks on the wrongdoings of both the Christian missions and the Western colonial administrations, accused for having destroyed the so-called well-balanced social systems in which African peoples have lived for centuries.

Today, when one looks at the social structures of society in Northern Cameroon, especially with regard to the role played by women in the public institutions of a modern state, one scarcely doubts the significant changes brought to the people of Northern Cameroon by the Western colonisation and the Christian missionaries. However, if the Christianisation of the African people by the Western mission societies brought significant changes in the lives of the African people, the impact of Christianity on the lives of the women in Northern Cameroon today must be measured according to the capacity of the Christian faith, as a social practice, to respond to the crucial problems like the misery, the powerlessness, the despair and the lack of creative confidence in which women live their daily lives. In other words, we must look at how Christianity oriented the lives of women towards the affirmation of their rights and their responsibilities in Northern Cameroon, rather than debating on what the missionaries brought to liberate women from African oppressive social systems.

What does it mean for the women in Northern Cameroon to become Christian today? Does Christianity help women to participate in the

¹⁷ Yinda, H. and Ka Mana, (eds.), *Op. Cit.* p. 25-89.

decision-making structures of the society and the church in Northern Cameroon? Does the church as a social institution contribute to giving a woman the social image that deepens the respect she deserves with regard to her relationship with the men in society? These are some of the questions we will try to clarify in the following section of this research. However, given the particular context in which women live in Northern Cameroon, a region known for its Islamic practices,¹⁸ one cannot give a straightforward answer to such questions, thus the necessity to critically examine Yinda and Ka Mana's assertion according to which:

Without Christianity as it outspread itself in Africa from the times of colonialism until today, with its ups and downs, its strengths and weaknesses, its successes and failures, the woman's condition would have not reached the stage of consciousness which characterises the groups and women's movements in African countries today (...). Without Christianity, without its international networks and possibilities to circulate and diffuse the ideas, some fights of the women would have been unthinkable and some of their victories concretely unimaginable.¹⁹

Applied to the situation of women in Northern Cameroon, Yinda and Ka Mana's assertion needs to be nuanced, for the position of women in both the church and society in Northern Cameroon still requires much effort from both the men and the women in order for the church especially to take the important step of including women in its ordained ministry.

1.2. Motivation

Introducing her book on Women and History Volume One entitled *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner strongly argued that, "Women's

¹⁸ As mentioned in previous chapters, the presence of Islam in Northern Cameroon is determinant when it comes to the issue of the women's status in social and religious matters. For instance, the main argument of the Church in Northern Cameroon to deny women the right to lead is that the Muslims will not respect the Christian faith if women begin to lead worship services in the Church.

¹⁹ Yinda, H. and Ka Mana, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 39-40.

History is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women.”²⁰
By writing this thesis on the women of the Church in Africa, I aim first of all to tackle a very controversial and heatedly discussed issue, that is the issue of the relations between men and women as equal and interdependent partners in both society and the church, and this regardless of their physical or biological differences.

My own observation of both society and the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon of which I am a part did not reveal the equality and justice necessary to govern the relationships between men and women as social partners. Rather, after having observed the way in which people relate to one another in terms of gender, I realised that women were undervalued and even discriminated against in some cases. The African traditional and Islamic systems of educating people, acquiring wealth or taking decisions in Northern Cameroon had impacted on the whole society in such a way that even within a Church like the EELC, it seems normal to take the subordination of women to men for granted.

In this context, the women of the Church and those who live under the rules of traditional and Islamic societies in Northern Cameroon are treated alike. Despite Mfoulou’s²¹ argument according to which, by fighting against the traditional system of dowry, the Christian church would have been an agent of progress and the emancipation of women in Cameroon, there is still a long way to go to bring the women of Northern Cameroon into leadership.

Most of the Western mission societies perceived the African system of dowry as both harmful to the women’s dignity and too costly for young

²⁰ Lerner, G., *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 3.

²¹ Mfoulou, J., “The Roman Catholic Church and Cameroonian nationalism: from misunderstanding to opposition”, in Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (ed.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, London, Rex Collings, 1978, p. 217-227.

men who were looking for a wife to marry. The colonial administration supported the church against the practice of dowry in Northern Cameroon, but did not succeed in abolishing it totally.²² Among the Massa and the Toupouri for instance, the Lutheran church succeeded in reducing the dowry cost to half of what was required of the suitor by customarily practice.

In Northern Cameroon, women have been kept in a subordinate position for years. They were and are still being considered as second-class citizens in their respective societies. Their roles as builders of social, political, economic, and religious systems are not acknowledged by the official version of the social history. In such a society, women for one reason or another have been and are still being silenced. They scarcely speak about their own situation, and those men who become involved in the issue of women's emancipation, are looked on as strange beings that have lost their culturally prescribed gender-identity. The men, who speak out openly against the marginalisation of women in this strongly male-dominated society, are seen as creating social problems where there are none. The status quo in Northern Cameroon is almost universally accepted, even by the women whom it devalues. What could therefore explain what Gerda Lerner termed as "women's historical 'complicity' in upholding the patriarchal system that subordinated them and in transmitting that system that subordinated them and in transmitting that system, generation after generation, to their children of both sexes?"²³

The situation in the Church is no different. Thus, literature on the development of the EELC, has mainly described what the men have achieved either in terms of the preaching of the Gospel or in terms of the

²² See Lode K., *Appelés à la liberté: Histoire de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun*, Imrocep Editions, Amtelveen, 1990, pp. 123-126 on "Marriage, Polygamy and Dowry".

²³Lerner, G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

social development work. Despite the fact that the Church has always consisted of women and men, those who have written and told stories about the EELC have mostly done it in a way which leads finally to a perception of the Church as an institution governed by men; women's participation has generally been marginalised, trivialised, or ignored altogether. To give a concrete example of such a situation, I will cite Kare Lode who, out of the 351 pages that make up his book, *Appelés à la liberté, histoire de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun*, dedicated only ten pages to the work among the women of the Church, and this clearly showed, how underestimated and undervalued, the performance of women in the Church in general and in the Church in Africa in particular was.

Former missionary of the Norwegian Missionary Society in Cameroon, Kare Lode is to my knowledge the only author who has written a systematic history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EELC). His book *Appelés à la liberté* is one the best secondary sources that I use in this work. His very male-centred perception of both the Mission Societies and the Church, however, is worth noting. Despite the fact that in Lode's book, one can find a number of interesting accounts of the roles played by women in both the Mission Societies and the Church, the intention of the author was above all to write about the Church as a male-centred institution. Therefore, women in the book do not appear as major role players.

As a student of Church history, one of my assumptions is that the women's role as builders of the Church, which is supposed to be a community of believers, both men and women, is of paramount importance, and for this reason needs to be acknowledged by the entire society. Therefore, this research also aims at giving a very especial heed to

the women's role in the implantation and the growth of Christianity in Northern Cameroon.

Historically known as a marginal or even oppressed group, women in Northern Cameroon were, and are still not, given the same opportunities as their male counterparts in terms of receiving a good education, which would enable them to play a leadership role in their respective communities. Rather, right from their earliest youth, women are brought up in such a way that even as adults, they can only perform specific tasks which are mainly domestic, such as drawing water from a well or from a river, cooking and cleaning dishes, and caring for the elderly people and the children. In this society, women still own nothing in terms of property. Married, they belong to their husbands and are much more valuable in the eyes of the latter when they can bear children to them.

Thinking of this situation in which women still live in Northern Cameroon reminded me of what Johannes Skauge, the General Secretary of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), wrote in his mission report on Cameroon in 1950:

The women of Africa have been for so long mere merchandise and beasts for labour without any human value that it seems almost impossible to elevate them to a level where they may have an interest in spiritual things and become accessible to the Gospel. The women of Sudan [and the term Sudan used to designate that part of Africa which lies south of the Sahara Desert and north of the Equator which includes the actual Republic of Cameroon²⁴] are sold, bought and given as presents by the man's will. According to the teachings of the Koran, the woman is without a soul, and for that reason, she cannot enter Paradise.²⁵

²⁴See Nissen's excellent study published by Purus Grafiske Hus in Danmark in 1968, entitled: *An African Church is Born: The Story of the Adamawa and Central Sardauna Provinces in Nigeria*.

²⁵Skauge, J., "Rapport fra inspeksjonsreise til Kamerun 1950", translated by Ole Eriksen, a former missionary of the NMS in Cameroon. The original report in Norwegian language was consulted from the personal archives of Ole Eriksen in Stavanger on

Commenting the socio-economic condition of women in Northern Cameroon, Skauge defended the idea according to which the African woman was her husband property, as he went on arguing that:

She [the woman of Northern Cameroon] is arbitrarily treated as an object of utility or an instrument of production. Polygamy and slavery are in reality the same thing and the oppression of the woman is really part of the social and political systems and therefore, her status cannot be changed except by a profound social revolution. Apart from the Islamic environment [he concluded], women who live in levirate marriages enjoy more freedom than others, although they are also submissive to the dictatorship of the male-dominated society.²⁶

Therefore, for me, writing about the women's role in the EELC, in this case, is not a mere intellectual exercise. Being myself a husband, father and male minister in a Church where women are still silenced by men despite their overwhelming number and their great contribution to the establishment of the church of Christ in a previously predominantly Islamic region, is a big challenge in itself. In researching this topic, I intend to alert my fellow Christians of Northern Cameroon to a problem, which although heatedly debated in the world, today remains taboo in our region, because of the conceptions held by Islam and the African traditions.

What I intend to say here is that as Christians, we are not bound to follow necessarily what the other religions have to say about the women's situation within the Church. This is not to say that we must neglect the advice of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians (see 1Cor. 8: 13), which encourage us to avoid doing anything, which can constitute a stumbling block to our neighbour because of their lack of knowledge. However, as Christians we must nevertheless find our ways to solve our own

November 19th, 2000. But the French version of the same document can be also read in Kore Lode, Op. Cit., p. 169.

²⁶ Skauge, J., Op. Cit., p. 2.

contradictions such as the exclusion of women from leadership in the Church. After a thorough analysis of the Church's structures in Northern Cameroon, there is clear indication that women are not fairly treated by their male counterparts.

However, before going further with the investigation into the women's role in the EELC and a reflection on how to empower the women to play a greater role in Church in future, it is useful to briefly clarify the main concepts that are dealt with in this research; hence, the necessity of defining some of the key concepts, which are used in this study.

1.3. Definition of Key Concepts

To write a doctoral thesis on the topic of "Women in the Church in Africa today" means nothing less than dealing with highly controversial issues such as the gender-perception problem, male and female personalities, and the nature and meaning of the church for the people of Africa, Africa being a continent which has undergone significant changes caused by the encounter between its peoples and the peoples from other parts of the world during the past century. In other words, what do we mean today when we use concepts like 'Women', 'Church', 'Continuity', or 'Change' in our attempt to understand women's conditions in a transitional context like that of the Northern Cameroon?

1.3.1. Is the 'Women' Concept a Social Invention of Men?

Grammatically, 'women' is the plural form of 'woman' which, according to Lisa Tuttle, comes from an

Old English 'wifman' (wif+man) meaning a female person. The complementary term meaning a male person (weapman) was lost and 'man' came to mean both male human being and human being. Thus femaleness became the marked quality; maleness was implied as the norm.²⁷

For some feminist thinkers like William O'Neill, 'woman' is an artificial social construct always defined in opposition to 'man' as the 'other'. Differentiating between women- a class of beings identified by sex- and 'woman', the mythical being invented by men, William O'Neill stated that the concept of 'woman' was a "creation of Victorian Society, where before there had been only women."²⁸

Furthermore, Chandra Mohanty in her critique of Western feminism's complicity in colonialist power, for instance, grounds her argument on a theoretical distinction between "'woman'- a cultural and ideological composite 'Other' constructed through diverse representational discourse (scientific, literary, juridical, linguistic, cinematic, etc.)- and 'women'- real, material subjects of their collective histories."²⁹ Thus, the concept of 'women' like any other concept conceived to categorise human beings, such as the concepts of race, nationality, and ethnicity to cite just a few can lead to misunderstandings of human historical realities.

The study of the concept of 'woman' in African languages confirms the controversy around the gender issue. In a friendly discussion with Rev. Pascal Fossou³⁰, a PhD student of Natal University, whose masters' thesis in theology was written on the topic of sexual education within the

²⁷ Tuttle, L., *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, London, Longman, 1986, p. 347.

²⁸ To get a better understanding of the discussion about the concept of 'woman' as an artificial social construct of the men, see O'Neill, W.L., *Everyone was brave: A history of Feminism in America*, New York, Quadrangle Books, 1976.

²⁹ Mohanty, C.T., *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* in Mohanty et al., (ed.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1991, p.53.

³⁰ Discussion with Rev. Pascal Fossou on April 4th, 2002, at the Lutheran Students' Residence, in Pietermaritburg, RSA.

church³¹, I realised that in the language of the Bamileke of Western Cameroon, the word *nju* (woman) etymologically means: “that which diminishes or lowers the value of *mbe* (man)”. It was interesting to note that in the Bamileke language, there is a different word *motchuo* or *mo’o* to express the idea of a human being without referring to its gender. But, do the Bamilekes consider a *nju* (woman) as a *motchuo* (human being) was a difficult question to be answered by my interlocutor.

In another African language called Massa, spoken both in Northern Cameroon as well as in Chad, human beings are referred to as *sumuna*, the plural form of *sana*. The *boyna* (women), which is the plural form of *tchata* (woman), are also *sumuna*, just as the *jufayna* (men), the plural form of *jufna* (man), are. However, in the common understanding of the Massa culture, a *tchata* symbolises the weak, the fearful, and obviously the spirit of submission. When a woman is referred to as a *tchata* or wife, she becomes the weak, fearful and submissive person. Therefore, it is mainly in a marital relationship with a man (*sajufna*), which means also courage, bravery and strength, that a woman becomes a weak, fearful and submissive *sana* (person), who is totally dependent on her husband’s protection among the Massa. On her own, a woman can do nothing, but only to rely on her husband’s care and protection.

This idea of the woman, who is like a child and needs the assistance of the man to face the challenges of life, is fully grounded on the type of relationships built up between husband and wife by one of the most patriarchal societies in Cameroon. It is not surprising, therefore, to note that the concept of the woman as a weak person among the Massa, is closely linked to the diminished and diminishing *nju* of the Bamileke,

³¹Fossouo, P., “Education sexuelle dans l’Egile”, Unpublished Masters’ Thesis, Faculty of the Protestant Theology of Yaounde, 1986.

another patriarchal society of Cameroon, even if these two African languages, both spoken in Cameroon, have no link at all.

On which scientific and objective arguments do we ground our distinction between male and female human beings? In other words, are there any differences between a man and a woman, which we can justify in an objective and scientific manner? Or, can the concepts of maleness and femaleness be understood and interpreted as mere products of a socially constructed male ideology of domination to subjugate the female gender for the sake of social order?

In an attempt to answer such questions, James A. Doyle in his research on sex and gender observed that

The human experience begins at conception when sex is determined as either 'female' or 'male' and expands after birth to include one's gender, which arises from the experience of being raised to behave and think of oneself as either 'feminine' or 'masculine'.³²

But, if according to Doyle's study, understanding one's sex and gender is one of the most interesting studies, it still is a domain of research filled with misconceptions, prejudice, and even bias. Sometimes, lay people and scientists alike use sex and gender interchangeably, and this can lead to more than a little confusion too. But generally, sex is understood as something natural (not acquired) and biological such as human organs like penis or vagina, while gender is thought of as a social or cultural aspect that pertains to the traits, norms, stereotypes, and roles considered typical and desirable for those whom society has designated as male or female.

In other words, as human beings, observed Doyle,

³² Doyle, J.A., *Sex and Gender: The Human Experience*, Dubuque, Brown Publishers, 1985, p. 7.

We all began as just so much biological material. Egg, sperm, chromosomes, and hormones set the stage for what is to become our sex and the basis for what others will use to determine our appropriate gender-related characteristics.³³

After birth, a human being develops psychologically and, with the help of his or her parents or peers, is shaped in the way that society believes essential for him or her. Therefore, the culture we are born into reinforces certain values and rules that also influence how males and females are to live out their lives in terms of their gender roles.

From a straightforward observation of any human society, one may easily note that, the social systems, whatever their origin, are built up on the basis of differences between sexes, races and social origins of individuals. For this very reason, one should not be surprised if the concept of the division of labour is so strict between men and women in Northern Cameroon.

Women, because of their biological sex which predisposes them for certain roles such as childbearing and nurturing, were assigned domestic tasks, while men were in control of anything that was happening outside of the house. This confinement of women to domestic tasks does not, however, take away the fundamental truth that in pre-colonial African societies; women were literally the breadwinners, since they were heavily involved in agricultural production.³⁴

Another controversial issue in dealing with the concept of woman is her ability to bear children or not. Despite the fact that women play a very

³³ Doyle.J.A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 18.

³⁴See Jeff Guy's article on "Gender oppression in southern Africa's precapitalist societies", in Cheryl Walker, (eds.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, (London, James Currey and Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), pp. 33-47.

important role for the continuation and maintenance of the human species, their role in the procreation process and their ability to nurture and care for needy people had been gradually viewed as secondary and depreciating roles.

When one reads some particular verses of the Bible about the role of man and woman in the procreation process, the apparent understanding is that a barren woman's plight is a desperate one. According to these particular verses of the Bible having a child is considered a blessing³⁵. And yet, the very Bible also speaks of the childbearing as a curse on women³⁶, because of the pain that they feel while giving birth.³⁷

Thus, regardless of the part of the world we live in, we have developed the idea that males are superior to females. Despite the fact that it is difficult to ascertain such an idea, except for some physical differences, for example males tend to be physically bigger and muscularly stronger than females, women in almost all human societies are perceived as second class citizens, playing a role of lesser importance in their respective communities. In this sense, it is almost taken for granted everywhere that women can only do a very limited number of tasks related mostly to the domestic sphere. But, in our search for clarity about the women's role in the EELC since its inception up to the time when the first women graduated from the theological seminary in 1999, we want to find out whether women, as a specific group of people, with specific concerns that the Church needs to deal with in a very specific way, can still be involved in the so-called preserved male domains like presiding over Church counsels, leading congregations and so forth?

³⁵ See Psalm 127 vv. 3-5; Proverbs 17 v. 6; Matthew 19 v. 14.

³⁶ In most of the African societies, this idea of childbearing viewed as a curse on women is unknown. The contrary is true because a barren woman is a cursed woman in the African worldview.

³⁷ See Genesis 3 v. 16.

As an institution, the Church itself claims to be a defender of the defenseless. But, within both society and Church well known for their patriarchal hierarchy, is there still any room for the women's role to be acknowledged in the building of social, economic, and religious systems?

Regarding the religious experiences of women in Northern Cameroon, everybody in the region knows before hand at which level women are placed by the African traditional religions and in Islamic society. But the topic becomes more interesting when it comes to the position of women in the Church. Although the Church is not willing to be treated as an African traditional religion or as an Islamic religion, her position on the women's role in society and in the life of the Church is still not well defined. Therefore, the concept of the Church itself is not very clear to most of the people of Northern Cameroon and in such a context; one must wonder what the Church really is?

1.3.2. The Concept of 'Church'

According to Erwin Fahlbusch, "the term 'church' is a multidimensional term."³⁸ It encompasses different elements, the relations between these elements, and their variations based on time and place where they happen.

Basically, the concept of the 'church' covers two main types of human realities, namely the spiritual, and the material or empirical realities. To put together the spiritual and temporal aspects of the church, Thomas M. Lindsay in his "Eighteenth Series of the Cunningham Lectures" defined what he termed 'the New Testament conception of the 'church' as a

³⁸ Fahlbusch, E., "The Church in Transition", in Erwin Fahlbusch et al., (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity, Vol. 1, A-D*, Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1999, pp. 499-502, p.501.

fellowship with Jesus and with the brethren through Him; this fellowship is permeated with a sense of unity; this united fellowship is to manifest itself in a visible society; this visible society has been bestowed upon it by our Lord a divine authority; and it is to be a sacerdotal society.³⁹

Lindsay's use of the term 'brethren' which is borrowed from the Apostle Paul and which we understand in an inclusive way, that it is referring to brothers as well as to sisters in church, his definition of what he called "The New Testament Conception of the Church", still helps us to distinguish between the visible and the invisible aspects of the church.

The spiritual dimension of the church is related to what the Apostle Paul calls "Christ's body", which is a result of an invisible and mystical relationship between the risen Christ and the believers, whereas the empirical or visible aspect of the church resides in its buildings, its institutions, and all the individuals who declare themselves as members of such organisations. Therefore, the question rises as to which aspect of the church really makes it a church, is it the spiritual or the empirical dimension?

In this brief definition of the church, we would rather like to avoid a doctrinal debate on the concept of the church. Considering the fact that a definition of the church by its doctrinal norms, which ignore its historical development may lead to the misunderstanding of its historical realities, and therefore, may not be of help when it comes to bring out the sociological meaning of the church, we opted for a phenomenological approach which includes a historical as well as sociological analysis of the concept of church.

³⁹ Lindsay, T. M., *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, Hodder, London, 1902, pp. 5-6.

From the discussion about the visible and the invisible Church that the Church's Fathers were involved in to defend the church against the heresies of the first centuries, the term church appears to be a unique phenomenon in that it defines itself in its disparity and ambivalence. Therefore, to get a thorough understanding of the nature and the role of the church, we must relinquish a simplistic approach of the definition of the church. Rather, to do justice to the many factors and dimensions of the phenomenon of the church, a pluralistic approach proves necessary. For the variety of elements that make the church, their relations and changes cannot simply be ruled out while defining the concept of the church. Hence, a conceptual definition of the church must not look down upon the social reality. It is possible only within a theory of the church that focuses on the church's present form or on a descriptive listing of specific features such as its regional spread or its form of organisation. For that reason, my approach and my understanding of the concept of the church in this research, without neglecting the theological meaning of the church, will preferably focus on its sociological and historical dimensions, that is describing and analysing critically the women's role in the EELC and the development of its structures in the course of its history from which arises the question of continuity and change through the Church's presence in Northern Cameroon.

1.3.3. The Notions of Continuity and Change Through Historical Development

According to the French historian Marc Bloch, some thinkers in imitation of Hume⁴⁰

⁴⁰ David Hume was a Scottish philosopher and historian of the eighteenth century. His works include his masterpiece *A Treatise of Human Nature* written in France in 1739-1740, and *The Natural History of Religion* (1755).

thought that there is, in time, at least something which is changeless: that is man but, we have learned that, man too, has changed a great deal in his mind and, no less certainly, in the most delicate organs of his body. How should it be otherwise? (...) However, there must be a permanent foundation in human nature and in human society, or the very names of man or society become meaningless.⁴¹

Otherwise, history is the science of the human beings and, human beings are historical beings for the simple reason that they are subjected to change despite the fact that they are able to carry with them the events of their past and reflect on them. In this sense, the notions of continuity and change in historical studies are of utmost importance.

Thus, 'continuity' can be understood as the unbroken and consistent existence or operation of something over a period of time, whereas 'change' is an act or a process through which something becomes different. Therefore, continuity is about what is permanent or what remains from the past values and traditions after these values and traditions have gone through changes. Here, there is an idea of transmitting a value or a tradition from one generation to the next. In this sense, to repeat the thought of the former South African Deputy Minister of Defense, Mr. Ronnie Kasrils, "there is continuity in change since we are building with the best values and traditions of all the constituent forces through a mutual learning process."⁴²

Applied to a given society, the notions of continuity and change can help us to understand as to how far and to what extent the change that the very same society underwent has influenced the habits of the populations.

⁴¹ Bloch, M., *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1954, pp. 42-43.

⁴² Kasrils, R., 'Progress in Transformation' in Cilliers, J., (ed.), *Continuity in Change: The SA. Army in Transition*, ISS Monograph Series No 26, Aug. 1998, p.15-24, p. 19.

Given the fact that any human society is subject to change, and that change in society is affected by both internal and external factors, our task in this work consists also of assessing these factors in such a way that at the end of the study, the reader may get a better understanding of what has happened and is still happening in the Church in Northern Cameroon. Then, the crucial question becomes that of how do we go about the assessment of the role played by both internal and external factors of this change, hence, the importance of having a clear methodological approach.

1.4. Methodology

The problem of relations between men and women, and the differences that characterise their respective social roles based on their biological distinctiveness, otherwise known as the gender issue, is neither a recent nor a simple issue. It has been, and is still being, discussed by scholars in various domains of the human knowledge. This research attempts to situate itself within the framework of what the masters of the French school of *Annales*⁴³ have termed the “Global History” or the “New History”, which is a new way of writing history.

This new approach of the historical discipline defended by the school of *Annales* particularised itself by integrating in the writing of history the facts and gestures of the ordinary people like the children, the women, and the peasants. In this sense, historiography in general and the historiography of the church in particular cease to concentrate only on the lives and works of the so-called “great men” who make history, such as emperors, popes, and theologians; or to give only heed to the so-called significant events that need to be commemorated like wars, economic

⁴³ The review, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, was founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Fèbvre in 1929. According to Joseph R. Strayer in his introduction to Marc Bloch's book, *The Historian's Craft*, during the years before the war no other historical periodical had as much influence on the rising generation of scholars as the *Annales* did.

crises, theological controversies, councils, canons or decrees. Rather, under the aegis of this new approach, the historiography has widened its horizon to include the lives of the marginalised people of whom women are a part. But here again, we must be aware of the fact that in writing about those who have been neglected by the traditional historiography, we might face not only the reality of the discovery and the use of new types of source material, such as oral sources, but we must also be able to make use of other disciplines like sociology, anthropology or geography. Therefore, this study dedicated to the role of women in the EELC is envisaged as an interdisciplinary research using indistinctly historical, sociological, anthropological, and theological data. However, in terms of methodological approach, this research uses as a theoretical frame the feminist analysis of the women's historical and theological situation. Feminist theoretical analysis is one of the many methodological approaches which social scientists, like the Latino-American leading figure of the liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez who published in 1971 a book called: *A Liberation Theology*, a title to which Alfred Hennelly preferred referring to as 'liberating theologies', which he thought "includes any theology which contributes to the authentic freedom of human beings on either the personal, political, economic, cultural or ecclesiastical levels."⁴⁴ Thus, to arrive at a more nuanced and well balanced understanding of the women's role and to provide a strategy to achieve a deeper and broader analysis of the hierarchical structures of both society and Church in Northern Cameroon, I opted for a "liberation feminist" approach. But what is feminism indeed?

⁴⁴ Hennelly, A., *Theology for a Liberating Church: The New Praxis of Freedom*, Washington, D. C., Georgetown University Press, 1989, p. 24.

1.4.1. A Feminist Approach

Feminism as a movement has a long history. From its beginning up to the time of the French Revolution of 1789, feminism was a conscious stand in opposition to male defamation and mistreatment of women, with the belief that the sexes are socially constructed, and not just biologically formed. For Nancy Hartsock, a feminist of our days, feminism is “a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women.”⁴⁵

From a perspective of promoting dignity and human rights, feminism can be understood as a commitment to eradicate the ideology of domination, be it sex, race, or social class, so that the self-development can take precedence over the worldwide phenomenon of imperialism and economic exploitation.

However, feminism cannot be restricted to a mere philosophical and socio-political movement. It also has a religious dimension which tries to understand the relationship between man and woman as a necessity to fulfill God’s will in creation. In this sense, feminist Christians like Patricia Wilson-Kastner⁴⁶ saw a close relationship between feminism and Christian ideals.

Having chosen a feminist approach for a research which aims at a balanced relationship between man and woman in a Christian perspective, I am fully aware of the position of feminist theologians such as Carol

⁴⁵ Hartsock, N., *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, Longman, New York, 1983, p. 58-59.

⁴⁶ Kastner, W.P., *Faith, Feminism, and the Christ*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1983.

Christ⁴⁷ and Mary Daly⁴⁸, who, shocked by the dominant image of man in religion, are inclined to reject “Christianity and Judaism altogether as hopeless, patriarchal and evil”. For those radical feminist theologians, stumbling blocks are found in numerous essential elements of biblical theology including the masculine identity of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and the entire package of masculine theological language. Hence, the attempt by some biblical feminist scholars like Elizabeth Cady Stanton⁴⁹ and Louise Schottroff⁵⁰ to reconsider and rethink the patriarchal traditional way of interpreting the biblical texts, and this time, by paying a special attention to the role and place of the women within the biblical narratives.

Although feminism seems to be a movement with a very long history, the feminist debate has been held mainly in Western countries like the United States of America, Germany or Sweden, with no special focus on the emancipation of the women in Africa.

1.4.2. About the Women’s Emancipation Movement in the African Context

The issue of women’s emancipation in Africa has been for a long time a taboo to African men as well as women. According to Oduyoye, it was only in December 1980⁵¹, while attending a conference convened by the Ecumenical Association of Third-World Theologians (EATWOT), and the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT) in Ibadan,

⁴⁷ Christ, C., *Divining Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Guest*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1980.

⁴⁸ Daly, M., *Beyond God the Father*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1973.

⁴⁹ Stanton, E. C. et al., (ed.), *The Woman’s Bible Part I*, Salem, Ayer Company Publishers, 1988.

⁵⁰ Schottroff, L., et al. (ed.), *Feminist interpretation: Bible in Women’s perspective*, translated by Martin and Barbara Runscheid, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1998.

⁵¹ Oduyoye, M.A., (ed.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, New York, Orbis, 1992.

Nigeria that, for the first time, the African women theologians met and decided to launch a religious and cultural movement for the emancipation of women in Africa. One must wonder why this issue of the emancipation of African women was raised so late by the African women theologians. Was it because the women of Africa were well treated by their respective cultures, or was it because like any other Africans, the African women were accustomed to their sufferings and found no need to speak them out? The answer could be that women were well aware of their situation of sufferings and knew also that they could unite in order to fight together for their liberation, but in their situation of oppressed people, they were unable to come together and articulate their common concerns.

Anyway, ten years after the Ibadan conference, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) was launched at Trinity College of Theology in Legon, Accra in Ghana. Thus, since October 1989, a lot has been said and written by African women on the women of Africa.

Although, the works of the women of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians are mostly written in English, writing this thesis at Natal University in South Africa enabled me not only to use their materials available to the English speaking readers, but also to get acquainted with some of its members and leading figures. Discussions with the Circle's members like Professors Christina Landman of the University of South Africa in Pretoria, Isabel A. Phiri of the Natal University in Pitermaritzburg, who is also the current coordinator of the Circle, and Rev. Dr. B. Haddad, as well as attendance of the meetings where the above-mentioned authors presented scholarly papers on African women, shaped my understanding of the African women's present life condition.

African women theologians, such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye whose works on African culture and religions have widely influenced my understanding of the African women's condition, are among the first African feminist writers. One of the strongest statements made by Oduyoye about the situation of women in Africa was that, by

accepting the myth of the Hebrew Bible [referring to the creation story in the book of Genesis], the African woman appropriates what it means to be a woman in her own culture, and accepts it as punishment. This internalization of the Church's teaching shows its negative effects on the self-image of African women.⁵²

In the same sense, she continued by depicting the paradoxical relations between the women and the Church in Africa affirming that

Christianity as manifested in the Western Churches in Africa does little to challenge sexism, whether in Church or in society. The experience of women in the Church in Africa contradicts the Christian claim to promote the worth (equal value) of every person. Rather, it shows how Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalization of women.⁵³

From this perspective, the church in Africa could easily be understood as an instrument of the perpetuation of not only Western domination ideology in Africa, but also of African male domination in society.

Writing about the role of women in both society and church in Africa, I am fully aware of various difficulties, which may result from this research. On the one hand, the fact that I myself am a male who was brought up in a strongly patriarchal society may constitute a stumbling block to this research. And on the other hand, one may expect women themselves to be suspicious of a man who interests himself in their struggle for recognition, and may think that a man cannot thoroughly understand their problems

⁵² Oduyoye, M.A., *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, New York, Orbis Books, 1995, p. 9.

⁵³ Oduyoye, M A., *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

and therefore, cannot adequately defend their cause. Despite the fact that such statements are well grounded and cannot simply be overshadowed by my sole desire and dedication to bring into light the contribution of women to the church growth in Northern Cameroon, I still strongly believe that the fight for the rights of women cannot be won by women alone. As an African male, brought up in a system, which is oppressive toward women, and as a pastor of a church in which women are not given any chance to lead, I need to do a thorough work of conversion on my own conception of the women's role in both society and church.

To enable ourselves as men to stand for the rights of women in our midst, so that they can get equal and just treatment from both society and church, we need to break our social biases. The fight for women's recognition in society and church in Africa cannot be won by the women only. As far as both men and women took part in the making-process of the present system, which subordinate women to men, they must also work together in order to get rid of them. In this sense, the question of the women's liberation ceases to be a specific concern for women only, but includes the men's concerns as well. It is a mutual liberation and for this very reason, the men, and especially the African male theologians, have a role to play.

The battle for the women's emancipation cannot be conducted successfully by the African male theologians without a self-renouncement. Therefore, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke understood correctly when he stated that, African men need to "deeply reflect and agonise over their role and status both as perpetrators and beneficiaries of patriarchy."⁵⁴ It is part of our daily experiences in Africa to realise that as males we have so much to give up in the cause of the women's liberation, otherwise, there will be no

⁵⁴ Maluleke, T S., "The `Smoke Screens` Called Black and African Theologies-The Challenge of African Women Theology", *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Vol.3.2, 1997, pp. 39-63, p.42.

positive change in our present systems, be it social, economic or religious. Therefore, to recognise our responsibility in the current systems, which for a long time have belittled the women, and to work together for a society where the women's experiences are taken into consideration, is a great step into the solving of the problem of injustice and inequality between men and women in society and the church.

1.4.3. Sources

To conduct this research in an efficient manner, my sources are of two different types, the written and the oral sources.

The written sources I make use of in this work come mainly from the historical, sociological, anthropological, and geographical literature produced on the evolution of the populations of Northern Cameroon by both African and non-African researchers during the twentieth century. With the creation in Cameroon of the University of Ngaoundéré in 1993, a scientific research project in which women's studies occupy the first place was jointly set up by this University and the University of Tromsø in Norway. This research project called "Ngaoundéré-Anthropos" has already produced some interesting material on women in Northern Cameroon. Documents such as the proceedings of the international conference on "Peoples and Cultures of Adamawa", held in Ngaoundéré on January 14-16, 1992⁵⁵, are of paramount importance, to locate the people about whom I write in their historical, geographical, and cultural context.

⁵⁵ Boutrais, J., (ed.), *Peuples et cultures de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun), Actes du colloque de Ngaoundéré du 14 au 16 janvier 1992*, ORSTOM/Ngaoundéré-Anthropos, Paris, 1993.

A critical reading and a thorough analysis of the reports, letters, and the minutes of the general meetings of the Church, written by both missionaries and Church leaders, have also contributed to document this research.

To be more specific and focussed on the history of women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, I have requested and obtained most of the reports, letters, and minutes written by missionaries of the Sudan Mission, and most importantly, the reports written by women missionaries since the beginning of their mission work in Cameroon in 1923/24, from the archives of the Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota (USA). I also visited the Norwegian Missionary Society in Stavanger (Norway) where I found interesting written reports, letters and photographs about the missionary work in Cameroon. These two mission societies (the Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society) have been and still are being involved in missionary work in Northern Cameroon.

From the side of the Lutheran church in Cameroon, no written sources are collected in the form of archives. Apart from a few minutes of the meetings held during the past ten years, minutes kept in the secretariate of the central office of the Church, there is no other written source, which a researcher can find on women from the Church office. The Lutheran church in Cameroon still has no one for the collecting and the filing of such documents. This lack of written material from the Church in Cameroon was, however, by-passed when I opted to conduct interviews with the Church members and missionaries as important part of my data collection.

Therefore, the originality of this thesis lies in the importance given to the testimonies of those who have played and continue to play a role about which this research is conducted; the women of the EELC.

The women of the Church, apart from the Western missionaries, did not and could not write about their contribution to the Church implantation and growth in Northern Cameroon. The limited written material on the historical development of the Church is mostly due to the fact that the male authors are only interested in keeping records of their own performance, putting aside what women have been able to accomplish. Even in the women missionaries' reports, more has been said about African males' activities, like evangelistic campaigns and open door preaching organised by African catechists and evangelists, than the outstanding work performed by the women in the Church. Therefore, I found it necessary to undertake the work of interviewing a selected number of women who made a great contribution to spread the work of the Church in the region.

In this regard, the oral sources in this work are much more accurate than the general written sources, which I have read about the history of Northern Cameroon. But, the use of oral sources as historical sources to write about the African people, rightly or wrongly known as the people of orality, must be undertaken with great care. Therefore, a clear distinction needs to be made between what the French-speaking people term *les traditions historiques* (the historical traditions) and contemporary oral accounts. According to Claude H el ene Perrot⁵⁶, the former emanate from a very remote past and have been transmitted in an organised and deliberate way within societies where orality has held and still holds a privileged status. The later is the oral history, which Philippe Denis defines as a

⁵⁶ Perrot, C.H.,(ed.), *Sources orales de l'Histoire de l'Afrique*, Paris, CNSR, 1993. p. 1.

methodology “based on hearsay or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred during the lifetime of the informants.”⁵⁷

Consequently, the people whom I interviewed, men as well as women for the writing of this thesis are eyewitnesses of the ongoing history of the women of the EELC. They have been all selected on the basis of the assumption that their knowledge of both society and Church in Northern Cameroon is well attested. Although, they are from different social status and cultural backgrounds (pastors, missionaries, pastors’ wives, women’s movement leaders, and lay workers), their answers to my questions helped me to come to a better understanding of the women’s present situation in the EELC. However, this is not to say that everything I heard from the various interviewees was valid and need no interpretation or assessment from me as a researcher. As pointed out by Jan Vansina who advocated oral tradition as one of the reliable historical sources,

oral traditions are not just a source about the past, but a historiography of (one dare not write historiography!) the past, an account of how people have interpreted it. As such, oral tradition is not only a raw source. It is a hypothesis, similar to the historian’s own interpretation of the past. (...) To consider them [oral traditions] first means not to accept them literally, uncritically. It means to give them the attention they deserve, to take pains to prove or disprove them systematically for each case on its own merits.⁵⁸

1.5. Chapter Overview

Northern Cameroon, like other parts of the African continent, has been subjected to Western missionary work. But, unlike southern Cameroon

⁵⁷ Denis, Ph., “The Use of Oral Sources in African Church History”, in *Bulletin for Contextual Theology*, Vol. 2, April 1995. See also his recent article on “Oral History in a Wounded Country”, in Draper, J., (ed.), *Script, Subjugation and Subversion: Essays in Orality, Literacy and Colonialism in Southern Africa*, Semeia, Forthcoming.

⁵⁸ Vansina, J., *Oral Tradition as History*, (London); Heinemann, (Nairobi), 1985, p. 196.

where the first missionaries, the freed Black Jamaican preachers, Joseph Merrick and Alexander Fuller, employed by the Baptist missions from Europe arrived in Douala in 1844⁵⁹, Northern Cameroon, known as a Muslim country by the Germans and French colonial governments, welcomed its first missionaries from the American Lutheranism in the late 1910s. This late arrival of the missionaries in Northern Cameroon was due to the fact that Western colonial powers did not allow mission societies to evangelise in the region. Later on, when access was granted by the League of Nations to all citizens of its member countries to freely enter and undertake any activity in the territories under the mandate regime, Christianity made its entry through American and Norwegian Lutheran missionaries. Since that time, the encounter between the traditional cultures of the people, the Islamic religion, and Christianity has brought tremendous change. The African women who converted to Christianity could count among those groups of people that underwent profound changes in their lives. However, notwithstanding the profound changes brought by that encounter, the situation of women in the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon has known no significant improvement, hence my desire and interest in finding out in this research, what the women have lost or gained from such an encounter.

Through a pluri-disciplinary approach where history, anthropology, women's studies, and theology cross and complete each other, I intend to analyse the impact of Christianity on the women's present situation in the Church in Northern Cameroon. Therefore, this research situates itself in the line of interrogations raised by theologian scholars such as Mercy A. Oduyoye as to how much the women of Africa gained from being

⁵⁹ Merrick and Fuller, two former Black slaves had the honor to preach the Gospel to the Douala's people of Cameroon and founded a Baptist Church before the Germans colonized the country in 1884. For further details, see Elisabeth Isichei, *A history of Christianity in Africa, from Antiquity to the Present*, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1995.

Christians in terms of their empowerment, their integration and their full participation within society as a whole, since Christianity was seen by its Western agents as a major event that would liberate and restore value to the outcast and deprived people of the world.

To avoid the mistake of being too general, about African women and the Church, I have limited this research to the specific case of the women of the EELC. For this very reason, the people whom I interviewed for this work are either missionaries from America or Norway who have lived in the region for many years, or indigenous people of Northern Cameroon who were and still are interested, in one way or another, in the church related question.

The chronological frame of this study (1923-1999) covers the period of the Church's existence in the region. From the very beginning of the missionary work up to the time when the first theologically trained women graduated from the EELC's seminary in 1999, women have been determinant factors, although not recognised as such, in the spreading of the Gospel in Northern Cameroon. Covering a period of almost three quarters of a century, this chronology is punctuated by important dates, which constitute the turning points of the historical development of the EELC on which we based our following periodisation.

The first period starts from 1923 when the missionaries of the Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) were allowed by the French colonial government to start a mission work in the Adamawa area, until 1962 when the first indigenous leader of the Church was elected.

The second period is the period which goes from 1962 to 1975, 1962 as the year of the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and 1975, the year of the launching of the women's movement, the "Women For Christ".

The third period is that of 1975 to 1995. The year 1995 was a very important year for the women of the EELC, for it was in 1995 that the Church had its first women recruited in its seminary to be theologically trained.

The fourth and last period of the Church of which the women's history is being examined in this study is the present time, that is the period from 1995 until today. This period may be characterised as a period of contradictions in the EELC because, by 1999, as the first women sent to theological seminary completed their training, the Church found itself faced with the critical problem of their employment: What was the Church going to do with its women theologians? Were they going to be accepted in the ordained ministry like their male classmates, or were they going to be simply abandoned by the Church because nothing has been planned beforehand for their employment within the Church?

Central to this study is the problem of the recognition of the role played by women in the historical development of the EELC and their integration within its decision-making structures. In other words, this research is primarily about bringing into light the important but hidden contribution of the women in building up society in general and the Church in particular in Northern Cameroon.

By researching this topic, my intention is to make the members of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon, and most importantly women

who constitute the great majority of the Church members, be aware of their important contribution to the development of Christianity in the region. Women are capable of great achievements in any domain of life just as their male counterparts are. Therefore, they should be given opportunities to take leadership positions both in church and in society as a whole in Northern Cameroon.

Around this central question of the recognition of the women's contribution to the development of the church and the society in Northern Cameroon, and their expected involvement in the leadership of social institutions like the church's development organisations, there are other issues such as the social, political, economic, and religious education of the women and the amelioration of their life's condition, which are being dealt with in this research.

As already mentioned above, this thesis is based on both written and oral sources. It is structured in seven chapters of unequal lengths.

The first chapter is an introductory chapter, which focusses on the motivation behind the undertaking of this research, a clear definition of key concepts of the study, an appropriate methodological approach to the topic as well as a general overview of the research.

The second chapter presents the geographical setting and the historical context of this research, given the fact that the peoples, the mission societies, and the Church of which stories are told in this work have been influenced by their environment and therefore, can be thought of as products of their natural and cultural milieus. Thus, by presenting the geographical setting of the region called Northern Cameroon, and by situating its population and the Church in their historical background, I

hope to give to my readers a better understanding of the things I want to bring into light from this part of the world.

Closely related to the idea presented in the second chapter of this work is the way in which the lives of the women were shaped by the natural and social environments in Northern Cameroon; hence, our attempt in a third chapter to present the lives of the women in Northern Cameroon before the arrival of Western missionaries.

In chapter four of this research, I attempt the difficult task of revealing the hidden work of the women missionaries in Northern Cameroon. This I do through a critical analysis of the reports made by the missionaries themselves, giving precedence to the women missionaries' reports and a certain number of interviews conducted with missionary women in Cameroon as well as in Norway during my research fieldwork. The analysis of these documents aims at enabling the reader to critically evaluate the contribution of the women to the missionary work in Northern Cameroon.

The fifth chapter focusses on the role that the African women have played in the building up of a national Lutheran church in Cameroon and their struggle to constitute a national movement of their own within this Church, which they worked hard to implant and in which their role has been almost ignored. The importance of the women's movement of the EELC in terms of their struggle for recognition and integration in Church is also fully presented, discussed, and evaluated here.

In the sixth chapter of this work I have dealt with the sensitive question of women's ministry in the EELC and have also raised the issues of the pastoral and theological training of the women as well as the social,

political and religious implications of the women's ordination in the Church in Northern Cameroon.

To conclude the thesis, a seventh chapter was necessary to deal with current challenges facing women in church and society in Africa in general and in Northern Cameroon in particular: these are the questions of education as an enabling factor for women's access to leadership, to formal economic, political and cultural structures in modern societies.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter of the thesis, my attempt was to explain to the reader the reason why I chose to write on women in Church, while being myself part of a Church that pays no attention to the women's involvement in its leadership.

The ill-treatment of women in both church and society in Northern Cameroon is mostly based on the idea that women are inferior to men and that, if women are not fully integrated in leadership today, it is mostly because of their nature and more importantly, the tradition which still denies them leadership positions in the spheres within which men are given leadership positions by the same discriminatory tradition. The assumption that women are inferior to men is a controversial assumption, which cannot be easily demonstrated. Women are perceived differently according to the cultures and the traditions of the societies they belong to. It also depends on whether one considers the women's condition in public or private sphere. On a private level, for instance, when we look at the relation between husband and wife, it cannot be easily demonstrated that the wife is inferior to the husband. Therefore, the situation of the women's inferiority to men is probably more complicated than simply stating it.

Since this research is all about women and especially about women in church, I have also tried to define some key concepts such as the concepts of “women” and the concept of “church” which, to me, are among the most important concepts for the understanding of this work.

A methodological approach which includes a short discussion on current feminist theories, women’s emancipation movements in Africa, and a review of literature and other source materials used to write this thesis, have been presented as well as an overview of its different chapters.

In chapter two, the reader is presented with the geographical and historical framework in which this study is being conducted.

Chapter Two: Geographical and Historical Presentation of the Research Field

Introduction

In the first chapter of this study, which is an introductory chapter, I presented the different aspects of the situation of women in today's church and society in Northern Cameroon. A methodological approach has also been defined as to how to go about conducting this research in an efficient manner. After having thus beacons the way for a good understanding and processing of data in order to tackle the women's issue in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, it appears therefore appropriate to present the reader with an accurate and updated study of the natural and human environment in which the research is located.

To study the social and religious status of a group, such as these women, in church and society, a minimal knowledge of the general social, political, economic, cultural and religious context is a prerequisite.

Although respecting strictly the boundaries drawn between the different Western missions societies at work in Cameroon that confined the Lutheran missions to the northern part of the country during the colonial times, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, as its name indicates, is not only a national church with congregations spread in various regions of Cameroon, but it has also developed working relationships with worldwide church organisations such as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) which totalises 57,845,668 members out of a world-wide Lutheran population of 61,528,197.⁶⁰ However, the aim of this chapter is to focus closely on a presentation of Cameroon and the region

⁶⁰The figures give the membership of the 124 LWF member churches including two associate member churches and 12 recognised congregations in 1998.

of Northern Cameroon as an African region where the interplay between social, cultural, political and economic factors, both from within and from outside, have created such a complex situation, that to work towards women's full integration in church as well as in society will require contributions from both men and women of the region.

2.1. The Region and Its People

2.1.1. The Region

Situated in equatorial and tropical Africa, the Republic of Cameroon is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the southwest; Nigeria to the west; Chad and Central African Republic on the east; and Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and the Congo Republic (Congo-Brazzaville) to the south.⁶¹ Cameroon as it is known today is not a large country, totaling only some 475 000 square kilometres and stretching 1 232 kilometres north and 720 kilometres east to west. A detailed study of the making of Cameroon throughout the colonial period shows that Cameroon as a German protectorate was many times amputated of some of its territories to the neighbouring countries like Chad, the Central African Republic and Nigeria.⁶² This historical fact of the shaping of Cameroon is confirmed by Théodore Ateba Yéné who, in his autobiographical novel, *Cameroun, mémoire d'un colonisé*, published by L'Harmattan in 1988, argued that the Berlin agreement of 1911 between France and Germany helped to solve a French-German dispute over the Alsace-Lorraine territory. The French government of the time had conceded to the Germans a portion of Alsace-Lorraine and in exchange, the German government, in total contempt of the protectorate agreements that abode them to the Cameroonian chiefs,

⁶¹ See Map 5.

⁶² See Maps 2 and 3.

ceded to France the Cameroonian territories of Oyem, Ouesso, Souanké, Bouar, Berberati and Léré.⁶³

Four major geographical regions are found in Cameroon, the Chad or northern plains; the plateaus of the central and southern parts of the country; the western highlands; and the coastal lowlands. The northernmost portions, which lie in the Chad basin, beginning north of the Benue River and sloping downward gently to the Lake Chad and the Adamawa Plateau⁶⁴, which extends into Nigeria, form the region I refer to as “Northern Cameroon” in this study⁶⁵. With a diverse landscape and a variety of climate and vegetation, the region is said to have “served as a shelter zone for successive waves of migrants called Sao of the Kanem-Bornu in the north and the people of Jukun language of the Kwarafara on the riverside of the Benue in the south.”⁶⁶

Following the presidential decree of August 1983⁶⁷, Cameroon was administratively divided into ten provinces. The region of Northern Cameroon, which constituted one administrative province before August 1983, split into three provinces, namely the Adamawa (Ngaoundéré as provincial capital city), the North (Garoua as provincial capital city) and the Extreme-North (Maroua as provincial capital city) provinces.⁶⁸

⁶³ Yéné, A. Th., *Cameroun, mémoire d'un colonisé*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1988, p. 16.

⁶⁴This plateau, at an elevation of about 1 370 metres, is the major watershed of the country. Rivers with sources from the Adamawa Plateau flow in several directions: into Lake Chad, into Nigeria, into the Congo River, and through the southwestern portions of Cameroon into the Gulf of Guinea.

⁶⁵See Map 4..

⁶⁶Njeuma, M. Z., “Les lamidats du Nord-Cameroun (1800-1897)”, in Njeuma, M. Z., *Histoire du Cameroun (XIX-Début XXè s)*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1989, p. 18. See also Map 1.

⁶⁷Frouisou, S., “Traditions, mutations sociales et comportements religieux dans la société massa du Nord-Cameroun des origines à 1998”, Masters thesis, University of Ngaoundéré, 1998, p. 12.

⁶⁸See Map 4.

2.1.2. The People

According to the figures of the first national census, conducted in 1976, and a generally accepted growth-rate figure of 2.47 percent per year, the population of Cameroon is said to have reached the level of 20.000.000 people in year 2000⁶⁹. Living mainly in rural areas (seventy-one percent residing in the country and only twenty-nine percent are in towns and cities), according to Mark W. DeLancey⁷⁰, the population of Cameroon consists of numerous and diverse ethnic groups. In Cameroon, the differences in ecological conditions have produced a great variety of cultures within the country, as different peoples coming from various places within the continent have had to adjust to local environment. It is usually claimed by the tourist officials of Cameroon that the country is a microcosm of Africa, an “Africa in miniature”, wherein one can find all of the major cultural types of the continent. Although this statement may not be academically defensible for many, there is still an element of truth in it because of the extremely heterogeneous ethnic mosaic present in Cameroon today. Researchers like Melville Herskovits⁷¹, George P. Murdock⁷², and Jacques Macquet⁷³ have pointed out to that ethnic heterogeneity of Cameroon. Some estimates suggest that there are as many as 230 identifiable ethnic entities of which forty make up the population of Northern Cameroon.⁷⁴ Although the criteria upon which these

⁶⁹For more details, see Mark W. DeLancey, *Cameroon, Dependence and Independence*, Westview Press, 1989, pp. 81-105, on Society and Culture.

⁷⁰DeLancey, M. W., *Op. Cit.* p. 84.

⁷¹Melville Herskovits defined six major culture areas for Africa south of the Sahara. Four of these include Cameroon ethnic groups (See his book *The Human Factor in Changing Africa*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1962, pp. 51-112, and specially the map on p. 57.)

⁷²In Murdock's set of categories for all of Africa, which he discussed under ten chapter headings, Cameroon groups appear in at least six of these. (See Murdock, G. P., *Africa: Its People and Their Culture History*, McGraw-Hill, 1959).

⁷³In his book entitled *Civilisations of Black Africa*, published by Oxford University Press in 1972, Jacques Macquet defined six civilisations in Africa of which four, namely the civilisations of the Bow, Clearings, Cities and Industry are represented in Cameroon. (See pp. 15-16).

⁷⁴Damay, J., *Lettres du Nord-Cameroun*, Karthala, 1985, p. 221.

classificatory systems are based, can be, and are in fact disputed, the important point here is that, by any classification system, Cameroon clearly has a number and variety of cultures and ethnic groups. But unlike the neighbouring Northern Nigerian situation where there is a clear proof of the Hausa tribe's domination over other tribes⁷⁵, none of these groups represents a politically significant proportion of the population in Cameroon. However, there are two other aspects of this diversity within the population of Cameroon, which prove to be of socio-political importance. These are the division between the English and the French speaking Cameroonians which results from the colonial history of the country and the potentially more significant division between North and South which is the result of pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence factors.

2.2. Brief Historical Outline of the Region

The colonial experiences of Cameroon, namely the German, French and British, have not only been the basis for definition of Cameroon as an entity, but they have also been determinant factors, both negative and positive, in the country's social, economic, political, and religious development. Though the first contacts between the people of Cameroon and the European traders can be retraced as far back as 1472⁷⁶, it was only in July 14, 1884 that the country became a German protectorate⁷⁷. From

⁷⁵The population of Northern Nigeria is made up mostly by Hausa people who in their great majority have adopted Islam as their religion. The imposition of the Islamic Law or Sharia in some states of the Northern Nigeria is the consequence of Muslim Hausa domination over other ethnic groups in the region.

⁷⁶1472 is the year of the so-called discovery by the Portuguese of the Fernando Po Island and the estuary of Wouri River which they named Rio dos Cameroes (River of Prawns), from which the German 'Kamerun', the French 'Cameroun' and the English 'Cameroon' names of the country may have derived.

⁷⁷Eduard Woermann, the chief German trader signed a treaty with Douala chiefs establishing the German protectorate on July 12 and Gustav Nachtigal, a German explorer and diplomat, took possession of the new protectorate for Germany and raised the German flag on July 14, 1884 in Douala.

that time onward, the German control of and presence in Cameroon varied greatly from place to place and time to time. Whereas control along the coast generally was exercised early in the German period, further inland it existed only later. For instance, the so-called Islamic area of Northern Cameroon was opened to the Germans only after the year 1899 when the German forces attacked Adamawa and conquered Tibati.⁷⁸

2.2.1. The Effects of the Islamic Conquest or *Jihad* in Northern Cameroon until the Beginning of the 20th Century

Islam which the Western colonisers and the Fulani dominant social class in Northern Cameroon agreed upon to present as the main religion practised by the people of Northern Cameroon, was brought into the region from outside and by people who were themselves considered as outsiders to the indigenous people of the area, mostly the Fulani. The perception by both the Cameroonian and non-Cameroonian historians that the region of Northern Cameroon was a Muslim preserved domain⁷⁹, came from an ideologically strategy circulated by the Western colonial powers. In fact, the Western colonisers were looking for a way to make peace with the Muslim chiefs whom they thought were in total control of Northern Cameroon. However, if the introduction of Islam was anterior to Christianity in Northern Cameroon, Islam like Christianity is an alien religion to the majority of the people living in Northern Cameroon at the time of the European encounter. The introduction of Islam in Northern Cameroon is a relatively recent phenomenon compared to the peoples' cultural and religious practices they lived in for centuries before the advent of Islam, which dates back to the beginning of the eighteenth

⁷⁸The Fulani Muslim conquerors succeeded to establish in Northern Cameroon a Fulani kingdom which extended from Maroua in the north to Tibati in the south. This kingdom which the Fulani themselves called *Fombina* (south) compared to the position of their capital city Yola (see the Pre-colonial Adamawa on Map 1) was established following the period of the *Jihad* in Northern Cameroon.

⁷⁹ See Mveng, E., *Histoire du Cameroun*, CEPER, Yaoundé, 1978.

century and which was facilitated by two major types of proselytes of which some were from the Bornu State (the region of the present Lake Chad) and the others from Sokoto (Northern Nigeria).⁸⁰ According to the authors of *The Dictionary of Global Culture*⁸¹, the Fulani are a Muslim ethnic group living throughout the western Sudanic region of Africa, from Senegal to the Central African Republic. Estimated about 400 000 in Cameroon, the Fulani, in their physical appearance, combine Negroid and Caucasoid features. They refer to themselves as the *Fulbe* or *Pullo*, as well as *Peul*, *Fulah* and *Fellata*. Fulani is the name given to them by the Hausa people living in Nigeria. The Fulani people were converted to Islam in the eleventh century and helped to spread Islam throughout West Africa.

Historically, the Islamic religion was officially brought to Northern Cameroon in 1715 when Bukar, king of Mandara, favorably received the Muslim missionaries from Bornu.⁸²

2.2.1.1. The Islamic Conquerors of Bornuan Origin

The Bornu state was located southeast to the Lake Chad. According to Jean-Claude Froelich, the state of Bornu was a place of refuge to the Kanem dynasty which was destabilised by the revolts of the So and the Bulala people in 1389⁸³. Joseph Ki-Zerbo also speaks of the empire of the Kamen-Bornu as one of the largest and most influential African empires of the time. Its influence at the time of its apogee stretched out from Tripoli and Egypt to the present region of Northern Cameroon, and from

⁸⁰ Mveng, E. *Op. Cit.*, p. 227.

⁸¹ See Kwame, Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Jr. (eds.), *The Dictionary of Global Culture*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York, 1997.

⁸² Mveng, E., *Op. Cit.*, p. 227.

⁸³ Froelich, J-C., *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire*, Paris, Orante, 1962, p. 47. See also Map 1.

Niger to the Nile⁸⁴. In the opinion of Leon L'Africain, the population of the Bornuan empire had "no knowledge of whatever faith, be it Christian, Judaic or Mohammedan."⁸⁵ However, under the long rule (1581-1617) of Idriss Alawma, well known for his religious proselytism, the Bornu subjugated the non Muslim tribes in the south of Chad, namely the Mandara, the Musgum and the Kotoko.⁸⁶

The Islamic campaign launched by Idriss Alawma against the Mandara kingdom caused great movements of the populations in the region. Not only did a number of groups among the Mandara seek refuge in the mountains while others were being forced to convert to the Islam, but also other groups like the Massa, the Moundang, the Guisiga and the Toupouri to cite but a few, were greatly affected in their own locations.

The phenomenon of Islamisation of the people in the Central Sudan⁸⁷ was mostly characterised by slavery and violence against the so-called pagan populations of the Lake Chad plain. The strategy utilised by the Muslim chiefs was to constrain the local chiefs to play the role of slaves' providers. Therefore, the indigenous chiefs converted to Islam or, having made agreements with Muslim chiefs, had to organise raids against their own populations in order to provide the Muslim chiefs with slaves. But there was also conflict among the different Islamicised people in Northern Cameroon. While for the Bornuan Muslim the principal reason to conquer other people was to constitute a provision in slaves, the Fulani Muslim instead were dreaming of creating a kingdom in which they would have control over every aspect of social, political, economic, cultural and religious life of the people.⁸⁸

⁸⁴Ki-Zerbo, J., *Histoire de l'Afrique noire*, Paris, Hâtier, 1978, p. 158.

⁸⁵Leon L'Africain quoted by J-C Froelich, *Op. Cit.*, p. 47.

⁸⁶Ki-Zerbo, J., *Op. Cit.*, pp.284-288.

⁸⁷ See Map 1.

⁸⁸Njeuma, M Z., *Op. Cit.* pp. 20-25.

2.2.1.2. The *Jihadists* of Usman dan Fodio

The Fulani were among the first populations of Black Africa to convert to Islam⁸⁹. Led by Usman dan Fodio⁹⁰ through a religious movement caused by an attitude of revolt, the Fulani people started fighting against the Muslim Hausa and Bornuan leaders in 1804⁹¹. But long before Usman dan Fodio launched his holy war, there were Fulani people in Northern Cameroon. They were scattered with their livestock and therefore could not constitute an influential and homogenous group. They were subject to the non-Muslim chiefs they found in place and with whom they had strained relationships.⁹² The revolt of Usman dan Fodio against the Hausa and Bornuan authorities served as a pretext for the Fulani of Northern Cameroon to gather and form a socio-politically unified group. Thus, animated by the desire to overthrow and subdue the Hausa and Bornuan authorities, the Fulani, in a fanatic religious way, undertook a war which they qualified “holy” against the indigenous populations of Northern Cameroon.

This attack launched by the Fulani against the populations of Northern Cameroon did not only aim at spreading Islam in the region. It also aimed

⁸⁹According to Joseph Ki-Zerbo (*Op. Cit.* p. 130), the king of the Mallel (Mali) was converted to Islam in the 11th century (1050).

⁹⁰Known as Usman (Uthman, Othman) Dan (son) of Fodio, Dan Fodio Usman (1754-1817) was the founder of the Sokoto Fulani Empire. Born at Marafa, in the Gobir area of what is now northern Nigeria, then one of Hausa states of the region, Usman dan Fodio succeeded in rousing the Fulani people and declared the Jihad or holy war against so-called unbelievers, and in particular against the Hausa kingdoms in 1804.

⁹¹Njeuma, M. Z., *Op. Cit.* p. 19.

⁹²The nomadic Fulani people were very often opposed to sedentary populations whose crops were sometimes destroyed by the Fulani's cattle, which wandered freely in the area.

at establishing a Fulani kingdom in Northern Cameroon where the Fulani princes would watch over the strict application of the Islamic Sharia.⁹³

Concerning the non-Muslim populations of Northern Cameroon, the Fulani motivation for a holy war was not clear. According to Njeuma⁹⁴, the attitude of the Jihad warriors towards non-Muslim people in the region was ambiguous and uncertain. In fact, wherever the Muslim Fulani found a well-structured political system, as was the case among the Batta, the Mbum and the Tikar, they tried to establish a situation of dialogue between these people and themselves in order to convert them to Islam and thereafter use their Islamicised local chiefs for the Fulani cause. This was the experience of the Mbum people for instance. They also had other options such as allowing people to remain adherents of their respective religions while at the same time demanding tributary payment the amount of which was unilaterally determined or fixed by the Fulani chiefs.

However, in the case of non-Muslim and non-structured groups, the Fulani people merely reduced them to slavery and assimilated them in such a way that they finally lost their cultural identities to the Fulani Muslim culture. This was the case of the Fali people of the Benue plain.

From a more general point of view, the hegemonic attitude of the Fulani warriors did not fail to create a situation of conflict between different ethnic groups, which populated the region of Northern Cameroon. Thus, the period of the *Jihad* in Northern Cameroon was characterised by a general

⁹³Unlike the Hausa Islam in Northern Nigeria which succeeded in implementing the Sharia Law in some of the Nigerian states, the Fulani Islam in Northern Cameroon influenced by what Thierno M. Bah called "a Jihad without a will of proselytism" (see Thierno Mouctar Bah, "Les facteurs peul et les relations inter-ethniques dans l'Adamaoua au XIX^e siècle", in Boutrais, J. (ed.), *Peuples et cultures de l'Adamaoua (Cameroun)*, Paris, ORSTOM/Ngaoundéré-Anthropos, 1993, pp. 61-86), produced a relatively pacific Muslim society, rid of any fanatical element.

⁹⁴Njeuma, M. Z., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 26-27.

situation of insecurity. Different groups of people declared war against one another under the manipulation of the Fulani Muslim chiefs. During that time of the *Jihad*, the number of victims was far higher than the victims of the tribal wars in which only rudimentary means like sticks were used in the battle. In most of the cases, these tribal wars between African people gave Europeans a pretext to intervene in Africa in order to make peace among African quarreling tribes. Therefore, these wars were perceived by the Western colonialists as the result of the barbaric manner in which Africans lived and this was sufficient to justify the European presence on the African continent as a “pacifying” and a “civilising” one.

In Northern Cameroon, the *Jihad* phenomenon, which the Europeans interpreted as one of these tribal wars in Africa, had disastrous consequences on people’s attitudes towards one another. Relatively good military equipment (they used horses, arrows and swords against non-military equipped people who used mainly sticks as means of combats) enabled the Fulani Muslim warriors to succeed in imposing their domination over the non Muslim populations. The consequences of this Fulani domination were numerous and significantly determined the political, social, cultural and religious image of the entire region of Northern Cameroon.

Politically, the Fulani chief (the *Lamido*) became an important personality who embodied all the political institutions in the region. Surrounded by a group of Fulani and non-Fulani advisers, the *Lamido* became a type of despot to whom everything in the chieftaincy (the *Lamidat*), human beings as well as goods, belonged in a personal way. However, Jacques Macquet relativised this autocracy and pointed out that:

The *Lamido* is a depository of the land, which is not properly speaking his property. But because of the total submission of his subjects who

serve him with an utmost religious respect, the *Lamido* enjoys a real prestigious situation among those who come from afar to solicit his help like the European colonisers.⁹⁵

Given the fact that the *Lamido* was perceived by his fanatic subjects almost as a god⁹⁶, the dedication of his people to fight in order to extend his authority over the other people in the region was of a religious nature. As a result of the Fulani Jihad in Northern Cameroon, there followed the gathering of the populations around the personality of the Muslim chief in urban areas. Even the non-Muslim people were forced to move closer to the place where the Muslim chief resided and therefore, it was obvious that such gathering of the population was going to have significant economic consequences. In this sense, the concentration of populations around principal centres such as Garoua, Maroua, Ngaoundéré, Tibati and Rey-Bouba, to cite but a few, where Fulani Muslim chiefs established their headquarters to rule over the entire region, necessitated greater food production to feed the rapidly augmenting population of these new settlements.

From a cultural and religious point of view, the impact of the Islamic Fulani culture on the non-Muslim populations of Northern Cameroon was decisive. Although the primary goal of the Jihad was not to impose Islam on the non-Muslim people of the region, the Fulani conquerors did all they could to impose their way of life on the so-called pagan populations of Northern Cameroon. For instance, in most of the urban centres in Northern Cameroon, the Fulani language (*Fulfulde*), the language of the conquerors, became the *lingua franca* among the people of the region. Whether they

⁹⁵Macquet, J., *Histoire de l'Afrique centrale des origines au milieu du xxe siècle*, Paris, Presence Africaine, 1971.

⁹⁶The bodyguards (Dogari) of the Lamido of Rey-Bouba are a perfect illustration of such behaviour. These traditional soldiers, armed with arrows and guns of local make, are quick in striking down whoever dares to attack the kingdom, the only condition being that order should be given by the "Baba-Rey", which literally means the father of Rey, who is not someone else but the chief himself.

belong to the Fulani group or not, most of the people in Northern Cameroon today speak *Fulfulde*.

Following the advent of the *Jihad*, most of the populations of Northern Cameroon who lived in urban centres in which Muslim authorities oppressed the non Muslim people, tried to imitate the Fulani way of life, some by speaking their language and the others by practicing an Islam that accommodated all aspects of their traditional religions. In the villages, the life of the people, and they were far greater in numbers than the ones who were forced by the *Jihadists* to move to urban centres, was totally different. The disputes about their crops destroyed by the Fulani's wandering cattle very often led the villagers to wars between nomadic Fulani and themselves.

It was in this context of high tension between the indigenous people of Northern Cameroon and the Fulani Muslim conquerors that the Europeans appeared in the beginning of the twentieth century, some of them as colonisers and the others as missionaries.

2.2.2. Western Colonisation and Mission Societies in Northern Cameroon

2.2.2.1. The European Colonisation in Northern Cameroon

The problematic concept of the European colonisation, as a "civilising mission" in Africa, dates back to the 15th century. In the beginning, this enterprise was interpreted as a divine mission entrusted to the Europeans to bring civilisation to the non-civilised people of the world amongst whom the people of Northern Cameroon were counted. To give heed to this demand, Pope Nicolas V in his capacity as head of the Roman Catholic Church, after having conquered the city of Ceuta in 1415,

authorized his crusaders in the Bull of June 18, 1452, "to attack, conquer, and submit the Sarrasines, the pagans, the infidels all enemies of Christ; to submit their person in perpetual servitude; to submit their territory and their goods to the European successors."⁹⁷ This colonial enterprise had a fatal impact on the African continent, although it was not the first target. In fact the Europeans, in a spirit of revenge, were targeting the Arabs Islamists and it was only by way of extending their influence that the African continent, and especially the sub-Saharan region of Africa, was implicated in the above-mentioned papal decree. In fact, the African people were victim of a double misunderstanding: one from the Muslim people who considered the African culture as an emanation of fetishism⁹⁸, and one from the Europeans who simply adopted the discredit thrown on the African culture by their Arabs predecessors. Thus, as pointed out by Kange Ewane: "The biases and the incomprehension put into contribution, Africa has therefore appeared for centuries as a continent without civilisation."⁹⁹

The Europeans appeared in Northern Cameroon for the first time in the middle of the 19th century as explorers with the unique aim of satisfying universal scientific needs, as it was then argued. Therefore, the incursions of Barth in 1851-52 and Vogel in 1854 in the Massaland¹⁰⁰ were presented as scientific missions, which were supposed to benefit the entire humankind. These Europeans were purely animated by a spirit of a scientific curiosity and as such their penetration in the African inland during the 19th century should not be interpreted as an action in

⁹⁷Ducatillon, J. V., "Théologie de la colonisation", in *Revue de l'action sociale* 90, juillet-août 1955, pp. 761-785.

⁹⁸The Jihadists of Usman dan Fodio did fight against their Hausa and Bornuan fellows, arguing that their Islamic practices were mixed with African fetishism.

⁹⁹Kange, E. F., *Semence et moisson coloniales: Un regard d'Africains sur l'histoire de la colonisation*, Yaoundé, CLE, 1985, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰Garine, I., de, *Les Massa du Cameroun, vie économique et sociale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1964, p. 24.

preparation of the advent of the industrial capitalism in Europe, argued Canal.¹⁰¹ But it would have been a total misunderstanding of the phenomenon of colonialism if one had to present it as a pure scientific activity with no link to European political imperialism and economic exploitation. The fact that England, the first European country to enter the industrial revolution and enjoy commercial and maritime supremacy compared to the other European nations, was the first to play a preponderant role in this colonial enterprise cannot be a fortuitous event.

Thoroughly informed by their predecessors' reports like those of Barth and Vogel, the Europeans came to Africa in order to multiply their mission of scouting and delimitation of their zone of influence. Among those of the Europeans who came as emissaries to Northern Cameroon, there were captains Maistres, Loeffler, Lenfant and Fort¹⁰², to cite but a few.

The British people had been furrowing for decades before the French and Germans arrived in the region. Although their first objective, according to Njeuma¹⁰³, was to eradicate slavery from the region, the English people did not miss the opportunity to promote commercial activities. Quickly abandoning their humanitarian idea of the fight against slavery, the English dedicated themselves to trading in which they succeeded mostly thanks to the Hausa intermediaries. That is why, during this period of the English intrusion in Northern Cameroon, there were Hausa traders who journeyed across the region, selling and buying merchandise for British Commercial Companies.

¹⁰¹Canal, J. S., *Essai d'Histoire Africaine: De la traite des noirs au néocolonialisme*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1980, p. 225.

¹⁰²Cuvilier-Fleury quoted by Igor de Garine, *Op. Cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁰³Njeuma, M. Z., *Op. Cit.* p. 44.

Despite the fact that all precautions had been taken to avoid conflicts between their citizens abroad, the European countries finally found themselves in conflict with one another in Northern Cameroon. With the arrival of the English and the French in Northern Cameroon on the one hand and the Germans on the other, the population had to undergo some troubles due to this European presence. The Germans pretended that their domination over Cameroon since 1884 did not limit itself to the coastal area, but extended to the region of the Lake Chad. The French with their colonial project aiming at a unified French African colony which extended from its west African colony and Congo to the north of Africa were confronted with the English who until this time had only developed commercial relations with the local populations.¹⁰⁴

In this situation of conflict between European powers, the French succeeded in signing an agreement with the Emir of Yola. This agreement did not deter the English, who signed an agreement with the Germans. Following this Anglo-German treatise of 1886-1887, Yola and a quarter of the Emirate of Adamawa were integrated to the English territory of Nigeria, and the rest became part of the German Northern Cameroon. However, in contest of the agreement between the English and the Germans, the French decided to sign an agreement with the German authorities in 1894 and were conceded the famous region of the "*Bec du Canard*" (Beak of Duck).¹⁰⁵

This European "coup de force" in Northern Cameroon put an end to the Islamic Jihad, and Muslim and non-Muslim people were forced to enter

¹⁰⁴Njeuma, M. Z., *Op. Cit.* pp. 41-51.

¹⁰⁵About the numerous agreements signed between the European powers modifying considerably the geography of Cameroon, see Eldridge Mohammadou, "Les sources de l'exploration et de la conquete de l'Adamawa et du Bornou allemands (1893-1903): Passarge, Dominik, Bauer", Unpublished paper found in the library of Ngaoundéré/Anthropos, University of Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, p. 40.

into a new type of process, which became known to the people of the region as: *processus de modernisation de notre société* or process of modernisation of our society.

From a political point of view, the French and the Germans made use of the structures put in place by the Fulani Muslims to gain control over the non-Muslim populations. Favouring the Muslim chiefs against the so-called pagan populations, the European colonisers contributed to the destabilization of the African traditional institutions and created ethnic antagonisms among the different groups in Northern Cameroon.

In the economic domain, the introduction of a monetary economy to the region by the Europeans contributed to the people embracing the concept of private property formerly unknown to most of the indigenous people in the region.

In short, the presence of the Europeans in Northern Cameroon as elsewhere on the African continent was predominantly a political and economic issue and not merely a pure scientific enterprise. This point of view was defended by Maurice Delafosse who, writing about the European presence in Africa, with an unusual frankness pointed out that:

We [the European colonisers for Delafosse himself was one of the French Governors of colony who, with the agreement of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Brazzaville, forbade the settlement of the Protestant missionaries in Northern Cameroon¹⁰⁶] are obliged to admit that it was not by altruism that we were drawn to Africa. Sometimes we wanted to insure the outlet for our commerce or some resources in raw materials for our industry, sometimes we were moved by our obscure and unconscious desire to secure a bit of glory or grandeur for our native land. In any case I discover as motive of our colonial expansion in Africa a real and reasoned will to contribute to the good of these populations that we went to subjugate.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶See Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷Maurice Delafosse quoted by Jean Suret Canale, *Op. Cit.*, p. 235.

But what credit should be given to those among the Europeans, namely the missionaries, who declared themselves as being sent by God to bring the Good News to the lost people of Africa?

2.2.2.2. The Western Mission Societies in Northern Cameroon

The European colonial powers that succeeded one another in Cameroon, the Germans, the French and English, maintained the same policy towards the Fulani Muslim domination established in Northern Cameroon since the advent of the *Jihad* in 1804. In Northern Nigeria, the agreement between the English and the *Lamibe* (plural of *Lamido* in Fulani language) or chiefs was interpreted by both sides as an English pledge to prevent Christian mission societies from undertaking evangelisation work among the populations of the area.¹⁰⁸ It was argued by the Western colonists that these policies were put in place in order to avoid conflicts with the traditional chiefs in a region known as an islamised region of Cameroon. According to Kare Lode, the German Governor, von Puttkammer, refused the Roman Catholics the right to settle in Northern Cameroon in 1903 for political reasons due to the strained relations with the Muslims in the North.¹⁰⁹ However, after World War I, the German territories of the Cameroons were divided into two unequal parts entrusted as “Mandates” by the League of the Nations to France and England respectively. Thereafter, having received the larger section of the Cameroonian territory of which the Northern Cameroon was a part from the League of the Nations, the French colonial government followed more or less the same policy as their German predecessors in religious matters. The fact that the protestant mission societies from the USA and Norway were the first to arrive and start missionary work in Northern Cameroon, more than twenty years ahead of the French Oblates, could partly explain the reticence of the

¹⁰⁸Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

French colonial government towards missionary work in the so-called Muslim countries where France was the colonial power.

But, as the international context evolved, the particular status of the Mandate prevented the French government from applying strict policies in terms allowing people from other parts of the world to immigrate to Cameroon, since the access to the territories under Mandate has been granted by the League of Nations to all citizens of its country members.¹¹⁰ With the advent of the League of Nations' Mandate over Cameroon, the region of Northern Cameroon attracted many Western mission societies of which the Mission of the Lutheran Brethren, the Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society were the first to start missionary work in the area in the early 1920s, the Roman Catholics starting almost twenty years after the first Protestants arrived from the United States of America.

The Lutheran Brethren World Mission, whose missionary enterprise contributed to the founding of the Brethren Lutheran Church of Cameroon, is an American Lutheran mission society with headquarters in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Its first missionaries arrived in Northern Cameroon in 1918 and worked mostly in the region of Garoua, Yagoua, Kaélé in Cameroon, and Léré in Chad.¹¹¹

The Sudan Mission, also called "the Gunderson Mission" started as an independent Mission Society on Gunderson's private initiative to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Sudan.¹¹² On May 22nd 1923¹¹³ when Missionary Gunderson, his wife and two nurses arrived in

¹¹⁰For more details about the Mandate status of Cameroon, see the excellent publications of Le Vine, V. T., *The Cameroons from Mandate to Independence*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1964, and Gardinier D. E., *Cameroon: United Nations Challenge to French Policy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1963.

¹¹¹ See Slageren, J., *Histoire de l'Eglise en Afrique: Cameroun*, CLE, Yaoundé, 1965.

¹¹² For more information on the term Sudan, see Chapter One, p. 5.

¹¹³ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 11-12.

Ngaoundéré from the United States via France as the first missionaries of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, there was still no fixed location for the Mission Society in the United States. However, later on when Missionary Gunderson, after many years of missionary work in Northern Cameroon and in the Central African Republic, returned to the United States, he became the first secretary general of the Sudan Mission and organised an office for the Mission in Minneapolis in the State of Minnesota where most of the European immigrants were of Scandinavian origin.¹¹⁴

Unlike the independent and private Sudan Mission which prolonged missionary efforts together with the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) had given birth to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, the NMS was founded in 1842 as an attempt from a Christian nation to evangelise non Christian nations, with its first missionaries sent to an African country, namely to the Zululand in South Africa in 1844.¹¹⁵ Among the first missionaries of the NMS to arrive in Cameroon in 1925 was Jens Nikolaisen, chief of the delegation who had already spent more than twenty years as a missionary of the NMS in Madagascar.¹¹⁶

Given the particularly hostile context of Northern Cameroon due to the presence of Islam and the opposition of the colonial authorities, missionary work in the area was not easy. Ironically, the colonial enterprise in Africa would have not succeeded without the support of the Western Christian mission societies. For “even though France is a secular country, it remains fundamentally a Christian nation and for this reason can only be beneficiary of a preaching that establishes in Black countries

¹¹⁴ Christiansen, R., *For the Heart of Africa*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1956, p. 245.

¹¹⁵ See Simensen, J., (ed.), *Norwegian Missions in African History Vol. 1: South Africa 1845-1906*, Norwegian University Press, Oslo, 1986.

¹¹⁶ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 14.

the principles of its own civilisation.”¹¹⁷ Hence the complicity, that existed between the Western colonial administration and the missionaries in Africa. The former made use of the latter to give a moral basis to their imperialistic action. Even in circumstances where missionaries encountered problems as a result of the opposition from colonists, the social dimension of the missionary work was facilitated by the colonial administration to demonstrate their philanthropic intentions by ameliorating the living conditions of the Africans. In this sense, the effort of the Western mission societies to ameliorate the conditions of life of the natives in Northern Cameroon was meant to have a particular impact on the lives of the most marginalised groups of people of which women were a part. No wonder if women were among the first converts to Christianity in Northern Cameroon. The Norwegian mission station in Ngaoundéré was for a long time viewed as a place of refuge, life learning skills and freedom for slaved women of the oppressing patriarchal system of the Fulani Muslim kingdom of Adamawa.

The European colonists and the missionaries, although not always in agreement as a result of their different backgrounds and origins, did work in most of the cases hand in hand to bring about change within African societies. As emphasised in the French government report to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1949:

The attitude of the government [the French Colonial Government] had consisted, since 1916 [when more than two-thirds of the German territories of the Cameroons were entrusted to France after the German defeat in the World War I] of increasing gradually the woman's freedom. Successively, the marriage of non mature girls was forbidden, the marriageable age was raised, divorce was allowed for the reasons listed in the French Law, then the renouncement of polygamy following a conversion to Christianity, the liberation of the widows by tribunals

¹¹⁷Dietmann, A., "Le rôle des missions religieuses dans la colonisation et leur statut légal en Afrique Noire", Unpublished document, quoted by Fabien Kange Ewane in his "Cours d'histoire de religions africaines", Faculty of the Protestant Theology of Yaoundé, 1989/90.

was authorised, and the woman's consent was required for the validity of the marriage, [and so forth].¹¹⁸

In a sense, although not always in a consistent and well planned manner, the Western colonists and missionaries worked together towards a programme for what is being today claimed as "the African women's emancipation." But how this conjugated effort of the Western colonists and missionaries impacted on the lives of the African women in Northern Cameroon is another interesting aspect of this work the accurate understanding of which requires a survey of the women's situation in pre-colonial Africa.

Conclusion

By the geographical presentation of the setting and the study of the historical context of the research, I hope to have given to the reader a better understanding of the background of the church and the society of which women's condition is being investigated in this work.

Northern Cameroon as a region has a quite different historical development from the south of the country, with a significant difference being the presence of Islam in the north, which dates back to the beginning of the eleventh century.

The presence of the Islamic religion and the introduction of Western civilisation through colonial administration at the end of the nineteenth century, and the Christian mission societies in the beginning of the twentieth century have brought many significant changes to the lives of people of Northern Cameroon in general and the women in particular.

¹¹⁸ "Rapport annuel du Gouvernement français à l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies sur l'administration du Cameroun placé sous tutelle de la France", Année 1949, p. 131. The English translation of the quotation is mine.

However, the situation of women in the church and society in Northern Cameroon today is no different from that experienced by women throughout centuries of male domination and, indeed, still experience in most of the traditions and cultures on the African continent.

The following chapter will look at the position of women in pre-islamic and colonial era in Northern Cameroon.

Chapter Three: The Perception of Women in the Pre-Islamic and Pre-Colonial Northern Cameroon and the Impacts of the Arabo-Islamic and Western Christian Cultures

Introduction

This research is aimed at giving special heed to the African women's condition in church and society in general, that of the women in the church in Northern Cameroon in particular. During this time of profound change and rampant globalisation, the church in Northern Cameroon cannot afford to evade the current debate on women's involvement in social, political, economic and religious leadership.

The woman of Northern Cameroon is increasingly influenced by the new currents of thoughts, and the perceptions of her by modern society have changed since her encounter with the new civilisations, namely the Islamic and Christian civilisations, at the end of the 19th century and the early 1920s respectively.¹¹⁹ That means that the woman we are talking about today in the church in Africa (Northern Cameroon) is not the same as her foremother who lived in the time before Islam and Western Christianity invaded the African continent. Therefore, it is useful to give a brief account of the conditions, which governed the lives of women in the pre-Islamic and Pre-Christian period, before engaging the problem of the women's position in church and society in Northern Cameroon today. In this sense, my attempt in this chapter is to present the reader with the African woman's image and role as perceived by Africans themselves in what we may call today "the African traditional society."

¹¹⁹ For more details on the encounter between Islam, Christianity and the African traditions in Northern Cameroon, see chapter chapter 2.

3.1. Women and Gender in Pre-Islamic and Pre-Colonial Northern Cameroon

Compared to other animal species which rapidly acquire social and survival skills, the human species is slow to adjust to its natural and social environment. The human journey from embryo to adulthood can be divided into developmental stages of differing duration: nine months *in utero*, one year to master walking, two years for speech and between ten to fifteen years before being initiated to and integrated in the social life of the whole community.

In this process of getting an individual becoming a socially responsible person, the role of women is of crucial importance. Speaking about the specific and essential role that women play in giving and nurturing a new life, Janine Hourcade¹²⁰ argues that it is the gift of giving life, which preeminently distinguishes the woman. Although this essentialist perception of the woman defended by Hourcade can be argued against, since the idea that the woman plays a central role in child upbringing is a social construct, culturally determined, and therefore, can vary or change according to the cultural environment, this woman's perception, however, corroborates the outstanding role women play in matters of education in all human societies.

Since the woman is the giver of life, the woman is also the best educator that the human society can afford. For

every woman, says Michelet, is a school, and it is from her that the generations get what they believe indeed. Long before the father thinks

¹²⁰ Hourcade, J., "Dans la Tradition et Aujourd'hui", in *Femmes et Mission, Spiritus, T. XXXV*, L'Harmattan, Paris, décembre., 1994, pp. 428-433, p.431.

of the education of the child, the mother has already given hers, which will then remain for ever in the child.¹²¹

In this sense, the woman educator is also the one who transmits to the younger generations the cultural heritage of their past. That is why, in most if not all civilisations, apart from those in which young people are uprooted from their mothers to be enrolled and indoctrinated for ideological and imperialistic wars like the involvement of children in civil wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Liberia, or in Sudan, the ways of living and thinking, the manners, are transmitted by women to the younger generation. We do acknowledge also that there are other institutions like schools, which remove the children from their mothers for the sake of their education. But here again, even though the education that the children receive in schools has nothing to do with the traditional one given by the women in Africa, there still is a great need of the women teachers who remain the main role players in our modern school systems.

Thus, through her role of educator, the African woman stands surety for the transmission of the values of the past to the future generations. It might be because of this role of transmitting the values of the past to the younger generations, which in a sense compels her to be more conservative, that the African woman has been accused of being backward and unable to adjust to social change and new social needs. However, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli is not of that opinion and argues that

if African women kept their rural ties to a greater degree than have the men, they maintain and pass on the traditional customs and life-style; this by no means signifies cultural, social and political backwardness, but rather an attempt to reject the new modes of production which have deprived the woman of her own source of income and made her more dependent on her husband and thus economically weaker.¹²²

¹²¹ Michelet cited by Hourcade, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 431.

¹²² Cutrufelli, M., R., *Women of Africa Roots of Oppression*, London, Zed Press, 1983, p. 162.

In other words, if the African woman in her role of mother and educator in the pre-colonial African society enjoyed a relative autonomy in both economical and social domains, the new system of education brought by the colonial power and the missionaries deprived her of that relative liberty. Somehow, there is a kind of contradiction when one considers that the current debate about women's emancipation in Africa is animated by the tenants of what Cheikh Hamidou Kane in his masterpiece, *The Ambiguous Adventure*¹²³, calls the "New School". This debate, mostly focused on the women's liberation issue, is being carried on by those who have been educated in the Western school, which according to the African conservatives denigrates the African social systems as being too oppressive for women. To clarify this debate about the African woman whose role in both church and society is central to this research, it is worth making a critical presentation of the African woman's image and role as it appears in various anthropological, historical and ethnological studies undertaken on Northern Cameroon by both foreign and local researchers. In this sense, our attempt in the following lines will consist of a critical presentation of the role played by the African women in the domain of education and childcare, healthcare and social development in Northern Cameroon before the introduction of the Western way of life through colonial administration and missionary work.

3.1.1. Women and Child Upbringing

The women's position in African societies has often been described, commented on and analysed by scholars from various fields of research.¹²⁴

¹²³ Kane, C. H., *L'Aventure ambiguë*, Paris, Julliard, 1961.

¹²⁴For the specific case of Cameroon and the region of Northern Cameroon which is the research field of the present study, interesting studies like these of Eguchi, M. J., "Aspects of life style and culture of women in the Fulbe district of Maroua", *Kyoto University African Studies*, vol. 8, 1973, pp. 17-92, Kaberry, P. M., *Women of the grassfields: a study of economic position of women in Bamenda, British Cameroons*, London, HM Stationery Office, 1952, and Vincent, J-F., *Traditions et Transition:*

The amount of literary work dedicated to the women and especially to the African women in their role of wives, mothers and educators makes the topic of the women's position in African societies one of the most interesting research topics today. However, taking into consideration the fact that the women's issue has raised and continues to raise a number of controversies among scholars in social sciences in general and in theology in particular, one wonders whether it is possible to come to an agreement on the women's role in church at all. For even in the present day, women are still considered unsuited for leadership in the Lutheran church in Cameroon.

Generally speaking, the training of a child in African societies is a cooperative effort in which members of the extended family and the neighbourhood play their parts. However, it is the direct responsibility of the women and more specifically the mothers to give early training and to educate the girls in particular.

To the African woman, argued Bukunola Osibodu¹²⁵, the aim of education is multilateral and the objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, cooperative and conforming to the social order of the day. In this regard, the woman educator is first and foremost concerned with training the infants and the growing children in general and the girls in particular to develop a sense of belonging to and respect for elders, to acquire specific vocational training in order to participate in family affairs and to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the

entretiens avec les femmes Beti du Sud-Cameroun and "Place et pouvoir de la femme dans les montagnes Mofu (Nord-Cameroun)", in *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-4, 1979, pp. 225-251, have been published, dealing mostly with the situation of women in African societies.

¹²⁵ Osibodu, B., "The Role of the Woman in the Education of her Child", in *La civilisation de la femme dans la tradition africaine*, Rencontre organisée par la Société Africaine de Culture, Abidjan, 3-8 juillet 1972, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1975, pp. 216-231.

community at large. Thus, despite the fact that in Northern Cameroon customs vary from one ethnic group to another, it is important to note that in all these ethnic groups, the aim, the content and the methods of training are essentially similar and are intricately interwoven. All the education systems used by the various ethnic groups in Northern Cameroon aim at bringing children to adulthood through daily life experiences and specific initiation rites to a fully responsible person. Such an initiated and adult person is therefore ready to play his or her role as member of the entire community. One notable feature of this education, which draws one's attention, is the separateness between customary education of boys and girls in African societies.

In fact, the African women, who are indeed the backbones of the African educational systems, and who are in charge of passing it onto their offspring, are very keen to distinguish immediately which type of training to give to their daughters and which type to give to their sons. This differentiation in training is in preparation for differing future social roles. For the role that society expects males to play in community life is different from the one, which it expects from the females. This is where the labour division based on sex differences begins in African societies. Therefore, shall we agree with the statement according to which African women are architects of their own misfortune? Or shall we rather accept that they are being victimised by a male machinery wisely built up before the dawn of time to which women have ignorantly contributed by passing it onto their daughters from generation to generation? Whatever our response to these questions, most of the studies currently conducted by scholars on the condition of the African women, present them as victims of a patriarchal system in which the place of a woman is not different from that of a slave. This clearly is in support of what Maria Rosa Cutrufelli

confirmed when she agreed with the statement of the first conference of the Mozambican women, according to which

The rites of initiation may take different forms in different regions [of Africa], yet they have the common purpose of instilling an attitude of submission to man into women's hearts by making them accustomed to the notion that they were born to take second place in society. [For] during the ceremony, the girls are told that from now onwards their task is to procreate and attend to their husbands and their homes, and any other task is forbidden to them. These initiatory rites, surrounded as they are by an aura of mystery and religious solemnity, have such a devastating psychological impact on the girls that they are mesmerised into a blind acceptance of the indoctrination through a traumatic experience bound to affect them for the rest of their lives.¹²⁶

Such a statement or conclusion about the African women's conditions might misinform if it is not looked at in a critical way. Hence, our attempt to have a thorough analysis of the materials at our disposal in order to find out whether the role played by women in Northern Cameroon in bringing up the younger generation, has hindered their own emancipation process or not. In other words, by assessing the educational role of the women through the analysis of the documents gathered through archival research and interviews conducted with the women themselves in Cameroon, we hope to arrive at a better understanding of the women's role in pre-colonial and pre-missionary era in Northern Cameroon.

In an analysis of the Freudian theory, Françoise Dolto¹²⁷, a French psychoanalyst, specialised in the analysis of children and a member of the *Ecole freudienne de Paris*, in her book, originally published by *les Editions du Seuil* in 1971 as, *Le cas Dominique*, pointed out that in the child's neurophysiological and psychical evolution when its development is not blocked, the child outgrows a number of successive castrations, namely the cutting of umbilical cord, the weaning from the breast, the

¹²⁶ Cutrufelli, M. R., *Op. Cit.* p. 155.

¹²⁷ Dolto, F., *Dominique: Analysis of an Adolescent*, translated by Ivan Kats, Souvenir Press, 1974, pp. 221-257.

weaning from bottle-feeding and from all-liquid diet, the freedom from functional physical dependence, unaided walking, toilet training and total bodily autonomy. At this stage, the baby and young child invariably look upon the mother as the person to imitate. Any person more mature than the child can temporarily be assigned this role of the child's support, but the mother remains the preferred co-existential object of the child for the father is known to the child only through his association with the mother in the child's mind.

In African societies, children are "initiated" at an early age. By means of elementary tasks, they begin to learn and assimilate the fundamental values of their cultural identities. According to Thomas Christensen¹²⁸, any person's socialisation is a long and complex process that occurs in the course of every day family life. For instance among the Gbaya of Cameroon and the Central African Republic, a child, be it male or female, first participates in the rhythm of life from a position on his or her mother's back or breast. Mothers always maintain close physical contact with the child until it begins to walk and talk. And this is not done before the age of two. In some cases, children do not give up their physical contact with their mothers before the age of four.

By the age of five or six, a small girl can already carry a calabash of water or a piece of firewood to assist her mother in domestic tasks. In the evening by the kitchen fire, a mother counsels her daughter how to prepare for marriage.

At about the same age, a small boy eats with the men and sits by the fire in front of his father's house where he, too, receives his first instructions

¹²⁸ Christensen, T. G., in his excellent study on the Gbaya tribe of Central Africa, published by Orbis Books, New York, 1990, entitled, *An African Tree of Life*, gives an extended explanation on how the Gbaya people bring up their children in chapter 7, "Growing Up in Gbaya Society: Tales and Dances", pp. 71-83.

about marriage and respect of the elders. He must also learn how to take part in family work routines, especially as he goes to the field with his father, helping to carry tools and hunting weapons. But generally, between the age of zero to six, a child is much more attached to its mother than to its father. This is understandable if one takes into consideration the obvious reasons of feeding and caring for it at this early age.

For instance among the Fali, one of the various ethnic groups in Northern Cameroon whose early contact with Islam had not altered their cultural identity, the education of a child from the age of six and below is totally the responsibility of its mother. At this age, boys and girls alike are taught by the women the basic rules of decency, which regulate the social life. Considering the theory of child psychology as developed by Freud whereby the building up of a human personality takes place within the period of zero to six years of the lifetime of the child, one must definitely acknowledge the key role played by women in the formation of individuals through their early care.

In an article entitled “*Le jeu de la femme*” (The Game of the Woman), Chantal Guilmain-Gauthier¹²⁹ demonstrated that among the Fali people of Northern Cameroon, the role of the woman lies in their difference. A difference which is neither inequality nor opposition to the role of the man, but rather complementarity in respect of the harmony of the world according to the will of *Faw* (God). In other words, women have different roles to play in society than men. This difference in roles belongs to the creation order and must not be interpreted in terms of inequality or opposition between men and women in society. Therefore, for a Fali woman, it is her “natural” task to look after her baby child and she

¹²⁹ Guilmain-Gauthier, C., “Le jeu de la femme”, in Barbier, J.-C., (sous la direction de), *Femmes du Cameroun: Mères pacifiques, femmes rebelles*, Karthala-ORSTOM, Paris, 1985, pp. 37-62.

assumes this role as if there were no other way for the child in this world to survive.

To better understand this apparent contradiction in which African women do not look at their educational role as a burden imposed on them by a patriarchal society, but rather, view it as an advantage, one must look back at their own educational background. By interviewing a number of elderly women from various ethnic groups¹³⁰ in Northern Cameroon, I realised that the woman of Northern Cameroon, whatever tribe she may belong to, is a product of her society. She becomes part of her community through a process in which her parents, relatives and other neighbours form her personality. She is thus deeply influenced, during her childhood, by the expectations that her society lays on her. Her ability to be a model wife and a successful mother, who trains her own children in the tradition of community group, is therefore an outcome of what has occurred during her own period of development in childhood. Women's roles as mothers and wives are socially constructed as I mentioned it earlier. Both European and African societies have their views of the women's role, which change from time to time.

From the interviews conducted with women in the course of this research, I also realised that all the respondents were unanimous on their common role as wives, mothers and simply as women in the society. Most, if not all of them, spoke of their duties toward their husbands such as cooking and bearing children for them as well as being obedient and respectful. There was almost nothing said about their personal expectations. According to these women, living consists mainly of caring for the needs of their community members. The majority of them enjoyed talking about how

¹³⁰ My choice of ethnic groups the women of which I conducted the interviews with was mostly guided by the ethnic composition of the Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Therefore, the women with whom I conducted thorough interviews, at the exception of the missionaries, were mainly from the Gbaya, Mbum, Tikar and Massa ethnic groups.

they raised their children to have good manners and how they were blessed by having children to be looked after.

As Jacqueline Darman, wife of the first indigenous president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and active member of the Church women's organisation, pointed out:

To bring up a child is more than teaching him some intellectual and moral values of our today's world in a very quicker way as they do it in the new schools. To educate a child is to give him or her all he or she needs to adjust to his or her social and cultural environment. In a sense, this is an "initiation" of the child for his or her future life, and this process begins as soon as the child is born and continues until the child is able to look after itself. In the Gbaya society of which I am a part, bringing up children is the business of the women in general and the mothers in particular.¹³¹

Since breast-feeding was almost the only way to ensure the feeding of a new born baby in African societies before the introduction of bottle-feeding by the Europeans¹³², all women, even those who had not had a baby for a long time were concerned about the survival of the new born. There were, however exceptions to the general rule. One should not forget the fact that there were other means for Africans to keep motherless children alive. For instance, among the Massa¹³³, there is a practice that, in the case of a mother's sudden death, after she had given birth to a child, the closest family members would try to give to the new born baby goat's milk, and not cow's milk, for the cow's milk is said to be less nutritious than the goat's one, in order to keep the baby alive. When a nursing mother does not have enough milk or has a milk of bad quality, a

¹³¹ Darman, J., Interview of November 2nd, 1999 in Meiganga, Cameroon.

¹³² There were of course exceptions to the general rule. One must not forget the fact that there were other means for Africans to keep alive the motherless children.

¹³³ In the Massa society, it is a common occurrence for a baby to be breastfed by a woman who is not the baby's biological mother. A grand-mother or an aunt who past childbearing age can still play the role of a woman who has just given birth to a child.

substitute is quickly found in another woman who can feed the baby from her own breast too.

At this early stage of the human's development, the type of care that a woman gives to her child includes toilet training and eating. In her role of a caring mother, the woman in Northern Cameroon sees herself as a child protector and is very sensitive to anything that happens to the child. Accordingly she ministers to its needs.

Between the age of one and six, most, if not all that a child knows has been learnt by imitation of his or her mother or any other woman in the community who cares for it. For this reason, the child speaks first of all the language spoken by his or her mother (the expression mother tongue is a clear indication of that) and does things in the way his or her mother does them. Despite the fact that the expectations of society from a mature individual vary depending on one's sex difference, one must recognise that in their early age children are more or less products of their mothers' influence.

While relating her own educational background, Mrs. Kolomeni Doudou Marie¹³⁴, one of the rare women from the region of Northern Cameroon who acquired her primary and secondary education through the mission school system and now is a high ranking civil servant in the Cameroonian administration and a staff member of the women's organisation of the ruling political party in Cameroon, pointed out that:

Mothers are very intelligent. They attach greater importance to the education of their children, which also proves to be their first priority in their life. Every child is looked after in a specific way. In the process of educating their children, they also distinguish between the sons and the daughters. Their wish for every child, be it a boy or a girl is that he or she will be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others. Mothers are

¹³⁴ Mrs. Kolomeni, D. M., Interview of November 14th, 1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

particularly concerned about the morality and good character of their daughters, [she continues]. They will do everything in their power to assure that the girls are brought up according to the standard of the tradition, and that they will not bring shame and dishonour to the family. For a misconduct of a girl like falling pregnant before getting married is seen as a big disgrace for her family and most particularly for her mother who then must be blamed for having failed in her educating role.¹³⁵

Furthermore, among the Massa people, the mothers begin to draw their daughters' attention to what is required of them to be good women when the girls are still very young. The education of a girl is made up by things that a woman may do and not do. For instance, between the age of eight to ten, the girls are told by their mothers and the other women in the community not to play with boys. They are constantly kept close to the women from whom they learn their future roles.

To speed up the moral and social training of the girls, the Massa society has had institutions like *Guruwalla* (a very important cultural tradition of both the Massa and the Toupouri peoples of Chad and Northern Cameroon which is now in process of disappearance, because the church stood against it). It is a sort of retreat whereby girls are made fat by means of drinking a lot of milk in order to get ready for marriage. During this period of fattening and readiness for marriage, which usually takes place when the girls are aged between ten and twelve, they are also initiated into various domains of their future responsibilities by old women in the community who have proved themselves well mannered in the eyes of the others. Therefore, the African principle according to which, to educate a child is to prepare him or her to face the challenges of the life, applies to the role that the African woman plays in the training of her young ones. As pointed out by Lady Jibowu of Nigeria: "Women in the traditional society and with traditional training are better prepared for their role in the community than the majority of those who are exposed only to modern life

¹³⁵ Kolomeni, D. M., same interview.

(...) and have only the modern form of education.”¹³⁶ In other words, the type of education given and received by the African woman was well adapted to the people’s life in Africa. The responsibility of the African women in the traditional context was not limited to the sole sphere of childcare and education but included other aspects of life such as healthcare, economic and social development. Therefore, the second section of this chapter will deal with the issue of women and health in the African perspective.

3.1.2. Women and Health Issues in African Traditional Societies

Before Islam and Christianity were brought to the people of Northern Cameroon as vehicles of new cultures, the people had their own religions and a culture or a civilisation of their own. They had specific ways of responding to their religious and cultural needs which proved well adjusted to their physical and spiritual environment. Therefore, they had specific ways of dealing with health and healing issues. Their understanding of the concepts of health, sickness and healing were largely determined by the way they viewed the world.

For instance, among the various ethnic groups that populate Northern Cameroon, the same concept of health is shared, with very little difference from one tribe to another. Among the Massa people for example, there is a common understanding that, as human beings we appreciate our state of health only through our bodies. For this ethnic group, the human body or our physical appearance is the only means to judge our good or ill health. To the usual question, “How are you?” a Massa would answer: *Nan Ka Ngaa*¹³⁷ (I am well), or *Nan Ka Donoo* (I am strong), or *Tuan Ka Ngaa* (My body is well), or *Tuan Ka Denge* (My body is robust).

¹³⁶ Jibowu, L., cited by Osibudu, B., *Op. Cit.*, p. 230.

¹³⁷ The Massa language is my mother tongue.

This concept of health co-exists with the African conception of a human as not solely a physical being, but holistically as a being who has spiritual dimension. Hence, the philosophical or conceptual contents such as strength, force, and well being of the body cover the concept of health in the Massa society. For these people, being in good health or being healthy is being strong, robust or feeling good in one's body.

Unlike the concept of health, which is common to all the ethnic groups under examination in this study, since when somebody enjoys good health there is nothing to be worried about, for the person feels good, strong and robust, the concept of sickness is diversely understood among the people of Northern Cameroon. According to several interpretations, the concept of sickness covers organic, psychological, and social aspects.

It is commonly accepted that African people believe that sickness can be generated from what John Mbiti calls, "the supernatural forces applied or used against people by their enemies or those who hate them."¹³⁸ Therefore, sickness appears to the Africans as a double-dimensional phenomenon in the sense that it is said to be an attack on the body and on the soul of an individual or a group of individuals. This conception of sickness is closely related to the way in which Africans conceive human beings and life that they live on earth. For them, a human being is a holistic reality and life itself is a holistic experience. That is why, after having lived for years among the people of Northern Cameroon, the late Archbishop of Garoua, Msgr. Yves Plumey wrote:

As opposed to the White conception of a human as composed of one body and one soul, the Black Man is a whole, made of a bodily envelop, a spirit contained in this body and a double, its soul.

¹³⁸ Mbiti, J., *African Religions and philosophy*, translated from English into French by Christian Le Fort, Editions CLE, Yaoundé, 1972, p. 179.

Normally, to live is to be in good health, to have something to eat, to be fruitful or fecund and to be in peace with the environment of the nature and the village.¹³⁹

From that perspective, being sick is a hindrance to life and has both physical and spiritual implications. For Africans, the spiritual and physical aspects of the human life are two faces of the same coin. It is neither easy nor necessary to establish a distinction or to separate the two aspects.

Along with the concept that a human being is “a bodily envelop, and a spirit contained in that bodily envelope, and a double, its soul”, sickness is understood by Africans, as the result of a bad communication between the bodily envelope and the double. Though a human being is a holistic reality made of a bodily envelop with a spirit in it and a double, its soul, there are times when there is a misunderstanding between the body and its double. Thus, to the African, when the double moves around, after having left the body during the sleep time, bad dreams and nightmares occur, or when the double is captured somewhere by an evil spirit, the body will fall sick or, in the worst of cases, when the double leaves the body permanently there is death.

The outcome of such a perception of life, health, and sickness by the Africans is a very specific medical practice, which takes into consideration the physical aspect as well as the spiritual dimension of the healing process. In fact, in the African traditional medicine, the healer is simultaneously the doctor and the priest of the sick. Made of herbs, plants, roots, leaves, mineral liquids, and bones, the medicines of the traditional healer are believed to bring a holistic healing, which implies the spiritual and physical well being to the patient.

¹³⁹ Plumey, Y., *Mission Tchad-Cameroun, Documents Souvenirs Visages, l'annonce de l'évangile au Nord-Cameroun et au Mayo Kebbi 1946-1986*, Editions Oblates, Trinità, 1990, p. 28.

John Mbiti further states that, when a traditional healer

treats a sick person, he can massage him, utilise needles or spines; he can bleed him, he can jump over him, he can make incantations and counsel the patient to sacrifice a chicken or a goat, to observe some taboos, to avoid certain aliments or certain persons.¹⁴⁰

This type of medical practice, despite the fact that it has a profound spiritual or mystical dimension, remains an empirical practice since it takes into consideration the visible effects of a given disease.

One may wonder what all this has to do with the issue of women and health in African societies. But, if one does not understand properly the concepts of health and sickness among the Africans, it may be difficult for such a person to comprehend why in African traditional societies, women are the key-role players in matters regarding health and healing.

In an article dedicated to the role of women in traditional medicine in Ivory Coast, Elisabeth Adiaboua and Marie-Madeleine Loba¹⁴¹ argued that the African traditional medicine is a holistic action which affects the body, the spirit, the relations between the individual and the ancestors, the individual and the gods, the individual and nature and the individual and other living human beings. This action or medicine is about applied physics, morals, politics, and religion. It is at the same time an organic, psychiatric, social and psychosomatic medicine.

In that sense, women who are generally known to have good practical understanding of various phenomena in life played a key role in the

¹⁴⁰ Mbiti, J., *Op. Cit.* p. 179.

¹⁴¹ Adiaboua, E. and Loba, M M., "The Woman and Traditional Medicine on Ivory Coast", in *The Civilization of the Woman in African Tradition*, Meeting Organized by the Society of African Culture, Abidjan, July 3-8th, 1972, pp. 356-364.

practice of traditional medicine in Northern Cameroon before the introduction of modern medicine by the Western missionaries. For instance, in the Massa society, when a child fell sick, the mother knew exactly which roots or leaves she should take to make medicine, which plant's sap she should make use of in case of an aching head, and so on. In other words, every woman was, at an immediate level, her own doctor as well as that of her family or the community members.

Despite the fact that in their structures most of the African societies do not clearly recognise the importance of the role played by women, women remain the givers of life and very often the only ones who care for it. That is why it is very common to find among the tribes of Northern Cameroon examples of women who have proved themselves as good traditional medical practitioners.

Among the Moundang people of Northern Cameroon, there were examples of women healers like Matedeuré¹⁴² who were very successful in their profession, using among others, medicines which certain observers would hastily have termed 'black magic'. Matedeuré, and many others in the area, were clear-sighted healers who added to their professional medical knowledge, had the gift of making contact with supernatural beings, who could best treat certain diseases. In such cases, there was a direct link between the African traditional medicine and the belief that sicknesses originate from the world of evil spirits. Therefore, the traditional healers also play a role of 'confession-hearers' beside the sick. Without any previous contact with the sick person, the healer will ask the patient to describe the illness to determine the cause and the corresponding treatment. Phenomenal results have been described.

¹⁴² Fadibo, P., "Matedeuré: Gardienne des traditions moundang (1860-1961)", in Bah, M. T., (ed.), *Les Acteurs de l'histoire au Nord-Cameroun XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, Yaoundé, Saint-Paul, 1998, pp. 49-72.

Among the various ethnic groups that populate the Northern Cameroon, only women are competent as midwives, for no man is allowed to be present at the moment of delivery. Therefore, only women are specialised in child diseases.

In most of the traditional societies of Northern Cameroon, women healers, like their male counterparts, are held in great esteem by the population. Unlike ordinary females whose role in most of African traditional societies is not acknowledged, women healers are respected and revered for what they do for the well being of their communities. In the manner of *okoo-pi-gangmo*, “the woman peace-maker” in the Gbaya society¹⁴³, the woman traditional healer of Northern Cameroon was, more than an ordinary healer, a religious and political leader, a judge and an educator in her community.

Even though they were fully trusted by the population, the traditional medical practitioners were limited in the sense that they were not able to measure with precision how much of their medication they should give to their patients. There have been many instances reported where there was an overdose of medication by a traditional medical practitioner. There has also been negligence in observing elementary rules of hygiene by those practitioners, and this explains their limited results in the case of diseases caused by microbes and viruses.

¹⁴³ On the role of how important is the ‘woman peace-maker’ in the Gbaya society of Northern Cameroon and the Central African Republic, see the excellent study on *An African Tree of Life*, by Thomas G. Christensen, published by American Society of Missiology Series, No. 14, Orbis Books, 1990.

3.2. Impacts of Islam and Christianity on African Women's Economic and Social Conditions in Northern Cameroon

Every social organisation has an economic element as its base, for the economic element always determines the social stratification and influences its management. Generally, the reality that one qualifies as social and economic is closely linked to a system set up by human beings in order to provide for their various needs. How a family, a tribe, a nation or a group of nations produce, distribute and consume the food, the clothing, the lodging and all the other goods that the people need for survival is the central question to the social and economic studies. Actually, before the introduction of the Western civilisation based on social alienation and economical exploitation of "man by man", the native people of Northern Cameroon were no less preoccupied by these social and economic challenges. They had also their specific ways to deal with their social and economic needs. Entirely dependent on their natural environment, the social and economic activities of the inhabitants of Northern Cameroon were proportional to what the physical environment could offer. Therefore, the social and economic activities of the natives consisted mainly of farming, poultry, fishery and the production of materials for domestic usage like pottery in which women were very skilled.

Before the introduction of Islam and Christianity in their Arabic and Western forms respectively in Northern Cameroon, the African women from various ethnic groups held a different social status from that of their male counterparts. Though treated as a man's property, the African woman held a key-position in social and economic spheres in African societies.

The people of Northern Cameroon, most of whom lived a sedentary life before the advent of Islam and the European colonisation, had as principal economic activities the agriculture. Despite the fact that all members of the family or the village, the children as well as the adults, were supposed to take part in the economic and social activities of the community, the women still had greater role to play in producing and circulating the social wealth within their communities. In fact, people were considered rich or poor according to the number of wives and children that they possessed. The more wives a man could marry, the more children he could have and the larger would be his farms and greater would be his production. In other words, the social ascension of an individual depends on how many wives he has. This clearly illustrates the important economic and social role of the women in African societies.

Being an exogamic society, the Massa of Northern Cameroon could only marry the women of a clan called *sagawda* (the enemies). This idea of marrying only the so-called “enemies” was based on the fact that through matrimonial alliances, people could establish the kinship and therefore facilitate the circulation of goods among the different clans.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the Massa woman and her Fali¹⁴⁵ sister alike, had represented, for a long time, an asset in matters of peace and reconciliation among the apparently opposed groups.

Once she had reached an advanced age, the African woman and especially the mother held a respectful position in the eyes of the other members of her society. Among the Massa people, such a woman was renamed *sumzina* (the mother of the home) and had the last word in any family

¹⁴⁴ Frouisou, S., “Traditions, mutations sociales et comportements religieux dans la société massa du Nord-Cameroun des origines à 1998”, Mémoire de Maîtrise en Histoire, Université de Ngaoundéré, 1998, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ See the interesting article of Chantal Guilmain-Gauthier, “Le jeu de la femme” in Barbier J-C., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 37-62.

business like the naming of the children. Also, in situation of a polygamous family, children were treated by their father according to the ranking position of their mothers. In this regard, a boy could only inherit from his father the things that belonged to his mother while his father was still alive.

Though the women are the main goods' producers and the means through which these goods circulate from one group to another through matrimonial alliances, the inheritance goes from a father to a son. For a daughter, once she is married to a man, will belong to her husband's family and not to her father's family despite the fact that she will continue keeping her family name even after marriage. Since we are dealing with a patriarchal system of social organisation, the position of the woman in such a system must be understood accordingly in order to avoid the misinterpretation of the woman's economic and social condition drawn by the agents of the Islam and the Western civilisation.

After its encounter with the Islamic and Western civilisations, the African societies had gone from a stage of a common sharing of goods, a renowned spirit of hospitality and solidarity among their peoples, to a stage of a pronounced individualism where the slogan is: "everyone for him or herself and God for all." Arguing about this spirit of sharing, of hospitality and solidarity that characterised the African societies before their encounter with other civilisations, Kange Ewané pointed out that:

The Africans older than forty years who lived in the villages at a time where the vestiges of the colonisation had not yet disappeared from the last retrenchments of our traditional life, those Africans have without any doubt kept the remembrance of this sense of sharing, of hospitality without pretence and of justice, which characterized our communal life. The products of hunting, the fruit of fishing or the harvest, any

provision brought back from a trip, all those things were scrupulously shared among the different members of the village family.¹⁴⁶

In other words, an economic and social system existed in which every member of the group and most importantly the women, because of their major contribution in producing and circulating the economic and social wealth, played a significant role. However, with the presence of Islam and most importantly the work of the missionaries, the African societies in Northern Cameroon underwent major changes. These changes affected both economically and socially the condition of African women in the region.

3.2.1. Impact of Islam on Women's Economic and Social Status

The influence of Islam on the manner of producing and consuming goods remains profound, if one considers the way in which people relate to one another in Northern Cameroon today. Islam seems to have been the main factor in the introduction of an economic system based on trade and the idea of profit making, which were unknown to the indigenous people of Northern Cameroon. In general, the wealth of the Africans stemmed from the harmonious relationship they used to develop with their natural environment. In this sense, the agricultural activities in which women were the key-role players provided for their alimentary needs. The foods produced were shared among all the family members and no one was left hungry. The adoption of the principle of sharing according to which, "If there is enough for one, there will be enough for all", precluded differing

¹⁴⁶ My English translation of the following text in French: "Les africains d'ages supérieurs à 45 ans qui ont vécu dans les villages au moment où le bétier de la colonisation n'avait pas encore abattu les derniers retranchements de notre vie traditionnelle, ces africains-là ont sans doute conserve le souvenir de ce sens de partage, d'hospitalité sans feinte et de justice qui caractérisait notre vie communautaire. Les produits de la chasse, les fruits de la peche ou de la récolte, toute provision ramenée d'un voyage, tout cela était scrupuleusement partagé entre les différents membres de la famille villageoise", excerpt from Kange, F. E., *Semence et moisson colonials: Un regard d'Africains sur l'histoire de la colonisation*, CLE, Yaoundé, 1985, p. 63.

social strata classified as 'rich' or 'poor' in the pre-Islamic societies in Northern Cameroon. For instance, among the Massa people, a wealthy person was not the one who had accumulated abundant material possessions, but the one who had many friends, many brothers and sisters, many wives and children. Therefore, the idea of trading and making profit out of the other people was foreign to the Africans. It was introduced by Muslims who use their prosperous trading activity in West Africa as a means of spreading their Islamic faith in the region. This was confirmed by Charles Vernier, one of the advocates of the introduction of capitalism and imperialism in Africa, when he pointed out that: "One of the good things that Islam has brought to African people is justly to have instilled to the Black for whom the land belongs to everyone and the capital is at the disposal of all, the notion of authority and private property."¹⁴⁷

For essentially mercantilist motivations, the Fulani people who brought Islam to Northern Cameroon in the beginning of the 19th century, created a type of villages called *rumdé*, populated exclusively by enslaved captives whom they had captured from the so-called *habé* or non-believers, during the *Jihad*.¹⁴⁸ These slaves the great majority of whom were females were used as concubines or gratuitous hand-labour in agricultural work for the exclusive benefit of the Muslim chief called *Lamido* or *Baba*.¹⁴⁹ In this way, the Muslim chiefs introduced into the Northern Cameroon the idea of private property and the personal success of an individual within a

¹⁴⁷ The English translation of the following French text is mine: "L'un des bienfaits que l'Islam a apporté aux Africains c'est justement d'avoir inculqué au Noir pour qui la terre est à tout le monde et le capital à la disposition de tous, la notion de l'autorité et de la propriété personnelle, excerpt from Vernier, Ch., *Islamisme et Christianisme en Afrique*, Montauban, 1908, pp. 98-99.

¹⁴⁸ As mentioned earlier in chapter two, the Islamic *Jihad* which Muslims themselves understand as a strive for defending their faith against the threat of the unfaithful, is a holy war which is fought by Muslims against people who constitute a threat to the Islamic religion or who oppose its teachings.

¹⁴⁹ The enslavement of the natives by Moslem conquerors is thoroughly presented in the fourth chapter of my masters' dissertation on "the effects of the encounter between the African societies and the external world in Northern Cameroon."

community, as well as the idea that a human being could reduce another human being into a state of slavery. The immediate consequence of this was the belittling of the women who became merely means of production in the hands of their masters. With regard to the particular situation of women, it was very unfortunate that these new masters of the social and economic environment were neither their husbands nor their relatives who could care and give them respect for what they were able to perform, as it was the case in the African societies before the appearance of Islam. This troubling situation of the women in the Islamic invasion of Northern Cameroon shows why, at the missionaries' arrival, the fight for the liberation of women was an obvious one.

Though, Islam was perceived by many as a major factor of social transformation, the deepest and most profound changes in the women's economic and social condition in Northern Cameroon were brought by Western missionaries in the beginning of the 20th century.

3.2.2. Impact of Western Culture on African Women's Condition

The presence of the Europeans on the African continent and elsewhere in the world outside of Europe has always been differently interpreted, according to whether one argues for or against this presence. For Ducatillon¹⁵⁰ for example, Europeans went to Africa as messengers of God. Such an argument is of a nature to render superfluous any distinction between the significant consequences that the European encounter with the African people had left on the latter, since this perception of the European presence in Africa does not make any distinction between those among the Europeans who were missionaries and those who were agents of colonialism. And yet, in my opinion, such distinction between Western

¹⁵⁰ Ducatillon, G. V., "Théologie de la colonisation", in *Revue de l'Action Sociale* 90, (juillet-août 1955), pp. 761-785.

missionaries and colonists should be made, especially in the case of Northern Cameroon, where the first Europeans with whom the Africans encountered were agents of the European imperialism who favoured the expansion of Islam, rather than the Christian missionaries who would have strongly advocated the Christianisation of the indigenous people. Instead, the French colonists in Northern Cameroon adopted a friendly attitude toward the Muslim elite at the expense of the expansion of Christianity.

Concerning the complicity between the French colonial government and the Muslim chiefs in Northern Cameroon, the French ethnologist Jean-Claude Froelich argued that:

Islam was a known and reassuring thing; the Muslims knew how to welcome and honour the Whites whilst the animist populations had often shown proof of duplicity and betrayal (...). Voluntarily we favoured the chiefs of fraternities and organised the going rounds for Muslims teachers by asking them, in exchange to pacify the spirits: we treated them with great honour, on their request we built schools, medersas and even mosques: we brought teachers from Algeria to teach in those schools (...): one may think at that time that a good number among the Africans fell into Islam line to better show their submission or their spirit of collaboration with the French people.¹⁵¹

In other words, the Western missionaries when they arrived in Northern Cameroon had to face the challenges of the obstacles put on their way by the Islamic and colonial powers, which were opposing the evangelisation of the indigenous. Working in such a context, the missionaries were not given enough room to reach the people, especially the women who made up more than a half of the subjugated population. We must question, however, whether the missionaries were primarily interested in ameliorating the condition of life of the indigenous people, especially the women's economic and social life or whether they were simply interested in making converts whose life conditions were not of any interest to them. The answer to such an interrogation may lead us to a profound assessment

¹⁵¹ Froelich, J. C., *Les musulmans d'Afrique noire*, Orante, Paris, 1962, p. 85.

of the missionary impact on the general habits of the evangelised people. Such an assessment is envisaged in the following chapters with specific regard to the women's issue. Prior to that assessment, however, it is necessary to attest that the place assigned to the African women by Western Christianity did not give them a better position than the one they had in the African societies.

Therefore, if the African woman in Northern Cameroon today has gained a certain freedom from the Muslim chiefs' oppression just as her non-Muslim male counterpart, the teachings of the Christian missionaries about women in both society and church, seem to have reinforced the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission of the African woman.

The missionaries taught the African women how valuable they were in the eyes of the Christians' God and how God was interested in the salvation of their souls; how freely as women, they were supposed to choose the men whom they wanted to marry and obey and how these husbands in return, would give them everything they needed. However, this idea of a submissive woman who should expect everything from her husband, who for the sake of his love for her should provide for all her needs, brought by the Christian teachings in Northern Cameroon, prevented the women from being economically independent from their husbands as they had been in the African societies in which they used to be the main producers and vehicles of goods' circulation in the communities.

Regarding the important role played by African women in the pre-capitalist economy which was set up in African societies long before the Europeans introduced their economy of colonial exploitation, Jeff Guy in

his well researched and excellent article on “Gender oppression in Southern Africa’s pre-capitalist societies”, suggested that:

The control and appropriation of the productive and reproductive capacity of women was central to the structure of southern Africa’s precapitalist societies. It was *the* social feature upon which society was based. (...) Furthermore, a clearer idea of the productive process, and of the role of women within it, enables one to begin to see ‘women’ as living examples not of an eternal, biologically defined category, but of a structured social category.¹⁵²

The other fact, which is worth mentioning here, is the cultural alienation of the African women by means of the consumption of new products brought by the Westerners. That an African woman aspires to a better life offered by technical progress, is praiseworthy. The problems, however, arise when the African women give up their leading role in the domain of local goods’ production to adopt a lifestyle of consumption of imported goods. Thus, the Western way of life had created among the African women in Northern Cameroon what Herbert Marcuse calls *faux besoins* or, false needs in English. By ‘false needs’, Marcuse¹⁵³ understands the needs related to particular interests of different social groups imposed on individuals from outside. In the case of the African women in Northern Cameroon, the need of asking for money from their husbands, the need of buying European goods like clothes and cosmetics as opposed to the ones, which they produced locally, has considerably reduced the boundaries of their freedom. Therefore, it seems likely that the freedom which Christianity pretended to give to the African woman was an illusion, because after her encounter with the Western civilisation, the African woman in Northern Cameroon seems to have lost even the freedom that she had in the African society; the freedom to produce and to make use of

¹⁵² See Jeff Guy, “Gender oppression in Southern Africa’s pre-capitalist societies”, in Walker, Ch., *Op. Cit.* pp. 33-47, pp. 40-41.

¹⁵³ Marcuse, H., *L’ontologie de Hegel et la Théorie de l’historicité*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1972.

what she had produced for the use of her family members; the freedom to go and come from her birth-place.

Conclusion

My objective in this chapter was to present my reader with a portrait of the African woman as she was perceived by the society in the pre-missionary era in Northern Cameroon. My reading of the previous studies done on women in Africa by the foreign as well as the local researchers and the analysis of missionary reports and the interviews which I conducted on the topic, show that women had more or less the same social status in pre-missionary Northern Cameroon. Thus, through her role of educator, healer and wealth producer, the African woman presents herself as the backbone of her community in the pre-missionary era in Northern Cameroon. However, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, one of the rare contemporary historians to dedicate a thorough study to the women's condition in Africa, argues against the fact that the situation of the African woman in the pre-colonial era can be objectively documented. Questioning the value of what African women can say about themselves to a researcher and the authenticity of the materials produced by the Europeans about African women, Coquery-Vidrovitch argued that the African women of the pre-colonial times did not have a precise perception of their place in society.

The only people to approach women in the beginning of the colonization were the missionaries and the religious sisters, and sometimes, a rare lay teaching or sanitary personnel. The first missionaries give us a perception [of the African woman] distorted by their bias ideas (...). They colonial novels have also abused the cliché of the willing African woman, representative of an impure and sensual species.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Coquery-Vidrovitch, C., *Les Africaines: Histoire des femmes d'Afrique noire du xix au xxè siècle*, Paris, Editions Desjonqueres, 1994, p. 82.

Chapter Four: The Role of the Women Missionaries in Northern Cameroon (1924-1998)

Introduction

Since the advent of the encounter between civilisations of different origins in Africa, when the explorers, the traders and the colonisers from Europe disembarked on the African coasts,¹⁵⁵ the role of school as an educational institution became increasingly important. In the starting twenty-first century, the school in Africa has become almost the only institution from which, most if not all, cultural values of the peoples are transmitted from one generation to another.

As part of the fulfillment of their “civilising mission”, the Western colonial administrations and the Christian mission societies established on the African continent used schools, healthcare facilities, and developmental work to reach out to the indigenous people. According to Ghislaine Lydon¹⁵⁶, the French colonial mission in West Africa was above all one motivated by educational prerogatives. On female education, she pointed out that the role of the colonial administration was to bring forward “cultural evolution”, and that schooling was important as the only opportunity available for girls to improve their status in society.

Beside the school as major means of transfer of knowledge and progress from the civilised Europeans to the savage and back-warded non-Europeans, there were healthcare facilities, and developmental work used

¹⁵⁵ This encounter between the Europeans and the African peoples on the Cameroonian coast dates back to the year 1472 as indicated earlier in Chapter 2, section 2 on “Brief Historical Outline of the Region”.

¹⁵⁶ Lydon G., “The Unraveling of a Neglected Source: A Report on Women in Francophone West Africa in the 1930s”, in *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 147, xxxvii-3, EHESS, Paris, 1997, pp. 555-584.

by the colonial power as pretext to impose the European culture to the African people.

Schools, healthcare facilities, and developmental work, used by the Western colonial powers to reinforce their domination in their colonies and to bring about their culture or civilisation to the so-called savages and non-civilised peoples of Africa, were also used by the missionaries to bring about the Christian light and salvation to the “lost heathen peoples of the dark continent”. In this sense, it is always difficult for church historians to make a clear distinction between the impact of the Western colonisation and Christianity on the lives of the African peoples. However, given the specific context of Northern Cameroon where Islam and the African traditions prevent women from holding responsibilities in public spheres of life, one of the main objectives of this research is to analyse the contribution of the women missionaries in the process of new changes brought into the region by the Western colonisation and Christianity.

Dedicated to the role of women in the mission societies and the church in Northern Cameroon, this chapter tries to present a critical analysis of the women’s contribution in the establishment and growth of Christianity in Northern Cameroon towards educational, healthcare and developmental work. The materials used to write this chapter are mainly letters and reports written by the women missionaries themselves, as well as interviews conducted, at the early stage of this research, with those among the missionaries and churchmen leaders who are still alive.

In perusing the materials gathered from the archives of the mission societies about the work of the women missionaries in Northern Cameroon from 1924 to 1998, I realised that the women’s activity within the mission societies and the Church was mostly centered in the domains of education,

evangelism, literacy, and healthcare. In this sense, the chapter focuses primarily on a thorough analysis of these domains of Church's activities in which women's contribution is of paramount significance.

However, by reading this work in a thorough manner, the reader may find out that in some instances, the author of the research shows certain ambivalence about the role played by both the missionaries and the colonial administrators towards African women's emancipation in Northern Cameroon. On the one hand, the Western intervention through education and healthcare in the region are viewed as important factors for the emancipation of the African women, and in the other hand, these missionaries are criticized for being motivated by the Western ideology of the domination of the other peoples of the world. I am fully aware of both this contradiction in my work, but I must also acknowledge that it is not easy to make a straightforward choice between the great achievement of the Western missionaries and the downfall of their action on the African peoples. Therefore, this ambivalence is maintained throughout the work, not only to faithfully reflect the viewpoints of my informants who, in their great majority, are the women who lived or are still living in Northern Cameroon, but also to show both the advantages and disadvantages of the missionary work on women's social status in the region.

4.1. Evangelism and Christian Education Through Bible Schools, Sunday Schools and the Women's Work in Northern Cameroon.

The importance of church institutions such as the Sunday school, the **Bible training** and the translation of the Bible into the indigenous languages of the people to be evangelised needs no longer to be demonstrated. African theologians of renown such as Kwame Bediako¹⁵⁷ and Lamin Sanneh¹⁵⁸ in

¹⁵⁷Kwame, B., *Jesus in Africa: Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, Editions CLE, Yaoundé, 2000.

their respective books have pointed out the importance of having the biblical message in the indigenous languages of the people to be evangelised. In reading accounts of the development of Christianity in Northern Cameroon since the time of the mission work until today, a pattern emerges which reveals that the main vehicles in the Christianisation of the natives were memorisation and recitation of the biblical verses in Sunday schools, the training of the local catechists and evangelists in Bible schools and the work among the women. It was crucial for the missionaries to reach the women and the children prior to reaching the rest of society. In fact, it was easier for a man to allow his wives and children go to the missionaries to see what their teaching was all about than going himself. This is what Sigrid Braut pointed out when she stated that in Songkolong, there were only three men who came to church.

When I asked a man to come to church, he responded: We gave you our wives and children; we ourselves (the men), we have to follow the chief and the chief is obliged to follow the *lamido* (the king) of Banyo. Are you not happy that we gave you our wives and children? Yes, but God is not happy for He loves men too, I replied.¹⁵⁹

It appears therefore, that women and children were targeted by the missionaries as appropriate means whereby they could reach the African society as a whole with the Christian message. Through biblical training and the learning of practical skills such as sewing and knitting, through the learning of Christian songs and biblical verses, the missionary women attracted many African women to their mission stations throughout the region. A critical reading and analysis in depth of the missionary reports and Church's minutes show that women missionaries were of paramount importance in the general implementation of the mission strategy. From the beginning of the missionary work in Northern Cameroon until 1975

¹⁵⁸Sanneh, L., *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis, 1991.

¹⁵⁹Braut, S., Interview of November 18th, 2000 in Stavanger, Norway.

when the mission societies handed everything over to the leadership of the local Church, the women in general and the women missionaries in particular were the principal agents of transmission of Christian culture to the indigenous through Sunday schools, Bible schools, translation or literacy work as well as the work among the African women.

4.1.1. Sunday School as a Tool for Christianising People in Northern Cameroon

According to Kare Lode¹⁶⁰, the teaching and the training of the indigenous people through Sunday school started as early as the arrival of the first missionaries in Northern Cameroon. The NMS had this Sunday school ministry well organized in the early thirties, only five years after the first missionaries of the NMS were sent to Cameroon. It was obvious that, for the missionaries to come to Africa, which was then known as a continent of darkness¹⁶¹, the primary task was to enlighten with the Christian message the peoples of this cursed and lost part of the world. Education for the sake of having an open-minded person did not interest the missionaries. Their foremost preoccupation was the salvation of the Africans' souls. To attain this objective, all efforts were therefore made in order to ensure that the Africans would learn the Word of God and start living accordingly. In other words, the goal of saving Africans' souls from hell was the main preoccupation for the missionaries and this goal had to be reached by all means, even at the risk of denying these Africans their human dignity, that is, their cultural heritage passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, the teaching of the Christian faith through church institutions such as Sunday school was one of the means the missionaries used to penetrate African society with the Christian ideals in Northern

¹⁶⁰ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.* pp. 195-196.

¹⁶¹ Hannah Sunwall, a missionary of the Brethren Lutheran Mission, relating her experiences as a missionary among the Massa of Northern Cameroon, wrote memoirs, published by Faith and Fellowship Press, Fergus Falls in 1989, under the provocative title of *From Darkness to Light*.

Cameroon. With the exception of the Islamic teaching, which requires children to recite verses of the Koran by heart, there was no other institution in the region before the institutionalisation of the Sunday school whereby the process of learning consisted of memorising biblical verses. In this sense, the Sunday school system brought by the missionaries was novel institution and therefore, was an alien learning institution for the natives of Northern Cameroon.

In both the NMS and Sudan Mission fields, the Sunday school system was thought of as a useful means of reaching the people with the Word of God. In many cases, the missionaries preferred to organise a Sunday school for the natives, rather than, for instance, a primary school. Some mission organisations, like the Sudan Mission, were rather reluctant to embrace the way in which colonial governments structured the school systems in Africa. The colonial schools in this case appeared to be a threat to the missionary work, though there were many connections between the two. For instance, Kare Lode¹⁶² pointed out that the Sudan Mission had for long resisted to the need of opening primary schools for the natives, for they feared that once the Christians were educated, they would quit the Mission and would go to look for jobs in the colonial administration¹⁶³. Another reason as to why the mission societies working in Northern Cameroon opted for Sunday school system as a most useful means of education for the indigenous, rather than the creation of adequate educational infrastructures like primary schools, was the fear of nationalisation. In their training institutions like the Bible schools and the Sunday schools, missionaries used mainly local languages to teach

¹⁶² Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁶³ Jean-Berchmans Kisweso notes exactly the same thing in his PhD thesis on "L'émergence du clergé autochtone de la mission des jésuites au Kwango (1893-1961)". According to Kisweso's e-mail correspondence of April 28th, 2002, this PhD Thesis will be publicly defended at the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium, in March, 2003.

subjects such as the Bible and the Christian principles to the indigenous people. The facilities they utilised as school buildings were in very precarious state. According to Kare Lode¹⁶⁴, the French colonial government, which was accountable to the League of Nations for the advancement of the social well being of the indigenous peoples of Cameroon, was critical towards the Sudan Mission school system in Northern Cameroon.

If the French colonial administration was critical towards the mission school system in Northern Cameroon, it was because the missions' educational institutions of the time did not respond to the criteria laid down by the colonial administration. For the colonial government, there was a need to have well trained teachers who could faithfully implement their programmes for the training of the natives. If the French colonial administration was not interested in an advanced education of the natives in Northern Cameroon, they needed at least people who could understand and make themselves understood in French, so that there should be a way to make use of them as interpreters and clerks in the colonial administration.

Concerning the point raised by the missionaries about the nationalisation of the missions' institutions, it was a false pretext to deny the Africans their rights to a better education and to confine them in a system which would not allow them to attain the same level of understanding as the missionaries. In fact, when the mission societies created educational institutions in Africa, it was mainly to achieve their principal goal, which consisted of converting people to the Christian faith. In the specific case of Northern Cameroon, women missionaries had played a crucial role in

¹⁶⁴ See Kare Lode, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 137-144, a section of his book on mission school system.

teaching the local people, the children as well as the adults, the Christian faith through informal training institutions like the Sunday schools.

Before the appointment of Marie Mundfrom¹⁶⁵, an American woman missionary, to organise a Christian education programme through Sunday schools on the mission field in 1957, there had already been a number of women missionaries who were involved in the Sunday school teaching in Northern Cameroon. As an acknowledgment of what her predecessors had accomplished, Marie Mundfrom wrote in her report to the Mission Conference in 1963:

I wish to express my appreciation for all the help and encouragement from the various publishing houses and mission groups in sharing with me their problems and solutions and in giving me permission to use their material. I also wish to thank all the missionaries' wives and single workers who did the original Gbaya SS [Sunday School] lessons, which was the basis for two books of teachers' notes.¹⁶⁶

More than being merely a way of communicating the new faith to the natives, the institution of Sunday schools in Northern Cameroon was perceived by many Africans as a new way of educating people brought by the *nazara* (the Whites) missionaries. The teachings done by missionaries through Sunday schools in Northern Cameroon were not just attended by the children, but also the adults of whom the women constituted a large number. The students learned and recited by heart biblical verses and some Christian songs translated into their languages by missionaries whose first task on the mission field was to learn and speak fluently the local languages. In this regard, literacy and translation work were crucial for the success of the missionary work undertaken in a region where, in

¹⁶⁵ See "Annual Report of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, 1963", Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

¹⁶⁶ Mundfrom, M., "Annual Report, 1963", Archives of the Sudan Mission in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

the words of Ruth Christiansen: “Many tribes cause a babel of languages and diverse racial and religious backgrounds.”¹⁶⁷

To succeed in their missionary enterprise in Northern Cameroon the missionaries, who adventured themselves into the region, had to possess the knowledge of the indigenous languages. It would have been inconceivable to teach the Bible to the natives without having the materials translated into their local languages, like the Gbaya, the Mbum and the Sango, to cite but a few. Therefore, learning to speak fluently the languages of the local people was a crucial step to be taken by any missionary coming from Europe or America to an African country. This justifies why so many missionaries and especially women missionaries were involved in learning and teaching local languages to the newly arrived missionary counterparts.

In Northern Cameroon, the task of translating materials in local languages and teaching was mostly carried out by women missionaries whose ability in learning new languages was said to be like that of the children. By their ability to integrate easily the African societies, women missionaries were fast in learning local languages. In fact, the women missionaries of the Sudan Mission and the NMS did not only dedicate themselves to teach African languages to their missionary counterparts, but they were also very active in translating portions of scriptures and in teaching the indigenous people. As a matter of fact, it was thanks to the teaching materials edited by Madel Nostbakken in the Gbaya language that the missionaries could start a three-year training programme for the catechists and the evangelists in the 1950s in what used to be known as the Sudan Mission field of the French Cameroons and the French Equatorial Africa.

¹⁶⁷ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

Despite the fact that there were many different languages spoken by the people in Northern Cameroon, the choice made by the missionaries to use mostly the local languages was a deliberate one. According to Kare Lode, “the dreams of small churches organised on the basis of tribes and the dream of presenting the Gospel in any language, were dear to many missionaries and for many mission societies.”¹⁶⁸ Keeping in mind the principle that the Gospel has to be given to anyone in his or her mother tongue, many missionaries, mostly the women, dedicated themselves to the alphabetisation, the translation and the literacy work in Northern Cameroonian mission field.

4.1.2. Alphabetisation, Translation and Literacy

The Alphabetisation of the adult people, the translation of Christian literatures, and the literacy work were used by missionaries as tools to reach out to the indigenous people in Northern Cameroon.

The literacy work, valued by the mission societies, among the indigenous people in Northern Cameroon, had one vital prerequisite; the ability of the missionaries to relate well to the local peoples in their own indigenous languages. This required the translation of the biblical text into those languages to facilitate the proclamation of the Gospel message, which was their primary purpose. The only thing that really mattered for any missionary that came to the region was the necessity for him or her to know how to relate to the indigenous people. It was, therefore, very important for the missionaries to learn the native languages, so that they could not only relate to the local people, but above all, make known to them the message that they brought, contained in the languages unknown to the natives, hence, the necessity for the missionaries to involve

¹⁶⁸ Lode K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 212.

themselves in the learning of the languages and later on, to translate the necessary literature into them.

The translation and literacy work carried on through the work of the mission societies that were present in Northern Cameroon in the early 1950s had a great input from the women missionaries. Women missionaries, either single or married, from both the NMS and Sudan Mission working in Northern Cameroon, were skilled in rapidly learning and in putting into written form, the native languages in order to teach their missionary co-workers freshly disembarked from Europe or America, and to provide material for the teaching of the indigenous in their own languages.

According to ELCA's list of the missionaries, from 1923 to 2000 a total of 187 families as well as single missionaries have been sent to Cameroon. Out of this number, 112 families or single missionaries were sent by a church organisation called TALC, which deals with the translation work.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, a critical analysis of the missionary reports which I had access to in the frame of this research, shows that missionaries, from both the NMS and the Sudan Mission, who were involved in translation and literacy work, were women. For instance, as I glanced through the personal reports of the missionaries of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon from 1961 to 1998, I noticed that the reports of the missionary women, even of those who worked mostly in health care institutions like hospitals, dispensaries or orphanages, mentioned their involvement in teaching in Sunday schools, translating and typing materials for literacy department.¹⁷⁰ Paradoxically, however, this ministry of translation and literacy, as far as the education of the natives was concerned, did not

¹⁶⁹ See <http://www.elca.org/os/archives/missionaries/cameroonn> "Missionaries 1842-2000: Cameroon – ELCA Archives", pp. 1-4.

¹⁷⁰ See Cece Noss, "Personal Report, 1979", Archives of the Sudan Mission in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

benefit the African women. Rather, the only Africans who were associated with this work were the men who were trained in Bible schools as either catechists, evangelists or even house cleaners or cooks for the missionaries.

4.1.3. The Bible Schools of the Missions and the Training of Indigenous Clergy in Northern Cameroon

In the middle of 1924, exactly one year to the day after the first missionaries of the Sudan Mission arrived in Cameroon, Sister Anne Olsen and Sister Olette Berntsen started a boarding school in Mboula.¹⁷¹ Through the establishment of the boarding school for African children, the intention of the Sisters was not to train an African elite of intellectuals in Northern Cameroon. Rather, they were interested in making disciples of Christ by the training of local catechists and evangelists who would be able to read and preach the Word of God to their people in their mother tongues. Such biblical training programmes run by missionaries in the beginning of the missionary work did not aim at qualifying the native people to apply for paid jobs in the colonial administration. The fear of losing well-trained local people for the benefit of the colonial administration was common among the missionaries on the field in Northern Cameroon. In his attempt to justify this educational missionary philosophy, which totally undermined a good education for the natives, Kare Lode argued that

the Sudan Mission was a mission of faith in which missionaries neither earned fixed salaries nor had fixed budgets for their work and that their objective in training the Africans was meant to inculcate in them this principle of working without remuneration.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁷² Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 105.

In other words, the training was focussed on the biblical subjects and the teaching was done in vernacular languages so that the students would not make use of the newly acquired knowledge to ask for paid jobs. After all, the Bible schools were not recognised by the colonial administration as official schools where one could be trained as a civil servant. In this sense, the students in the Bible schools were limited to serving the needs of the mission societies in Northern Cameroon. This strategy was later on clearly expressed in the following statement made during a mission conference in the late 1970s: “If they (the Africans), aren’t evangelists, then it’s useless for us to train them further (the underlining is from the author).”¹⁷³ This missionary perspective of the local people’s training reveals that the education of the natives was limited and was of a poor quality. Missionaries did not actually aim at empowering the natives by way of a good and quality education. They feared that by giving Africans a good education would enable them to run away from the church and to go and compete for salaries in the secular colonial administration. But what was this training of the indigenous clergy through the missions’ Bible schools all about? How did the Bible schools curriculum look like, who were the teachers and which were the requirements for students to enroll in these programmes? These are some of the questions I would like to deal with in the following paragraphs.

As already mentioned in the previous sections on the general philosophy adopted by the mission societies in matters of the natives’ education, the main goal for the missionaries in training the native people in Northern Cameroon was to get the necessary help from them to evangelise their fellow country men and women. It was, therefore, important for the sake of the spreading of the Gospel to have trained catechists and evangelists who could read and transmit the biblical message to their people in their

¹⁷³ “Reports of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, 1979”, Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, p. 5.

mother tongues.¹⁷⁴ As a result of this, the training programmes in the missions' Bible schools consisted mainly of reading, memorising and reciting verses of the Bible and some passages from doctrinal books such as "the Great and the Small Catechisms" of Martin Luther, and the other confessional materials translated by missionaries into local languages. According to the reports on the advancement of biblical teachings in the Sudan Mission in Cameroon in the early 1930s, writing classes were rare. As one could read from Christiansen's account:

August 16, 1932. School is going with all sails to the wind. (...) We have about 120 on the roll – men, women, and children. The first hour is devoted to memory work: Bible passages, the Lord's Prayer and another prayer; the Ten Commandments, and a hymn singing. The pupils enjoy this period very much. During recess, we do some gymnastic exercises to music. (...) After that we gather for the reading class. Alphild is printing with large letters Bible verses in Baya and Fulfulde too, on the back of the Sunday school picture rolls we have here. We have to type or print our own reading materials for use in the school.¹⁷⁵

This was noticeable when most of the catechists and evangelists trained by missionaries of the Sudan Mission in Northern Cameroon could scarcely write despite the fact that they could read competently and preach good sermons from their vernacular Bible translation. Missionaries were very reluctant to teach the natives in French which was the only medium used in public schools in Northern Cameroon for at least two reasons: Firstly, the missionaries were either from America or Norway. Therefore, they did not know enough French to use it as a medium of communication in the schools, which they created for the training of the natives. Secondly, in training the natives, the missionaries were not interested in giving them a general instruction which would have prepared them to run for paid jobs in the colonial administration or in other mission societies like the NMS which according to Christiansen's confidential letter of September 12,

¹⁷⁴ See Harriet Stovner's personal report of 1968, in the "ELCA's Missionary Reports, 1961-1998". Archives of the Sudan Mission, Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

¹⁷⁵ Christiansen, R., *Op. cit.*, pp. 57-58.

1935 to missionary Gunderson, were paying “big money” to their catechists.¹⁷⁶ Instead, the missionaries were interested in preparing people for evangelistic purpose. Therefore, in their training programmes, they focussed mostly in educating the natives on how to read and preach the Gospel to their people in their own languages. Thirdly and lastly, all the teaching institutions established by missionaries in Northern Cameroon were used as a great opportunity for missionaries themselves to learn and practice to speak the local languages in order to better understand the people they come to evangelise. In this sense, doing the teachings and everything else in the local languages while staying in the mission field was the most desirable activity for a missionary in Northern Cameroon.

As I skimmed through hundred of pages of the missionary reports written by missionaries from both the NMS and the Sudan Mission, I came to the conclusion that anything the missionaries organised to train the natives in Northern Cameroon was done as an attempt, without expectation of a good outcome for the natives. For instance, the teachings in the Bible schools were organised in a non-systematic way. Training programmes were conducted in the form of gatherings called by missionaries who availed themselves to train the natives in evangelism, preaching, Bible studies, catechism, songs, and hygiene. The content of those biblical courses could vary from one missionary to another and the duration from a few weeks to a few months and the students were taken from various villages and had to provide their food and lodging during the period of their training. For instance, “in November 1939, a biblical course was held for a month by Ruth Christiansen and Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in Mboula. The students came from the surrounding villages and from afar and had to work for the

¹⁷⁶ See Confidential Letter of Ruth Christiansen to Missionary Gunderson, Mboula, September 12, 1935, in “Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen, 1935”, Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA.

missionaries in the afternoons to cover the cost of their stay during the training course.”¹⁷⁷

Though it was not well organised in the beginning, the biblical training of the natives through the Bible schools was a first attempt by missionaries to train the indigenous people through a formal type of educational institution ever established by the mission societies in Northern Cameroon. The importance of a well-organised training institution was emphasised by the missionaries when they saw that the rise of African nationalism in the 1950s was going to chase them away from the continent. In the case of Cameroon, the creation of the nationalist political party, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (U. P.C.) in 1948¹⁷⁸ in the southern part of the country and whose principal goal was to fight for the immediate independence of Cameroon, threatened all the Whites who were staying in the country and of which missionaries were a part. Missionaries were therefore afraid of losing their possession on the continent without having prepared those who would take over from them when they would be gone. Among the Africans themselves, there were people who raised their voices to speak out against the missionaries’ educational policy that failed to train the local church leaders adequately. A good example of this legitimate concern of the natives about the poor quality of education which they had from the missionaries, was the discussion that took place between missionary Anderson of the Sudan Mission and Jaouro Ruben, a native Christian of Mboula in the mid 1940s. Critical of the Sudan Mission policy in the domain of the education of the natives, Kare Lode pointed out that:

In 1946, Anderson told Jaouro Ruben that perhaps the missionaries would have to quit Cameroon and be replaced by the Cameroonians.

¹⁷⁷ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁸ Bah, T. M. and Taguem G. F., “Les élites musulmanes et la politique au Cameroun sous administration française: 1945-1960”, in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 123.

Ruben, however, retorted that it would not be possible, for the Christians of the Sudan Mission were lacking a modern training to take over from the missionaries.¹⁷⁹

However, this attitude of undermining the natives' education was not the practice of the sole Sudan Mission in Northern Cameroon. Missionaries from other mission societies like the NMS were also reticent to a profound education of the natives. The experience which Doudou Kolomeni went through during her schooling in the Norwegian mission schools in Northern Cameroon was revelatory of the fact that even the Norwegian missionaries were not in favour of an advanced education of the natives in their African mission fields.

First, I was sent by my father to a Roman Catholic school to start my education, explained Doudou. Later on the Norwegian missionaries took us to Tibati and I continued my studies in their school. But shortly after I passed my first school certificate, they told me that I had studied enough and they wanted me to accept a scholarship from them to go to Norway and to train as a deaconess. But I refused the offer. I decided to go to a public high school if they did not want me to continue my studies with them.¹⁸⁰

As a response given to the specific need expressed by the indigenous people in the domain of education and training, the NMS and the Sudan Mission organised their first formal Bible schools in which they started a three-year training programme for the indigenous church workers or catechists as they were called, in 1954 in Tibati, Cameroon, and 1956 in Baboua, Central African Republic then known as *Afrique Equatoriale Française*, respectively.¹⁸¹

As in any other domain of the missionary work, women missionaries were in the forefront of the teaching of the Bible to the natives in Northern

¹⁷⁹ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁸⁰ Kolomeni, D., Interview of November 14th, 1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

¹⁸¹ Lode, K., *Ibid.* p. 145-146.

Cameroon. Women missionaries like Harriet Stovner¹⁸², one of the most knowledgeable Bible teachers in Northern Cameroon, had played a prominent role in teaching the Bible and Christian doctrine to the natives. In an interview which she granted to the “American Lutheran Church Women in the World Mission” project in February 3, 1988, Harriet Stovner emphasised the fact that she had taught in the Bible school for eight years and that, for four of them, she had been in charge of the School and that her students had been African males who had been trained to be catechists in their villages.¹⁸³

In fact, at the time when the missionaries started schools, be it a Bible school, a Sunday school or a primary school, for all these schools aimed at the same goal which was the spreading of the God’s Word in the region, the students were all males, as pointed out by Ruth Christiansen:

All in all, six and a half years of the Deaconesses’ service was spent at Mboula. Among the more important spheres of their work had been the large boarding school they maintained. The school had 30 to 40 boys enrolled most of the time. It was no easy matter to control such a group. Sometimes the boys would walk out on their part of the work, leaving the two women to do the chores like getting the water and carrying the wood.¹⁸⁴

Thus, despite the fact that most of the teachers in the Bible schools were women missionaries, the enrolled students were all men. Although the African males accepted without objection the fact that most of their teachers in the Bible schools were women, they neither allowed their wives to attend such trainings nor did they teach them at home what they

¹⁸² Born in 1912 in Mooreton, North Dakota, Harriet Stovner was a graduate of Lutheran Bible School (Lutheran Brethren) in Grand Forks, North Dakota. She served as a missionary from 1947 until 1979 in Cameroon as a parish worker and Bible School teacher.

¹⁸³ Swendseid, D. M., *American Lutheran Church Women in World Mission: An Oral History and Archives Project*, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Global Mission, Chicago, 1989.

¹⁸⁴ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 54-55.

learned from the missionaries. In this sense, the performance of the women missionaries through their teaching ministry in Northern Cameroon did not yield fruit for their African “sisters”. For this reason, one may wonder whether the women missionaries were aware of the imbalanced situation to the creation of which they were contributing by enabling the men to dominate in a Church where women were in majority. In this sense, Mineke Schipper¹⁸⁵ was right when she argued that the White women missionaries in their missionary involvement on the African continent were perpetuating a Western model of segregation against the African women in a context where the Black man as well as the Black woman were considered as inferior to the Whites. Therefore, the indigenous women of Northern Cameroon carried a double or triple burden on their shoulders: Firstly, the African women had lower status in the African societies, secondly they were given no value in the Western colonial and missionary enterprises, and thirdly compared to the White women who considered themselves oppressed by the Western patriarchal system, the African women’s situation was not even mentioned until recently in the liberation debates animated mostly by the African men and the Western women through the nationalist and the feminist movements.

4.2. Women Missionaries and the Challenge of Educating People in Northern Cameroon

Although the women missionaries had received a different type of education from the one which the African women had received and despite the fact that they were in great majority single women, without any experience of rearing children, these women missionaries dedicated themselves to the education and healthcare of the natives in Northern

¹⁸⁵ See Schipper, M., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 1442-149, a sub-chapter entitled, “Insiders, Outsiders and cultural boundaries”.

Cameroon. The gathering of orphans¹⁸⁶ in centres like Mboula, Yoko and Meiganga, the creation of boarding-schools¹⁸⁷ in Dir, Tibati, Bankim and Mbé as well as various other initiatives in other domains like translation work, alphabetisation and the teaching of the Bible¹⁸⁸ to the indigenous people, put the women missionaries in the front line of mission work in Northern Cameroon.

How the orphanage work became one of the most important tasks of the mission performed by the women missionaries in Northern Cameroon is a very interesting story. Explaining how the orphanage work came into existence in the mission field, Pearl Larson, founder of the Mboula orphanage which was later on transferred to Meiganga, stated that in 1938, Lloyd Sand, one of the first missionaries of the Sudan Mission on the field in Northern Cameroon was on an evangelistic trip to a town called Doua.

When he came into town, Larson said, he heard the beating of drums and of course it has just a different sound if it's done for enjoyment or it's a death. He could hear that a death had taken place. He went over to where the people were gathered and they were beating the drums and the people had white wash all over their bodies and dirt (as it was the habit among various ethnic groups living in Northern Cameroon). He went over to where they had gathered and he saw two babies lying on the ground and he asked: "What are you going to do with these children?"¹⁸⁹

After having heard that there was no need for an orphanage because an orphaned baby was either starved to death or was buried with its mother and that if a mother died, an older child could always be taken care of by relatives so that was not a problem, Lloyd asked them again, and this time they did not know what they were going to do with these motherless twins.

¹⁸⁶ See Appendix 2, Picture 2.

¹⁸⁷ See Appendix 2, Picture 8.

¹⁸⁸ See Appendix 2, Picture 7.

¹⁸⁹ Swendseid, D. M., (ed), *American Lutheran Church Women in World Mission: An Oral History Project*, The American Lutheran Church, Division for Global Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation, Chicago, 1987, p. 10.

After having noticed that the bereaved family did not know what to do with the twins, missionary Lloyd urged them not to do anything to these children. “If you can’t take care of them, he suggested, send them over to the Mademoiselles over in Mboula. I am sure they’ll find some way of taking care of them.”¹⁹⁰,

Five days after Lloyd had reported the story to the *Demoiselles* in Mboula, an old grandmother came carrying the smaller of the twins and said that they could have that one. This news was received by the *Demoiselles* with a feeling of surprise as missionary Larson reported:

We didn’t know what to do with this baby either. We hadn’t come out for that purpose of taking care of babies. We tried to find an African that would take care of the baby and then we would prepare its milk and its food and see about its medicine and so on, but we couldn’t find anyone. No one was willing to take care of that baby. Finally one of the African Christians said that, “the only one that would ever take care of that baby is an elderly woman who has lost her husband and whose children are grown up. She might take care of it. We only know one like that.” We said, “Well go and find her. Bring her here. We’d like to have her take care of the baby.” When she heard what we wanted she just simply went out to the garden and she stayed there. She did not put in her appearance at all. What are you going to do in a case like that? You don’t do a thing except take care of the baby. As time went on they saw that little Samuel Bane as we called him was growing and this news just spread from village to village that every time a mother would die they would say, “Well don’t bury it with the mother. Just send it over to the missionaries. They’ll take care of it.”¹⁹¹

In the end, concluded Larson,

That was a new work. It seemed that I was more able physically to take care of these babies that woke up a few times at night. (...). It wasn’t terribly long before another baby came, and another and another and another and another. By the time I had twelve I said, “You know this looks like we’ve got an orphanage.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹⁹¹ Swendseid, D. M., *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁹² *Ibid*.

Far from being the starting point of their interest in the education of the indigenous people, since the first contacts between the missionaries and the natives were made possible through the songs, the readings, and the writing lessons given to the African women and children by the missionaries, the orphanage work was a stimulus for women missionaries to undertake a new venture which was the schooling of the young African children. In orphanages created and run by the women missionaries in Northern Cameroon, children were not only cared for their physical needs, but they were also taught how to read and memorise the Bible verses as well as to write and sing songs in their own languages. In this sense, the women missionaries played a very important role not only in educating the young girls to play a different role than the customary role assigned to them by the tradition, but they also involved themselves in the training of anyone else supposedly involved in the spreading of Christianity in Northern Cameroon.

Applied to the type of work performed by the missionaries in Northern Cameroon, the concept of education though takes a different meaning to the one, which was used by the African society. From a type of education which consists of transmitting knowledge to the child by life experiences, one passes to a type of education which consists of communicating a general and impersonal knowledge through means of institutions like schools whereby people learn how to read, to write and to speak new languages, vehicles of a new civilisation.

The challenges of the new education systems brought by the Westerners in Africa are diverse and complex. They range from the difficulty of being open to something that is totally new, the relevance of that new civilisation brought by the Western invasion of the world to the old context, the constraints and the pressure under which the agents of the new

systems put the African populations. Like the Diallobé¹⁹³, the population of Northern Cameroon did not easily accept the new system of education brought by the Westerners. This, however, prejudiced their ability to face the new challenges of the modern life. “The art of getting the better of the others without being right” which, Hamidou Kane alluded to in his novel *The Ambiguous Adventure*, was an unavoidable way for the Africans to adjust to the new situation. That is, to send their children to the White man’s school where they could learn the new ways of doing things from those who belonged to the dominant world. The will to learn how to cope with new changes created an increasing desire among the natives in general and more especially among the children, to learn from missionaries. In various villages in the region of Northern Cameroon in the 1950s, there were reports from missionaries, which mentioned both the reticence and the excitement of the children who did come to the mission stations to be educated through mission schools staffed mostly by women missionaries.¹⁹⁴

4.2.1. Women Missionaries and the Mission Schools in Northern Cameroon

According to Viola Bohn, member of the “Lutheran Daughters of the Reformation”, a women’s mission outreach organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, in

Sudan [the author referred here to the region of Northern Cameroon] as in all countries where mission work is carried on by the Church, education plays a significant part. A united effort of the Evangelical

¹⁹³ In his novel *L’Aventure ambiguë* (The Ambiguous Adventure), the well-known Senegalese novelist Cheikh Hamidou Kane expresses the tragic side of the culture shock experienced by his people, the Diallobé, after the arrival of the Europeans. Before taking any decision as to whether the Diallobé should send their children to the “White’s school” or not, they had to discuss the problem among themselves. Cf. Kane, C. H., *L’Aventure ambiguë*, Paris, Julliard, 1961, p. 49.

¹⁹⁴ See Appendix 2, Pictures 1 and 8.

Church, the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Lutheran Brethren is established for the operation of a school system. Assistance in medical and social welfare is developed and has won the acclaim of the Moslems and pagans as well as the Christians. Christian literature is being published in Baya and Fulani languages.¹⁹⁵

According to the then coordinator of the Sudan Mission's schools in Northern Cameroon, missionary Ruth Christiansen¹⁹⁶, the Director of Education in Protestant Missions in Cameroon was of the opinion that in 1953, the Protestants in Northern Cameroon had had the highest percentage of children going to their school. And yet the task of getting the whole population of the region interested in the schools of the mission required dedication and perseverance from the missionaries themselves. Therefore, missionaries in general and women missionaries in particular, had difficulty persuading some parents to send their children to school, as we read from Magda Petersen's report:

On January 26, 1953, Trygstad and I made our entrance to Dir. I was to have charge of the schoolwork and started right in. First we had classes for the married women and a little later with the girls. A young man was struggling along to keep a class going for the boys, but the Pangara boys haven't learned to go to school. It was most discouraging; sometimes there were two and sometimes none. We got tired of that and in June we took ten boys in to live on the station, - a small boarding school B and since we have at least had this class of boys.¹⁹⁷

To show how important the school was in the general strategy of the Western mission societies to bring the Gospel to the indigenous people of Africa in general, and the missionaries of the NMS to the people of Northern Cameroon, in particular, Kare Lode in his book about the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon,

¹⁹⁵ Bohn, V., "Sudan", in *World Mission Outreach*, Lutheran Daughters of the Reformation's Magazine, Undated Document, Luther Seminary Archives, Saint Paul, Minnesota, p. 42.

¹⁹⁶ Christiansen, R., *Sudan Mission Reports, 1953-1957*, Luther Seminary Archives, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

¹⁹⁷ Petersen, M., "Report of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, 1953-1957", Luther Seminary Archives, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

triumphantly entitled *Appelés à la liberté* (Summoned to Liberty), pointed out that in the mission work undertaken by the NMS in Northern Cameroon, the primary education of the natives through mission schools was of singular interest. As anywhere else in the world, it was the tradition of any mission society working in Africa to consider schools as the most important activity for the evangelisation of the natives.

Among the Protestant mission societies working in Cameroon, the Mission of the Presbyterian Church, which started the work in the southern region of Cameroon in 1889¹⁹⁸, had its school system already well organised when for the first time, the missionaries of the NMS began to think about the possibility of running schools for the education of the natives. As indicated by Kare Lode, the mission conference of the NMS held in 1930¹⁹⁹ focussed mostly on the issue of the education of the natives. According to Kare Lode²⁰⁰, the missionaries of the NMS in Cameroon thoroughly discussed the issue of the schools for the natives, and Johannes Thrana, one of the pioneers of the NMS in Cameroon, observed that the beginning was going to be difficult for at least two main reasons. Firstly, missionary Thrana argued that the traditional chiefs' opposition to the school system and the lack of good understanding of the value of the school by the parents as well as the lack of interest in or the patience required for attending school amongst the children themselves was going to be a serious issue to be addressed. Secondly, all the components of the local population, the chiefs of the ethnic groups, the parents as well as the children had a negative attitude toward the schools of the mission. The local chiefs and parents did not want to send their children to the mission schools because they were afraid of exposing them to the Christian faith.

¹⁹⁸ See Sanneh, L., *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, Orbis Books, New York, 1992, p. 118.

¹⁹⁹ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56, a section of his book dealing with the issue of the primary schools of the NMS in Northern Cameroon.

Therefore, the second obstacle for the missionaries to create and run schools for their mission societies in Northern Cameroon was related to the threat Christianity represented for both the Islamic and African religions in the region.

In fact, after many unsuccessful attempts by the missionaries of the NMS and the SM to create and run schools for the natives in Northern Cameroon, their first educational institutions aimed mostly at converting the natives to Christianity. The subjects taught were all related to the Bible and the languages used for the teachings were neither French (the language of the colonial power) nor English or Norwegian (the languages of the missionaries), but the local languages, namely the Gbaya, Mbum, Dii, and Sanko, to name but a few.

In many areas, the local chiefs although they were not all of Fulani origin, were converted to Islam and therefore, were opposed to the Christian teaching in the mission schools. When the question of whose religion and whose language to promote through and speak in the new schools arose, the missionaries opted for the use of various languages depending on the area in which the mission station was established. For instance, in areas like Mbula, Meiganga and Dir where most of the people are Gbaya speaking people, the missionaries used the Gbaya language to teach the natives in their schools. Although the Fulani language also called *Fulfulde* is the language of the Muslim ruling class in Northern Cameroon and for this reason, spoken by most of the people living in the region, it did not become the medium of teaching in the mission schools, because the Christian converts came from non-Islamised ethnic groups.

After a difficult beginning, however, in the 1930s²⁰¹ well trained Norwegian women teachers and pedagogues, fluent in French, were assigned the difficult task of organising mission schools in which French would be the main medium of teaching. The outcome of this turning point in the organisation of the mission schools was that the colonial government began to commend the efforts of the mission societies to educate the natives according to the colonial administration principles. Those of the mission schools in which teachers started using French for teaching, were recognised by the colonial government as good schools and were given subsidies as a sign of encouragement by the government from 1952²⁰². From that time on, the schools of the mission were mainly run by women missionaries, and the children, though in very small numbers, attended these schools. However, arriving in Northern Cameroon in 1946, the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church had their first school opened in Ngaoundéré 1947 and their school system, which grew quicker than the protestant was mainly run by the Fathers.²⁰³

After a meeting held by the French colonial administration in Garoua in 1956²⁰⁴ about the involvement of the Christian mission societies in schools, every mission station established in Northern Cameroon where there was a woman missionary trained as a teacher, run a recognised²⁰⁵ primary school of the mission for the children of the natives staying around the mission station. It was difficult, however, for the missionaries to surrender their concept of a school as a means of evangelism and

²⁰¹ For more detail on the first conference held by the missionaries of the NMS on the schooling of the natives in Northern Cameroon, see Kare Lode, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

²⁰² Lode, K., *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁰³ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 142.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ The system of recognition of the schools of the mission societies by the French colonial administration in Cameroon was based on the use of the French language as a medium of teaching, the implementation of the government school programmes, the recruitment of qualified teachers, and the building of good infrastructures for the schools by any private organisation like the mission societies that wanted to run schools for the education of the natives.

Christian education. In this sense, the mission school system put a particular accent on the training of the men, whom the tradition in Northern Cameroon allowed to be absent from home for a relatively longer period than it allowed to the women. This could explain, though only partially, the reason why the African women were not particularly targeted by the mission schools in Northern Cameroon.

Therefore, despite the fact that, in 1956²⁰⁶ all the mission societies established in Northern Cameroon were allowed by the French colonial government to run private educational centres where they could teach the Christian doctrine to the natives in their mother tongues, the Norwegian teachers did not stop religious instruction in the recognised or authorised mission schools. The difference between a recognised or authorised mission school and a mission educational centre resided in the fact that in recognised mission schools, the teaching programmes which did not include religious subjects were provided by the government and French was the only language of instruction, while in the mission private educational centres like catechism classes or bible schools, the teachings were about Christian doctrine and the medium of communication was the local language.

Praising the efforts of Norwegian women missionaries who dedicated themselves to the educational ministry of the mission, Kare Lode pointed out that:

In 1970, Heimstad (one of the many missionary women in charge of the mission schools in Northern Cameroon) was busy elaborating school programmes and teaching materials adapted to the needs of the religious teaching in the schools of the Church, in collaboration with other women missionaries specialised in teaching. No other Church in Cameroon had reached such a level and the success was due to the quality management given in the schools by our women missionaries.

²⁰⁶ Lode, K., *Op.Cit.*, p. 142.

They were headmistresses, pedagogic counselors and schoolteachers, in addition to being responsible for Sunday school and the training of evangelists.²⁰⁷

Between 1960 when Cameroon became independent from France and the Evangelical Lutheran Church, born from the missionary works of the NMS and the Sudan Mission in Northern Cameroon, was recognised as a national Church and 1976, when the mission schools were transferred to the national Church, most of the schools created by the mission societies were led by women missionaries. The appointment of Else Strand²⁰⁸ as a general coordinator of the schools of the Church in 1977 showed how much the women of the mission contributed to the establishment and the running of the school system in the region. Speaking to us from Drammen in Norway where she is enjoying a well-deserved retirement from work as a missionary of the NMS in Cameroon, Else Strand²⁰⁹ gave us a glimpse of her experiences over more than thirty years of organising the Church's school system in Northern Cameroon. About her involvement as a missionary in the schools, Strand said that she was a trained teacher before going to Cameroon as a missionary and that the privilege to work among the children in this particular region of Cameroon was God's call to her. "This task was given to me by God himself and I found this work for children in Northern Cameroon to be a blessing ministry", she emphasised as she went on explaining her work as a missionary schoolteacher in Adamawa.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 181.

²⁰⁸ Missionary of the NMS, Else Strand served in various positions in the schools of the Protestant Churches in Northern Cameroon from 1959 until her retirement in 1991. See also Appendix 2, Picture 22.

²⁰⁹ Strand, E., Interview of November 4th, 2000 in Drammen, Norway.

²¹⁰ The Adamawa region she referred to comprises from south to north the plains located between Yoko and Tibati, Bétaré-Oya and Meiganga, and the high Plateaus of Ngaoundal and Ngaoundéré, which dominates the basin of the Bénoué river in north. The church school began in this area in the 1930s, many years after the children in Southern Cameroon started schools by either going to the public or church schools.

The missionaries who arrived at that time quickly understood the necessity for the natives to learn to read and write. The instruction was then indispensable. Therefore, the schools were firstly created in the centres (where the mission stations had been established) and later on, in the countryside.²¹¹

At her arrival in 1959, Else Strand entered this teaching ministry as a school district director in Mbé, a very difficult work to carry on. However, she said that this work was very enriching and gave her much blessing and joy at the end of the day.²¹²

Asked whether she believed in the beginning that the mission schools in Northern Cameroon were responding to the people's needs, and whether or not she had the feeling that the Church had efficiently fulfilled those needs, especially with regard to the women in the region who are still said to be the less educated portion of the population, Else Strand responded that she was satisfied with what had been done by the Church's schools in Northern Cameroon. She also pointed out that the schools of the Church were gifts of God in order to open the gates of education for the children of the most disadvantaged families. Though it was very difficult for the parents to understand the value of the school in the beginning, for most of them preferred to send their children to work in the farms than sending them to school, the missionaries in that particular region had to negotiate²¹³ for almost every child to convince the parents to send them to school.

With a wonderful sense of humour, Else Strand went on explaining to me that she was still remembering how often she had to walk to the villages to bring back to school those who had run away from it, and that this struggle

²¹¹ Strand, E., Interview of November 4th, 2000 in Drammen, Norway.

²¹² Strand, E., Interview of November 4th, 2000 in Drammen, Norway.

²¹³ Else Strand probably refers here to missionaries like herself who were involved in setting up mission school system in Northern Cameroon.

became even worse when the mission introduced the school fees to invite the parents to share the responsibility of educating their children with them. There were many complaints from the parents, she said. Some people voiced their concern by asking questions like: “What! Again paying to get our children to school? What a useless expense!”²¹⁴

Facing all these problems, however, did not affect the good will of the church in Northern Cameroon to educate the children who then represented the future and the growth of the church. Without the youth, there would not be a good continuation of the announcement of God’s kingdom in this part of Africa. As rightly pointed out by Else Strand, “our regions, our provinces, and the country as a whole without the talent and dedication of educated young people, the church would have died and would have not stood long after the missionaries were gone.”²¹⁵

In concluding the interview, Else Strand did not fail to give some advice as to the strategy the Church should adopt in dealing with the crisis, which the school system is facing in Cameroon today. Keeping a closer collaboration with the parents who need to be encouraged in order to participate financially in the formation of their children by giving up things like beer, tobacco and beautiful women, having good school staff members who show the obedience to Jesus Christ in their daily lives and persevering in prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ may show the way to follow, said Strand, are some of the things that the Church in Cameroon must do in this time of crisis in the educational system.

From this interview conducted with one of the leading figures of the Protestant schools in Cameroon, and the reading of the missionaries’ reports, it appears that women from both mission societies, the NMS and

²¹⁴ Same Interview.

²¹⁵ Strand, E., Interview of November 4th, 2000 in Drammen, Norway.

the Sudan Mission the union of which gave birth to the EELC, were the principal agents of the introduction of the Church school system in Northern Cameroon. How successful these women missionaries were in terms of service delivery as far as their engagement in the missionary work was concerned is one of the issues we will be dealing with in the following section of this chapter, which will also focus on the impact that this particular missionary education has had on the situation of women in Northern Cameroon.

4.2.2. Women's Education Through Mission Schools in Northern Cameroon

The attempt to send girls to Western schools has always encountered difficulties in African societies. There were various reasons as to why parents did not want to send their children and especially their daughters to school. As already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the parents' opposition to the White's school was either due to the lack of knowledge of the school's value or the lack of interest in what was taught to their children in the White people's school. Maria Rosa Cutrufelli however, cites other reasons for this parental opposition. She pointed out that:

Formal education in Africa discriminated against females from the start; perhaps this is hardly surprising since it was patterned upon the Western model. When it was introduced, there was some reluctance on the part of families to send their daughters to school because girls could be set to better use in the home and in the fields. Besides, there was the suspicion they might become too independent.²¹⁶

Though the women missionaries took a serious view of their role as educators in Northern Cameroon, they were still profoundly influenced by

²¹⁶ Cutrufelli, M. R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 159.

the system they were trying to serve. The mission societies, of which they were employees, had a very conservative conception of the role of women in both the society and Church. That is why most of the women missionaries in those mission societies were mainly confined to the tasks such as nursing and the teaching ministry in which they were said to have “natural gifts”.

Even though they did take their role as educators in Northern Cameroon seriously, the women missionaries were still heavily dependent upon their Western ideological educational background that not only confined women to specific spheres of activity but, did not regard other peoples’ cultures and traditions as civilised. This attitude was clearly shown by the missionary teachers in the way they approached the education of the natives in Northern Cameroon, as pointed out by Pearl Larson of the Sudan Mission and former missionary of Cameroon:

I was to take my ABC’s, and go down to the chapel, and gather the little children, and teach them the alphabet, (...). It was in French and I taught them words to learn so they could start reading. I did that, but I had about sixty children and about thirty different ones every day so you had absolutely nothing to work with. You didn’t know whether anyone was making progress at all. We didn’t have writing paper. We had a few pencils and we used the inside of our envelopes for writing paper because it really didn’t make any difference (...). It wasn’t a very successful class.²¹⁷

Furthermore, the education given to the natives by the missionaries was of a very poor quality and in most cases inappropriate. For instance, in an article entitled: “Baya Women Believe and Act”, published in the September 1959 issue of the *Women’s Missionary Messenger*, an official publication of the Women’s Missionary Federation, an Organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (America), John Watne²¹⁸, a missionary in

²¹⁷ Swendseid, D. M., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 8-9.

²¹⁸ Watne, J., “Baya Women Believe and Act”, in *Women’s Missionary Messenger*, September 1959, p. 2.

the Sudan, pointed out that most of Baya women on the Sudan Mission field had never learned to read. At many of the mission stations,

the women's work" consisted of reading classes taught by one of the missionaries (...). They read, memorised scripture, prayed and memorised songs. Sometimes they practiced writing, but that went slowly as circumstances dictated that most of the women bring their babies with them, and trying to write, while holding a baby who contended for the pencil was less than ideal and met with little success. In other words, there was not that much that the missionaries could do for the education of the natives and especially for the women who were said to become disobedient to their husbands when they became literate. Therefore, the main role of the women missionaries in the education of the African women became a counselling one as pointed out by Watne: "Some of the deaconesses also go on evangelistic trips on foot or with the missionary in his 'kutu-kutu' (motorcycle). The deaconesses also counsel the women about obedience to their husbands. This is a very necessary part of their work, as many of the women are inclined to become spunky- or MORE spunky when they begin to 'know books'".²¹⁹

Despite the fact that the missionaries did not have a clear vision of the education of the indigenous in general and the women in particular, the society of Northern Cameroon as a whole was becoming more and more influenced by the new ideas and the need of the people to be educated become more and more felt. This caused the mission societies to start with training programmes in which both men and women could be trained to handle the change that their societies were undergoing. Now that many were willing and eager to come and hear of Christ, and that the parents had become eager for their sons and daughters to attend the mission schools, the challenge to educate the people for the Protestant mission societies working in the region was becoming a matter of their own survival as reported by Laura Burton in the French School Report of 1953. The new school year, she reported,

begins the 1st of May when we hope to open two new schools. The government is becoming more strict in its requirements for the authorisation of the opening of schools as well as qualifications for

²¹⁹ Watne, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 3. (Capital letters in the quotation are from the author).

teachers. It has been brought to our attention that we of the North (Cameroon) must have an Educational Director of our own. Thus far, the Missions of the North are under the direction of the American Presbyterian Mission in the South. But as the work grows up here, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to give adequate direction. And it has also been suggested that if we the Protestants expect to keep the North we must make a greater advance with our schools.²²⁰

The suggestion that if the Protestants were expecting to keep the North, they must make a greater advance with their schools was not an innocent wish from the Protestant Educational Director. In a sense, it was an open competition that went on between the Protestants who were the first arrived in Northern Cameroon and who wanted to keep the monopoly of the Western presence and the Roman Catholics, although they were the last to arrive, and they had the favour of the French colonial administration. This confirms the assertion by Christine Alix²²¹, a well-known Church historian of our days according to which, when a great colonial power obtains political concessions over a colony, the right to evangelise the native people is also granted to its citizens. This view also appears clearly in Burton report when she stated that:

The R. Cs. (Roman Catholics) are out to win Cameroon through the schools. The North is their newest territory and they are concentrating on it with all the zeal, talents and money they can get a hold of to do it.²²²

Putting a particular emphasis on the opportunity given to the mission societies to witness through their schools in Northern Cameroon, Burton argued that,

it was God who granted the missionaries wisdom and guidance in the direction of the schools the previous year and that, for the boys and girls who had had an opportunity to hear and learn the Word of God as

²²⁰ Burton, L., Reports of the Sudan Mission, 1953, in the Archives of Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

²²¹ Alix, C., "Le Vatican et la décolonisation", in *Les Eglises chrétiennes et la décolonisation*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1967, pp. 22-23.

²²² Alix, C., *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.

they may later on go back to their villages to tell the Good News around the family fire-place as they gather in the evenings to chat and tell the news of all they have seen and heard.²²³

In other words, “it was God’s amazing grace”, to use Burton’s words, which helped the missionaries to fulfill their demanding task of educating the indigenous people.

After the meeting in Garoua in 1956²²⁴, the missionaries in Northern Cameroon were compelled by various factors to enhance the level of their educational programmes and to add to the biblical training, which they were already giving to the natives since the beginning of their mission work, some general training in other domains as well. Thus, in 1957²²⁵ at the Tcholliré mission station, there was a technical school run by the mission where the boys learnt to run the mission sawmill, carpentry and gardening.

However, according to Adelaide Bergeson²²⁶, the girls were not enrolled in schools, even if they were taught some elementary notions of serving. Many parents pleaded with the missionaries to start a school for their girls, realising the value of both new training and education. Thus, despite the restriction put on the education of the girls by the missionaries, pretending that they were respecting the rules of the African society, the creation of a girls’ school in Dir by the Sudan Mission in the 1950s can be understood as a response of the latter to the needs of the people in the specific domain of education. Education through schools gained interest among the natives and the school itself, as an educational institution, was viewed by natives

²²³ Burton, L., “Reports of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, 1953”, Archives of Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

²²⁴ The conference held in Garoua in 1956 between the colonial government and the churches in Northern Cameroon was a turning point in the establishment of the Christian private schools in Northern Cameroon.

²²⁵ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

²²⁶ Bergeson, A., “In the Land of the Blacks, Mission Study for Junior Groups”, in *Women’s Missionary Federation News Bulletin*, January 1937, pp. 372-375.

as a positive contribution on the part of the missionaries as was the healthcare system to which the second part of this chapter is dedicated. Problems arose, however, regarding the quality and the appropriateness of the education given to the natives through the mission schools, which in the case of Northern Cameroon, was largely influenced by the French colonial school system. In fact, with regard to the educational matter, the Western colonial powers in Africa had limited goals and favoured a high quality education given to the Africans through their school systems set up in Northern Cameroon. As rightly pointed out by Mineke Schipper:

Colonial schooling for African children was purely Western and rather limited. Children in the British colonies were taught the history of the Dukes of Kent, while in the French colonies (the African schoolchildren) learned about *nos ancêtres les Gaulois* (...). Schoolchildren were taught to sing [songs of praises to France] whenever a missionary arrived in a village colonized by the French.²²⁷

The above quotation shows how narrow and inappropriate for Africans the White people's educational system was. Even through the missionary education system, the White people's school was created, above all, to serve the interest of the colonial administration rather than the local people. This point was made clearer in the minute of the Mission Conference in 1954, when the board of the Sudan Mission met and decided that, for example, the education of the girls in school should not go beyond the reading of the Bible in mother tongues. It was therefore recommended

that the girls be taught in Baya for the first two years and then start a little French in the third year, that the curriculum include Bible, reading, writing, arithmetic, a little geography and home-making, that each girl bring a mat and 100 Francs entrance fee.²²⁸

²²⁷ Schipper, M., *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

²²⁸ Quoted from "Girls Boarding School, Sudan Mission Reports 1953-1957", The Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Through new schooling systems brought from their countries of origin, the Western colonists and missionaries in Northern Cameroon did not aim at giving proper education to the Africans. In fact, Ghislaine Lydon²²⁹ argued that the French colonial mission was above all one motivated by the principle of the *mission civilisatrice*, and that Europeans themselves had much to learn from the Africans, including in the field of education. Her vehement critique of the mission schools in Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) led her to denounce the misconduct of some missionaries whose teaching was mainly orientated towards their own African servants. Therefore, the main objectives that the Western colonial powers and the mission societies seemed to have been trying to attain through their school systems were to have some people among the indigenous people trained as interpreters or servants in order to help them to implement their colonial policy and to make life easier for them in the so-called “dark and risky continent.” In this sense, the Western school in Northern Cameroon was meant to serve the interests of the White people, rather than the interests of the natives. The reason why no efforts have been made by the Western colonial and missionary systems to adjust their school systems to the lives of the Africans could be found in the above-mentioned vision of the colonial education in Africa. And yet, those among the Western colonisers and missionaries who dedicated themselves to the task of teaching and healing the indigenous people, were considered more honest, more idealistic and clearly less prejudiced than the others.

If the colonial and missionary schoolteachers and healthcare workers were seen by some Africans as “good Samaritans”, helping them to overcome the difficulty of adjusting to the new context of the Western colonisation, it was mainly due to the fact that these schoolteachers and health workers

²²⁹ Lydon, G., “The Unraveling of a Neglected Source, A Report on Women in Francophone West Africa in the 1930s”, *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 147, XXXVII-3, 1997, pp. 555-584.

were viewed as fortunate possessors of power, performing charitable deeds for the sake of the deprived and needy people.

Examples of missionaries who dedicated themselves to the education and healthcare ministry among the natives in Northern Cameroon are many. For instance, in 1954, when the Sudan Mission opened the first school for the girls at Dir²³⁰, though it was in a very narrow way of educating the African women, the interest of the women missionary teachers, and especially the single women missionaries, increased, as they realised that some African girls were interested in the programme.

Despite the fact that the Western school system was not adapted to the African context and therefore was inappropriate in many domains in which the African women's education was of great interest, it is worth at this stage noting that there were women missionaries who dedicated themselves to the teaching of the girls in the mission schools. Their contribution, therefore, needs to be acknowledged.

Dedicated women like Harriet Stovner, Hilda Youngren, Magda Pederson and Verna Syverson²³¹ of the Sudan Mission, Henny Waala, Helga Hetlesether and Sigrid Braut²³² of the NMS to cite but a few, were among those of the female missionaries who gave all they could for the education of the natives in general and the education of the girls in particular in Northern Cameroon.

²³⁰ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 79. See also the "Station Report, Dir, July 1st, 1954 to January 1st, 1955", Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

²³¹ When I wrote to Verna Syverson to inform her about my research on women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, she was very happy and sent me all the reports she wrote on the Women For Christ, a women's organisation of the Lutheran church of Cameroon of which she was a leader for many years.

²³² Helga Hetlesether and Sigrid Braut, two former women missionaries of the NMS in Cameroon, were interviewed in Norway in order to document this research.

In a rather triumphal statement made by the Norwegian missionary and author, Kare Lode,²³³ the African women who had been considered as slaves in society in the past were taken to a more advanced state of emancipation by the missionaries. From the inception of the missionary work in Northern Cameroon, the women missionaries, married or not, organised the instruction of the African women. To achieve this goal, the mission societies at work in Northern Cameroon through the initiative of women like Hilda Youngren, began to invite African women, married as well as young girls, to gather on the mission stations in the afternoons, to meet together for those who could come in order to learn. The first meeting of this nature took place in Abba in 1933.²³⁴ Initially the teaching was informal, but later, when the missionaries realised that a more organised training programme was required, they began courses in hygiene, cooking and childcare in a more systematic way.

Differing responses were given to the creation of schools by the mission societies, depending on the readiness of the communities to send their children to the mission schools or not. For instance, in 1950 when Henny Waala²³⁵ started a girls' school in Yoko where she taught mostly subjects related to housekeeping, parents, were not willing to send their daughters to school, so the school closed down shortly after being opened. However, among the Tikar in whose culture Sigrid Braut observed that there was more respect for women than for men, she had a different experience in schooling the girls.

I replaced Karen Ulland (later Mrs. Haar) in the primary school in Bankim, she said. Karen Ulland had had good contact with the parents

²³³ The title of his book *Appelés à la liberté* (Summoned to Liberty), was inspired by the fact that among the first baptised Christians of the NMS, there were a good number of women who had been freed by missionaries from the bondage of the traditional chiefs in Northern Cameroon.

²³⁴ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 170

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 171.

and she received schoolgirls in her house. They (the schoolgirls) slept in her office. She asked me to build a house for them as a boarding school and I did it, she happily emphasised. They were from Gambé-Tikar. Among them there was one Pygmy girl and her name was Séraphine. It was wonderful to have them and to teach them, she happily concluded her answer.²³⁶

After a period of hard try, the Sudan Mission had its first school organised for the girls in Dir, in 1954.²³⁷ In the course of the same year, after having spent six years in organising a boys' boarding school in Garoua-Boulai, Magda Pederson moved to Dir to dedicate herself to the training of girls. But, the early marriageable age of girls in the region resulted in fewer enrolments of girls than boys in schools. For this reason, the education of girls through mission schools in Northern Cameroon had tentative beginnings, as one could read from Magda Pederson's report:

I began the boarding in 1954 as a trial. Not as many girls came as I had expected but during the last two and a half months I had sixteen girls in dormitory and twenty-six girls in the day school. The plan is for forty girls during this school year with a running expenditure of \$1000. I hope and pray that our girls' school may grow and that we, as the need may be through the years to come, may be able to enlarge it and that, by and by, may have a permanent school and buildings, all to the glory of God and to the blessing and training of the Baya girls.²³⁸

From that time on, the schoolwork was carried on five days each week by Magda Pederson at the Dir mission station. It was, however, difficult to keep the classes running effectively. Firstly, because the children did not come regularly, for the fathers or mothers still required their assistance, either in the garden or at home and, secondly, because the women missionaries in charge of the mission schools faced the problem of using the French language as a medium for instruction in schools. In fact, most of the missionaries who were running the mission school system in

²³⁶ Braut, S. Interview of November 18th, 2000 in Stavanger, Norway.

²³⁷ Station Report, Dir, July 1, 1954 to January 1, 1955, Luther Seminary Archives, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

²³⁸ Pederson, M., "Sudan Mission Reports, 1953-1957", Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, pp. s 14-15.

Northern Cameroon were of either Norwegian or American origin and therefore did not have a good knowledge of French or the local languages. Consequently, the teachers faced great difficulties in communicating the course content to the natives. These difficulties were mainly related to the language issue as one could read through Syverson's account:

They (the children), looked like 'angels' all garbed in their distinctive robes, their kinky hair neatly shorn, and not one foot out of place as they were lined up neatly in a row one behind the other resting their hands on the shoulders in the person in front of them, she reported. After stately posing for picture taking, they marched proudly into the classroom. The minute they stepped inside the door their reserved manner disappeared and boldness and pertness ruled. It was beehive ... everybody was busy ... running, shoving, giggling, and singing. I was stricken with dumbness. The few words and phrases I knew in Gbaya language left me. I did remember how to say, *ene ya nu* ... sit down! I am sure they thought it was a game because when I tried to grab one child, he slipped away, stared at me with his rolling dark eyes, giggled and then ran around the table. He mumbled something which might have been "I bet you can't catch me!"²³⁹

Thinking they were settled, the newly arrived American woman missionary began to read the story of Moses to her African schoolchildren in an awkward and unskilled way.

But, with the exception of a few leaving their seats to gaze out the window, a few pinching and slapping each other, a few giggling and others falling or being pushed off their bench, Syverson carried on, there were two left who were ready to listen. As the hour marched on, I was busily digging into every closet and pocket searching for the right words to use. I never did find "Will you please sit quietly!" I knew that was one sentence I must learn to perfection for my next class period. But surprisingly, when Pearl, one of our senior women missionaries on the field asked them what they had done in class that first day, they told her they hadn't done any writing but they had studied *Sadaka*. This is the title of the Gbaya primer and we had not even mentioned it in class that day so what had I taught them?²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Syverson, V., "The First Day of School..." in Reports of the Sudan Mission, October 31, 1962.

²⁴⁰ Syverson Verna, "The First Day of School...", Reports of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon, October 31st, 1962, Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

“What had I taught them?” was the telltale question. Such question when asked by one of the missionary teachers who spent a whole day struggling to get something done in educating the natives is revelatory for more than one reason. Firstly, this question reveals the honesty of the missionary in charge of the teaching of the natives. She came to Africa as a missionary and was given the task of teaching the children without knowing what she was supposed to teach them and without specific preparation for that, hence her surprise at listening to what the children had to say about their class. Secondly, it shows that in some cases, mission societies in Africa did not have a coherent programme of education based on the knowledge of the needs of the natives. Missionaries therefore had to be inventive enough to come up not only with their own programmes adjusted to their own needs but also programmes that they could easily put into practice. Therefore, for most of the missionaries in charge of teaching programmes on the field, the easiest way was to make use of the Bible the content of which nobody else had any knowledge. In this sense, the education of the natives by the missionaries in the beginning of the mission work in Northern Cameroon²⁴¹ was done mainly through the Bible schools, the running of Sunday school programme, and the translation work in which any missionary, though not well trained in those fields, would become an expert. In this sense, it was not surprising to find that in Northern Cameroon the church educational institutions were closely related to evangelism and the teaching of the Bible and Christian doctrine. However, before they were able to communicate the Christian faith to the natives, missionaries had to start by teaching them new things like Christian songs and biblical verses through informal programmes like the Bible study Sunday school sessions.

²⁴¹ For more details on the beginning of missionary work in Northern Cameroon, see the section on “The Western Mission Societies in Northern Cameroon”, in chapter 2.

4.2.3. The Missionary Perspective of the Women's Work in Northern Cameroon

Concerning the beginning and the development of the women's work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, I conducted a lengthy interview with one the Norwegian women missionaries, Helga Hetlesether whose main missionary responsibility in the NMS in Cameroon was to organise the work among the women in the church. In her responses to my questions, she explained to me how the women's work started among African women in the church in Cameroon:

The work among the African women in Northern Cameroon was started by the missionaries' wives in the early 1930s. In the beginning, the wives of the missionaries began to gather the African women from the mission station's neighbourhood to get them interested in the Christian faith. The missionaries' wives themselves were not recognised as full time working missionaries by the sending mission societies. However, they accompanied their husbands just as their children did. But in many cases in Northern Cameroon, the husband missionary himself did not know how to start his own mission work once in the field until his wife had contacts with the children and the women of the village in which they were stationed. For instance, I was told a story by Mrs. Skulberg²⁴² which I still remember well. Mrs. Skulberg told me that as missionaries wives, they were privileged to meet African women in their houses and to organise training for them in sewing, knitting and cooking, as well as organizing Bible study sessions where African women learned to recite biblical passages by heart.²⁴³

In those days, like their husbands, the African women could neither write nor read. However, they were very adept at memorising and reciting verses of the Bible and were very excited when the White women started teaching them songs and verses from the Bible to be sung and recited.

²⁴² Dr. Skulberg whose wife, according to Hetlesether's account, was the first missionary's wife to start a women's work among the African women in 1931, was a very controversial missionary of the NMS in Cameroon. Arrived in Cameroon in 1927, Dr. Skulberg first worked for the colonial administration in the region of Tibati where he was supposed to start a mission hospital until 1932. After having failed to start a mission hospital in Tibati for reasons only known by the colonial administration and Dr. Skulberg himself, he entered in conflict with his sending Mission Society and established a private medical work in Galim.

²⁴³ Hetlesether, H., Interview of November 20th, 2000, in Olen, Norway.

Verna Syverson from her experience of teaching the African women pointed out that:

They (the women) were so interested and I (Verna Syverson) feel it proved to be successful. Classes were held between 8: 15 and 12: 00 and 2: 45 and 5: 30. They were unable to read but I wish you could have heard them recite the verses they memorized. I hope to do some more work similar to this again this coming year.²⁴⁴

This type of missionary work undertaken by the women missionaries among the African women was based on the presumption that a woman's occupation revolved around domestic duties, and that the African women lacked the appropriate training to fulfill their roles as housewives. Since these women missionaries were deeply influenced in their way of thinking by the Western biases about the life of the African people, their effort to uplift the lives of the African women did not produce the expected result. Furthermore, the Western ideology of the African women's domesticity scholarly expanded by Deborah Gaitskell in her article on the "Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg"²⁴⁵, threw more light on how limited the action of women missionaries in Africa was, to liberate their Black sisters from patriarchal oppressive culture. Therefore, the women missionaries' effort to instruct the African girls, their religious co-operation with adult women, and the social welfare projects they initiated in Northern Cameroon were all imbued with the particular view that the role of the woman in the Christian family is that of "a submissive wife and a loving mother".

In Northern Cameroon, the training of the African women initiated by the women missionaries, unlike the training of the African men, was mainly

²⁴⁴ Syverson, V., "Personal Report, 1969", Archives of the Sudan mission in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, p. 21.

²⁴⁵ The idea of the 'African women's domesticity' circulated by Western civilization has been explored in depth by Deborah Gaitskell in her article "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-39", published in *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), pp. 241-256.

focussed on topics like Christian education (how to live as a Christian woman in family, in Church and in society as a whole), Christian family life (the life of a Christian wife and mother), and hygiene (which has a social developmental dimension such as the cleaning of the house, cooking food and providing for the other needs of the household). These aspects of the course will be analysed thoroughly in the following chapter, which among other aspects of this study, deals with the women's organisation of the Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

Before going further into our investigation about the women's work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, however, there is another domain of the missionary work in which the women proved to be the main contributors that needs to be investigated; the medical work performed by the missionaries in Northern Cameroon. Therefore, the second part of this chapter will examine the critical role played by the women missionaries in implementing modern medicine in a region where, before the arrival of the missionaries, the populations were mainly reliant on their traditional healing methods to cure the diseases.

4.2.4. The Social and Economic Impact of the Missionary Work on the African Women's Position in Northern Cameroon

In an interview on October 1, 1986, Pearl Larson²⁴⁶ expressed the opinion that when the missionaries first came to Africa, the women were the

²⁴⁶ Pearl Larson whose personal reports I constantly referred to in this study was one of a few privileged women missionaries interviewed by the Oral History Project on American Lutheran Church Women in World Mission, a project initiated by The American Lutheran Church, Division for World Mission and Inter-Church Cooperation to preserve for future researchers the oral narratives of American Lutheran (and predecessor bodies) women whose participation in the church's world mission effort began, ended, or took place during the period 1930 to 1980. The interview was conducted in Minneapolis by Fern Gumestad, a former President of The American Lutheran Church Women. See "Interview With Pearl Larson, Missionary in Cameroon", in Swendseid, D. M., (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, American Lutheran Church Division for World Missions, Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 1st, 1986.

property of the men and they were ruled by them. In this sense, their liberation started only when the missionaries began the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and when the Africans accepted Jesus as their Lord. From the beginning, there were small classes with few students and little instruction held by the first missionaries. Then, because the women were not permitted by their husbands to come to the classes, the first missionaries began with the men who could come. Later when people chose to follow Jesus, the time for the women also came and they became very active in learning from the missionaries. They wanted to learn how to read, and to write, and know how to care for their children, and give them nourishing food. According to Pearl Larson²⁴⁷, the African women's condition was a critical one. Although she was the main support of her family members, the African woman lacked a good modern training to enable her to provide competent, efficacious health and nutritional care for herself and for her family, hence, the high rate of diseases and death amongst mothers and children in the region. Therefore, it did not take long before the missionaries involved themselves in projects such as the women's work and orphanages for the motherless children in the villages nearby the mission stations.

At its inception, the work among the African women was based on the premise, or presumption, that the African women were ignorant and were ill-treated by the African traditional societies. It did not take long, however, for the women missionaries themselves to find out that the African women were, in a certain sense, more free and self-supporting in their societies than the missionaries' wives were, as pointed out by Ester Roen:

I was impressed by the way in which the African women were self-supporting. They were doing everything to provide for their own needs, for the needs of their children as well as those of their husbands. They

²⁴⁷ Born in Kanawha, Iowa, in 1906, Pearl M. Larson served as a missionary of the Sudan Mission from 1936 to 1975 in Cameroon where she established an orphanage.

were not bothered at all. Whether they had drunk husbands or not, that wasn't their problem; they would look after their family as if they were the only ones who should be responsible for them. That wasn't the case for us the missionaries' wives.²⁴⁸

About the social dimension of the missionary work in Northern Cameroon, Pearl Larson, while relating her experience as the founder of an orphanage in Meiganga, went on and pointed out that there was no way for missionaries to avoid this unanticipated missionary work, because there were so many babies who were not cared for after the death of their mothers.

The fifth day, after the death of a mother of twins, an old grandmother came carrying the smaller of the twins and said that we could have that one. We didn't know what to do with this baby. We hadn't come for that purpose of taking care of babies. We tried to find an African that would take care of the baby and then we would prepare its milk and its food and see about its medicine and so on, but we couldn't find anyone. No one was willing to take care of that baby. (...) What are you going to do in a case like that? You don't do a thing except take care of the baby. It wasn't too terribly long before another baby came, and another and another and another and another. By the time I had twelve I said, "You know this looks like we've got an orphanage."²⁴⁹

How important and appropriate was this orphanage work in the eyes of the indigenous of whose social organisation it is said that everybody, children as well as elderly, were cared for? Only the missionaries who saw the need for such work at that time could answer this question. The only comment we can make here is that, according to Pearl Larson again, this orphanage work started in 1938 in Mboula, the first mission station of the Sudan Mission in Northern Cameroon. It was then transferred to Meiganga and was carried on only until 1975²⁵⁰ when the missionaries themselves began to admit smaller number of the children. The reason why missionaries ceased this orphanage work may lie in the fact that in 1975, the mission societies had to hand their responsibility for all their projects over to the

²⁴⁸ Roen, E., Interview of October 28th, 2000 in Trondheim, Norway.

²⁴⁹ Swendseid, D. M., (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

local leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, following the integration of the mission societies into the local Church. One could also evoke the lack of missionaries who could avail themselves to work with orphans as one of the reasons why the mission societies working in the region stopped supporting this work.

After the independence of Cameroon in 1960, there was a common idea that the local people should take over their responsibilities from the foreign agencies previously established in the country. This attitude of the sense of responsibility shown among the indigenous people created fear and threat in the minds of foreigners who tried to withdraw from their previous commitments in the country. In this sense, even in the church, there were no more missionaries who felt called to embrace ministries for the needy ones, like the orphanage work, as a possible missionary career for them. As pointed out by Pearl Larson, the orphanage work in the Sudan Mission field was not only caring for needy children, giving them a good training for life, but it was also a means to win the plaudits of the colonial government which substantially subsidised this type of work for its colonial propaganda before the League of Nations.²⁵¹ Therefore, since 1975, the orphanage work, as it used to be organised by the women missionaries, has ceased to exist. The orphanage of Meiganga was integrated into the mission's hospital in Garoua-Boulai in 1975, and the one, which was opened by the NMS in Yoko was transferred to Tibati to be nearer to the mission hospital in Ngaoubela and had operated until 1986²⁵² when it was closed down.

Although, the nurses in the mission hospitals were mostly women missionaries, they were now working in different capacities; as nurses and

²⁵¹ See "Correspondence of Missionary Pearl Larson, 1935-1950", Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

²⁵² Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 220.

medical doctors rather than simply being “super-mothers” for the orphans. Thus, the idea that the work in the orphanage can be done by anyone, no matter the person was trained as a social worker or not evaporated to give room to a much more professional class of women who came out from either Europe or America after the 1970s, to prove what they were able to achieve not only before the eyes of their male counterparts, but also before the Africans in different fields of social work.

4.3. The Women Missionaries and the Health Care Work in Northern Cameroon

Health and healing are very important issues for any human society, which longs for a harmonious improvement of its members’ life conditions. Being in good health or being healed from a given disease offers good opportunities for an individual to contribute positively to the development of his or her community, and consequently to the development of human society as a whole.

The Lutheran missionaries perceived and implemented this concept from the inception of their missionary work in Northern Cameroon. Before any other thing was taken into consideration, the missionaries understood that it was necessary to care for both the physical and spiritual needs of the people to be evangelised. In this sense, among the first missionaries sent to Cameroon by the Sudan Mission (SM) and the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS), there were well-trained women nurses to do a meaningful work of a healing ministry.

Today, when people think of what has been achieved by the Mission Societies in Northern Cameroon, the aspects of education and health care appear as the most important ones. Some people even think that without tackling the problem of education and health of the indigenous people, the

missionaries would have failed to implant a church in Northern Cameroon, a region strategically attributed to the Islam by both German and French colonial governments.²⁵³

All the stories of the first Africans converted to Christianity in Northern Cameroon bear some relationship to the schools or healthcare centres created by the missionaries and in particular by the women missionaries called “Sisters” or “Misses”, depending on the sending Mission Society, who lived among the people in scattered villages of the region. This healing ministry taken on by missionaries since the beginning of Christianity in Northern Cameroon, which is being continued in our days by the national churches, does not only contribute to the spread of the Gospel among the indigenous people, but also the improvement of the people’s life conditions.

As mentioned above, the healing ministry throughout the missionary work was mostly carried out by women, of whom a good number were trained as school teachers or nurses. In many cases, even those who were not formally trained as nurses did take on medical responsibilities once in the mission field. Very compassionate, all the “Misses” or “Sisters” of the Mission Societies were at the same time Gospel preachers and health workers among the indigenous people of Northern Cameroon. One of them, Helga Hetlesether of the NMS, describing her work as missionary in Cameroon, explained:

I used to travel from house to house, from village to village, carrying my medicine box on my back, teaching women how to look after their babies and keep their houses clean. I gave a tablet when a baby was sick; I explained at length to the wives and most importantly to the mothers of the houses how they must use the medicine I gave them for a treatment of a given disease. Very often, I had to treat infected wounds and speak to women about sexually transmitted diseases,

²⁵³ For more details on the presence of Islam in Northern Cameroon, see chapter 2.

which were spread all over the region. I think I succeeded in doing that, because I was a woman. The chiefs of the harems would never have allowed a man, even a white man, to enter the gate of his house. Because I was a woman, I could talk to everyone in the house; I could talk to the children, the wives and also to the housefather. That is why, I could teach everyone about the basic and elementary rules of hygiene, and about what to do in case of a sickness. I could also read some Bible stories about Jesus and so on.²⁵⁴

Thus, the “Misses” and the “Sisters” of the Mission Societies not only contributed to the implantation of churches in a region known as an Islamic region but, above all, they helped significantly in introducing modern medicine to Northern Cameroon. They were the first to treat the sick people in the villages by means of new remedies. They taught people about certain diseases, how one could be infected by them, and also how to prevent them. They also treated people with quinine and antibiotics, which they brought with them from Europe or from America depending on the missionaries’ country of origin.

In short, the women missionaries were the main agents of the transfer of the new medical knowledge from Europe and America to the then so-called remote area of Northern Cameroon. Therefore, it is of paramount importance in a work dedicated to the contribution of the women to the social, political and religious development of an African society to highlight the importance of the medical work in which the women missionaries as well as the African women had played a major role.

Having established the prominence given to the healing ministry by the mission societies in Northern Cameroon and that most of the health personnel were women, I shall now focus on the contribution of the women from specific mission societies and the reactions of the indigenous people to the implementation of modern medicine.

²⁵⁴ Hetlesether, H., Interview of November 20th, 2000, Olen, Norway.

4.3.1. The Missionary Work and the Implementation of Modern Medicine in Northern Cameroon

In the early twenties, right at the beginning of the missionary enterprise in Northern Cameroon, the Lutheran Mission Societies from America (the Lutheran Brethren World Mission and the Guderson's Mission also called the Sudan Mission) and Norway (the Norwegian Missionary Society) were very interested in missionary work in a country described by missionary Ruth Christiansen as a region where "many tribes cause a babel of languages and diverse racial and religious backgrounds."²⁵⁵ On their arrival in Northern Cameroon, missionaries faced the tough reality of adjusting to a life different from the one, which they lived in their own countries. There were very high rates of child and adult mortality among the people of the area due to various infections and tropical diseases such as malaria. Missionaries were, above all, preoccupied with their own survival in such a hostile environment. Part of the reason for the first missionary teams arriving from the Western countries to Africa being mostly composed of nurses and doctors carrying not only the Bible but also boxes of medicines, was the fight against tropical diseases. In that way, missionaries did enough to improve the health and the life condition of the indigenous people by a thorough work performed in the domain of public health in most of the African countries.

A report of the French colonial government before the General Assembly of the United Nations about the social progress in Cameroon in 1949 states:

It is particularly advisable to lay stress on the importance of what the various religious Missions have accomplished in the domains of education and health. For the specific region of Northern Cameroon, there were Roman Catholic Sisters, holding certificates in nursing and

²⁵⁵ Christiansen, R., *For the Heart of Africa*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1956, p. 3.

the social workers, who served in sanitary centres in Garoua and Ngaoundéré.²⁵⁶

Talking about the Protestant Missions of which the Lutherans were the first to start the work in Northern Cameroon, the composition of their steering committees is revelatory of the focus of their missionary endeavours on the issues of health and healing amongst the indigenous people.

Missionaries from the Lutheran Brethren World Mission of Fergus Falls, Minnesota, in the USA arrived in Northern Cameroon in the early twenties and started the work in Garoua, Maroua, Yagoua, and in the west region of Chad. The composition of their local mission board, including a pastor and two deaconesses, shows clearly how important was health and healing ministry in the vision of missionary work, especially when we know that the deaconesses were all well trained in nursing and social work.

The Sudan Mission started the work around Ngaoundéré and Garoua in 1923 with a man and three women of whom two were deaconesses. Sister Olette Berntsen and Sister Anne Olson, as they were affectionately called by the people of the area, were a special blessings to them through the medical work that they performed for years in the region.

Missionaries from the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) were sent to Northern Cameroon as early as 1924. Their missionary work spread all over the region south of Garoua and the Ngaoundéré area. Three pastors and two deaconesses, all Norwegian citizens, formed the local steering committee in 1949. A succinct analysis of the number of missionaries sent by the NMS to Cameroon from 1925 to 1975, reveals that more than 65%

²⁵⁶ "Rapport du Gouvernement français à l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies sur l'administration du Cameroun placé sous tutelle de la France", Année 1949, pp. 127 and 132.

of the missionaries were women, and of the 65% almost 70% were single women working mostly with sick and needy people in hospitals, dispensaries, leprosy centres and orphanages, or in schools.²⁵⁷

4.3.1.1. The “Sisters” of the Sudan Mission

When the French colonial government granted them a mission field in one of the territories under their administration in Africa, the Gunderson’s group left for Africa on March 21, 1923.²⁵⁸ The two deaconesses of the team, as well as Mrs. Anna Marie Gunderson, were going to be agents of great change in the lives of the people of Northern Cameroon. Not only were they going to be church builders in a region long known as an Islamic area but, with their easy access to the people, they taught, preached and, above all, healed the sick.

At the beginning of their missionary work, the Sisters effectively used their knowledge in the medical domain to improve the health conditions of the indigenous people. As recorded in Mrs. Gunderson’s diary,

May 31, 1924, Sister Anne and Sister Olette were being occupied in much the same way at Mboula. They started a boarding school which eventually had forty boys enrolled. They also taught some of the chief Djabou’s men how to read. Sister Olette maintained a dispensary. People from all the tribes - Fulanis, Haussas, Bayas, Mbororos - came to her for treatment; with her healing ministry went a teaching ministry in the things of God.²⁵⁹

To understand, however, how important was the healing ministry in the missionary enterprise, it suffices to read what the Sisters wrote about their daily experience with the sick people:

²⁵⁷ See “Missionaries of the NMS in Cameroon from 1925 to 1975”, Ole Eriksen’s personal archives, Stavanger, Norway. See also Appendix 2, Picture 6.

²⁵⁸ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

²⁵⁹ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 27-28.

August 27, 1934, Alida Agrimson, the nurse, is busy at her new post. One young man was taken suddenly ill and for several days was in a coma. He was brought back to health again. This made quite an impression upon the people. When he was able to come to the Mission he said had we not been there he would have died.

An old lady who was brought the first of the year with an ulcer which covered her whole leg (...) was entirely healed. Now she's like a new person. It is most encouraging when people are healed.

This ministry of mercy is one of the means of reaching these people with the Gospel.²⁶⁰

Furthermore, the importance of the missionary healing ministry in the eyes of the local people was clearly expressed through the first ever visit paid to the Rey Bouba chiefdom²⁶¹ by the "intrepid Sisters", when they explored the region in 1932. If the Sisters were fairly welcomed by the chief of Rey Bouba, it was largely because he was expecting them to start health care work in his kingdom. That expectation was made clearer when Ruth Christiansen, reporting about the visit they paid to the Rey region in March 1944, wrote:

Lamido (the King) Rey has not been at all well. He cannot stand on his feet. As soon as we reached the city, he sent a message to us asking if we knew that he was suffering from rheumatism. I sent him a bottle of liniment; and when we called to see him, he said that he had slept well after using it (...). He greeted us cordially and seemed really glad to see us.²⁶²

That attitude of openness of the old chief towards the ministry of the Sisters was obviously followed by his son, Hamadou, who took over the throne after his father's death in 1945. His gift of a large piece of land to

²⁶⁰ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 104.

²⁶¹ The Rey Bouba region, named after its chief Lamido Rey Bouba, is one of the largest divisions in the province of North. No one could enter the Rey Bouba's kingdom without the personal permission of its chief. Until the year 1945, that restriction held for Whites as well as Blacks. When Germans first occupied the Cameroons, chief Rey Bouba would not acknowledge them nor allow them to enter his territory. At the outbreak of the First World War, the chief immediately joined forces with the French and the British against the Germans. When the French took over the territory, Rey-Bouba pledged them allegiance and in return, the French accorded him autonomy in his own territory. This is why even today, the traditional chief of Rey-Bouba acts like an absolute monarch over his people, in an independent and democratic Cameroon.

²⁶² Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 162.

the Mission in Tcholliré, the capital city of the French division within the Rey Bouba kingdom, was a sign of the friendly relationship, which the Sisters had worked hard to build with the royal family through their healing ministry.

The people of the Rey kingdom were the ones who benefited from the temporary healing ministry of Mrs. Sand. She was one of the missionaries' wives who were trained as a nurse before joining her husband on the mission field. She stayed with her husband, pastor Lloyd Sand, when he was acting as a director of the Sudan Mission on the field in Cameroon. At the time he was waiting for permission from the chief and the French colonial authorities to start the construction of the Mission station in Tcholliré, Lloyd Sand received from the people of the region the expression of their gratitude towards missionaries for having availed them of treatments for their sick and needy ones.

In his welcoming speech to new missionaries who replaced the Sands, Lamido Rey Bouba pleaded for a good health care ministry. In a private conversation with the new missionaries, the chief could ask questions like: "Are you able to tell what is wrong when you see a sick man? Why are your children so much stronger than our children? I have heard they do not die so quickly. What kind of food do you give your babies?" And so on. Following this conversation between the king and his missionary visitors, Mrs. Trobisch could confidently draw this conclusion by pointing out that:

From his questions it became clear to both of us [her husband and herself] that our 'invasion' [the missionaries' presence] of his kingdom must be along practical lines, and above all through public health techniques and medical aid.²⁶³

²⁶³ Trobisch, I. H., *On Our Way Rejoicing*, Harper and Row, New York, 1964, p. 156.

Having this expectation of the king in mind, the Trobisches dedicated themselves to the uplifting of the people's life conditions in the region of Rey Bouba, in Northern Cameroon.

Thanks to her obstetrical knowledge gained years before, when she attended a nursing course in that subject in America before coming to Cameroon as a missionary, Mrs. Trobisch revived a neonate who was about to die, suffocated with mucous. From that moment on, reported Ingrid Trobisch, word spread in the region that "*Monsieur et Madame*" at the mission station could make dead babies live. So from that day onward, the ministry of the Trobisches in the region focussed on the physically sick people.

Describing their daily routine of missionary work in the region, Ingrid Trobisch wrote:

By now our mornings were almost entirely taken up in caring for the sick. Before we even finished breakfast, there they were, thirty or forty of them from all the villages around. We did what we could with our rudimentary medical knowledge. (...) First we sorted out our patients: those who came for worm medicine, those with tropical ulcers, those with venereal diseases (a high percentage, another of the "blessings" the white man has brought to Africa), those with sore eyes, and those in need of dental care.²⁶⁴

Even though they were receiving some medicines by mail from a missionary medical doctor stationed in Ngaoundéré, one wonders how they managed to satisfy all the medical needs of their numerous patients. As Paul Darman, the first African leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, put it: "God himself was at work through the missionary's healing ministry and that's why people were healed anyway. And thank you to the Sisters who came to us on behalf of God."²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Trobisch, I. H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 161.

²⁶⁵ Darman, P., Interview of November 2nd, 1999 in Meiganaga, Cameroon.

4.3.1.2. The “Misses” of the Norwegian Missionary Society

Caring for the sick people, Kare Lode²⁶⁶ contended, was central to the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) wherever the Society had sent missionaries. The NMS missionaries in Northern Cameroon were involved in a health ministry very similar to that of their fellow missionaries from other mission societies. Despite the fact that the indigenous people of Northern Cameroon were deeply attached to the practice of their traditional medicine²⁶⁷, the Norwegian missionaries emphasised the development of health infrastructures such as leprosy centres, dispensaries and hospitals. It was very difficult for the people to accept the new medical practice, especially women whom the local traditions prevented from going out of the houses.

According to Lode²⁶⁸, the fact that it was generally accepted by the Africans that the ladies (the deaconesses) of the Mission could go into the people’s homes to assist the mothers in child delivery contributed to a certain degree, to augment the influence of the women missionaries in the health care system. For this same reason, the success of the health work undertaken by the NMS in Northern Cameroon greatly depended on the women missionaries who had the necessary medical knowledge and who could easily travel from one village to another, teaching and healing the sick people in their homes. Even though the strategy of the Norwegian

²⁶⁶ Lode, K., “L’apport culturel de la mission norvégienne en Adamaoua”, in Boutrais, J. (ed.), *Peuples et cultures de l’Adamaoua (Cameroun)*, Actes du colloque de Ngaoundéré du 14 au 16 janvier 1992, ORSTOM, Paris, 1993, pp. 249-263.

²⁶⁷ With regard to the attachment of African people to their traditional healing systems, an interesting PhD study currently conducted by Ntsimane Radikobo on “A Critical History of Lutheran Medical Missions in Southern Africa: A Special Emphasis on Five Hospitals (1903-1973)”, looks at the impact of the missionary healthcare system on the indigenous healing system in Southern Africa.

²⁶⁸ Lode, K., *Appelés à la liberté, histoire de l’église évangélique luthérienne du Cameroun*, Improcep, Amstelveen, 1990, p. 137.

missionaries was to treat sick people through formal structures like dispensaries, leprosy centres and hospitals, the successful example of the “Sisters” of the Sudan Mission was followed by the NMS as well. The women of the NMS, single or married to a missionary, played a significant role in the development of the public health care system in Northern Cameroon.

In the beginning of health and social development like orphanages and leprosy centres, the names of Norwegian women missionaries were mentioned. Women missionaries like Tone Bjornhaug and Follesoy were already lodging a number of needy children in their homes when in 1949, the French colonial government granted the NMS a legal authorisation to build an orphanage in Yoko; Ingerborg Mosand was the first woman appointed as director of the center.²⁶⁹

Although the focus of the thesis is on the Lutheran church, the contribution of the Sisters of the Roman Catholic Church to the improvement of the people’s live cannot be ignored. It is, therefore, worth noting here that the Sisters of the Roman Catholic Church in Northern Cameroon played an important role in responding to the medical needs of the people, especially in the rural areas.

4.3.1.3. The Sisters of the Roman Catholic Church

In Northern Cameroon, the Protestant Mission Societies started the missionary work almost forty years ahead of the Roman Catholic Church. Msgr. Jean Zoa (the late Archbishop of Yaoundé) wrote in his Foreword to the book of the late Archbishop of Garoua (Msgr. Yves Plumey) about the announcement of the Gospel in Northern Cameroon and Chad:

²⁶⁹ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 99. See also Appendix 2, Picture 2.

In 1946, the Northern Cameroon, Chad and the Northwest of the Central African Republic are still pagan lands, unknown, abandoned. Only a few colonial administrators and, preceding them, a few officers or under officers of the colonial legendary troops furrow these regions. A tenacious and unchecked rumour circulates among the Christians and even in the Roman Curia, which states that these lands are Islam properties.²⁷⁰

This statement, however, did not take into consideration the fact that these regions were already being visited by the Protestant Missions Societies. As in the southern part of Cameroon, which received its first missionaries (who were Jamaican freed Black slaves from a Baptist Mission Society) in the 1840s, before the *Pères Pallotins* or Pallotine Fathers from Germany founded the Roman Catholic Mission in 1890²⁷¹, Northern Cameroon had its first missionaries from Protestant denominations. Despite the fact that the Protestants were already busy at converting people to Christianity through teaching and health care work as means of evangelisation, there was still enough to be done in order to cover the whole region of Northern Cameroon with medical work.

The Roman Catholics came into the play in 1946 and consequently a Roman Catholic health care ministry began as soon as they established their first mission stations in the region. The arrival of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Saint-Jacut in December 1956 in Garoua was seen by the Roman Catholic authorities as a special blessing to the indigenous people in Northern Cameroon. According to Yves Plumey²⁷², “a great work was waiting for the Sisters”. As soon as they arrived, a dispensary was built to welcome in a decent way the sick people whose number was constantly increasing.

²⁷⁰ Plumey, Y., *Op. Cit.*, p. v.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁷² Plumey, Y., *Op. Cit.*, p. 90.

Until the late 1950s, most of the main centres of Northern Cameroon were still in need of more appropriate health structures. In 1957, there was an urgent need expressed by Father de Bernon for a community of missionary sisters who could take on the work of caring for the sick, the promotion of women and the establishment of an orphanage in Touboro. That need was met when in 1968²⁷³, three sisters of Mater Orphanorum of Milan, namely Sister Dorina Barcellari, Sister Lucilla Passoni and Sister Filomena Zappone arrived in Touboro after having received good medical training for their future work. Their medical work was so successful that the public authorities of the country created a public dispensary, which was given to the Sisters to run.

Rapidly, both the population of Touboro and an increasing number of people from the neighbouring villages and those living from afar came to the dispensary to receive treatment given by the sisters.

This fact is confirmed by Msgr. Yves Plumey when he points out that:

Every morning, the nurse sister, Sister Lucilla, is there. (...) A long queue of sick people wait, there are sick, wounded people, disabled. Many mothers bring their small babies who need to be examined and cared for. The sisters have to face all the necessary work of examining and treating the sick. In these tropical countries, malaria kills many. In the same manner, several other diseases due to alimentary deficiencies and poor quality of drinking water have to be treated. And there is the entire work of delivery to be done.²⁷⁴

Thus, although the sisters of the Roman Catholic Church were not the first comers on the mission field in Northern Cameroon, their work in the domain of health has put them in the first place among those who have contributed to the improvement of the people's social life in the region. It is worth noting here that the Roman Catholic mission in Northern

²⁷³ Plumey, Y. *Op. Cit.*, p. 213.

²⁷⁴ Plumey, Y., *Op. Cit.*, p. 213.

Cameroon was at a time seen by Protestants as a competing mission. We have already mentioned while dealing with the issue of the missionary educational system in Northern Cameroon, that the Protestant schools in the region developed as a result of the challenges that they faced when the Protestants saw that the Roman Catholic schools were growing in number as well as in the quality of the education given to the natives. However, unlike the school system on which the Roman Catholics heavily relied in order to take control over the region previously occupied by the Protestants, the intervention of the Roman Catholics in the domain of health care remain limited compared to the Protestant health care system. For instance, the Protestants have three reference hospitals in the region while the Roman Catholics have just a few dispensaries scattered in rural areas.

4.3.2. Missionary Medical Practices in Northern Cameroon

In an article entitled: “The Cultural Contribution of the Norwegian Mission in Adamaoua”, Kare Lode²⁷⁵ wrote that before the arrival of missionaries, there was neither a school nor a health care centre in Northern Cameroon. The colonial administration provided them later. However, the reality was that, before they were convinced of the efficacy of the new medicine, people trusted their local medicine. As mentioned earlier in chapter three,²⁷⁶ the limitations of the traditional medicine were many. Not only the traditional healers did not have proper way by which to diagnose sicknesses, but in some cases, they were also limited in knowing with precision what dosage of medication to give to their patients. Raising the issue of the limitation of the African traditional medicine does not mean that the African traditional medicine is bad or has failed compared to the Western medicine. The point is that, these two

²⁷⁵ Kare Lode in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 251.

²⁷⁶ See Chapter Three on, “Women and Health Issue in African Traditional Societies”.

medicines, as they are being practiced today in Africa, have their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, there need to be a complementarity between the two medicines.

Unlike the traditional medicine, the modern medicine brought by missionaries consisted of teaching people about the basic elements of hygiene, how diseases can be prevented and treating certain diseases by means of new medications. The modern medicine as practiced by missionaries has both preventive and curative aspects, hence its success in decreasing the percentage of certain diseases hitherto common among the populations.

Ester Roen, a well-trained Norwegian nurse who accompanied her husband, missionary Roen²⁷⁷ of the NMS to the Central African Republic and Cameroon from 1987 to 1993. She spoke to me about the importance and the value of the new medicine introduced by missionaries in Africa. As a missionary's wife, Mrs. Roen was not assigned a specific task. Only her husband was sent to Africa by the mission society to work as an evangelist and the wife was supposed to be a housewife. However, as a professionally trained nurse, Mrs. Roen organised, though in an informal way, a medical service for the sick people in the Central African Republic, and worked in the Church dispensary in Meiganga in Cameroon while her husband was training catechists, evangelists and pastors for the Lutheran churches in Africa.

As I approached Ester in October 2000 for an interview, she was quite opened to answer my questions. She willingly accepted to share with me her experience as a missionary's wife who spent some years in Cameroon. For the writing of my doctoral thesis on the role of women in the Lutheran

²⁷⁷ Madam Ester Roen, a former missionary's wife, was interviewed in Trondheim, Norway on October 28th, 2000 at their home.

church in Cameroon, it was a good opportunity to have the experiences of a happy and excited missionary's wife. Very fluent in both Gbaya (an African language) and English, she told me her story, not only as a missionary's wife but also as a nurse who spent some years dealing with the health of the people among whom they lived as a missionary family. The health of the Africans in general and the African women in the church in particular, she said, was her main concern during their stay in both the Central African Republic and Cameroon.

From her experience as a missionary's wife, Ester Roen said that she could not remain jobless when she saw many African people with such great medical needs.

Realising that in the villages mostly the women were the ones who looked after their family members in case of sickness, I organised at home a health service for women who were most in need of proper training to look after their children. After a few weeks of doing it, there were not only women but also men who came to learn how to keep themselves in good health. In a way, she said, I was still answering the questions asked by the chief of Rey Bouba to the Trobisches almost forty years ago.²⁷⁸

As she described it to me, Madam Roen's medical work consisted mostly of teaching some of the specific topics such as pregnancy, childbirth, vaccinations, the various causes of coughing, headaches, fever, stomach pain, urinary infections, venereal diseases and malnutrition, and also of explaining to the patients how to use the new medicines such as quinine and antibiotics. The result of all that work was encouraging.

By the time we left Africa, [concluded Mrs. Roen], I could notice a big change in the people's attitude. Women were more prompt to take their children to the health centre for a check up and they were also getting more and more used to the new medicines.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Roen, E., Interview of October 28th, 2000, Trondheim, Norway.

²⁷⁹ Roen, E., Same Interview.

4.3.3. The Reactions of the Natives to the Western Medicine and the Public Health Issue in Northern Cameroon

The first task of a missionary is undoubtedly preaching and teaching the good news. However, bearing in mind that Jesus did not only preach to and teach the people of his time about the love of God, but also healed those who were physically sick, any missionary enterprise has, among other preoccupations, the satisfaction of the physical needs of the people to be evangelised. Therefore, medical work offers one of the best opportunities for evangelism.

According to missionary Ruth Christiansen, the medical work “often opens the door to preaching and teaching, doors that otherwise remain closed.”²⁸⁰ To demonstrate that the medical work constitutes the best form of service that makes the love of God live in the hearts of human beings, and based on her own experience from the field, missionary Ruth Christiansen would ask the following questions to challenge those who think of missionary’s work as an easy one:

Can you love that old man with the ulcer? That old Mbororo woman whose eyes are running with pus and teeming with stick flies? That emaciated child covered with itch and caked with dirt? Here is a test B an opportunity to demonstrate in deed as well as in word God’s love and care for all humankind.²⁸¹

In a broad sense, the medical work performed by the missionaries in Northern Cameroon greatly assisted the local people. By bringing with them new medicines and new medical practices unknown to the people of the region before, the missionaries helped to fight some “superstitious” ideas attributed to African people by the Westerners themselves, ideas according to which for Africans, behind any harm, any disease, there is always an evil will. Although, many people showed a negative attitude

²⁸⁰ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 262.

²⁸¹ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 262.

towards the new medicine in the beginning, in the end it was well accepted by all. This is the reason why today, even in the most remote area in Northern Cameroon, when somebody falls sick, people immediately look for the nearest healthcare centre to get the sick person to the right place where the treatment can be administered. It shows how deep the impact that the Western modern medicine has brought upon the African people's way of thinking is. They are no longer reluctant to the new treatments introduced by the missionaries who were among the first people to bring modern medicine in the region.

At the government level, attempts have been made to develop the practice of modern medicine among the people. The issue of public health in Africa, however, is still a complex problem. To be totally integrated into the people's habits, the practice of modern medicine in Africa must take into consideration the African perception of life.

For Africans, one cannot be healed of a disease unless its cause, which is always linked to an evil spirit or a magical practice or sorcery, is extirpated. Therefore, as long as modern hospitals will only care for the physical aspect of the disease without taking into consideration its spiritual and psychological dimensions, for the Africans the healing will not be complete and the traditional healers will continue to prosper beside the modern health centres established by both government and church.

The issue of health and healing in Africa today is so complicated that, even for the Christians, there is no straightforward solution. According to John Mbiti,²⁸² even our well-educated Christians, will continue to go to their traditional healers, though in secret, to seek for complete healing.

²⁸² Mbiti, J., *Op. Cit.* p. 179.

On the whole, health and healing are ambivalent enterprises in Africa today. I acknowledge that much more can be said on this issue. The African traditional healing system cannot simply be thrown away or rejected because of the introduction of a new medicine by the Westerners. For instance, in his PhD thesis, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Radikobo Ntsimane defends the thesis “that mainly out of individual initiatives, some missionaries introduced western medicine and western concepts of healing to alienate indigenous communities of southern Africa from their cultures and undermine their traditional healing concepts.”²⁸³

Conclusion

In Africa today, there is a common understanding that the lives of the African people had been turned upside down by the European colonisation. The cultures of the people in Africa, which is considered as one of the continents where the Western imperialism has been ruling for centuries, have been destroyed by the Western culture. Therefore, the new school systems, the medical facilities, and the developmental work brought to Africa by the Western missionaries, could only be brought to the African people within a Western culture, which is different from that of the Africans. It is, therefore, obvious to note that even in the case of the work done by the mission organisations to educate, to heal, and to promote social development for the Africans, there were some confrontations between the two sides. African authors, like the Cameroonian historian, Kange Ewane²⁸⁴ had seen in the missionary work a deliberate will of the Europeans to deprive other people of their own civilisation. Thus, among

²⁸³ Ntsimane, R., “A Critical History of the Lutheran Medical Missions in Southern Africa with Special Emphasis on Four Hospitals: 1930s-1970s”, Post Graduate Seminar, 11-13 November, 2002, p. 1.

²⁸⁴ In his book entitled *Semence et moisson coloniales, un regard d’Africains sur l’histoire de la colonisation* published by Editions CLE, Yaoundé, 1985, Kange Ewane exposed the complicity which existed between the Christian missionaries, excellent agents of the Western civilization, and their fellow countrymen, the colonial administrators in Africa.

the so-called “friends of Africa”, there has always been an accusing finger pointed at the work that Western missionaries have done on the continent. Even in the domain of health and healing ministry, there is a great suspicion today. The White practitioners are said to have suppressed, or stolen, from Africans their medical knowledge. In the same sense, M. Akin Makinde²⁸⁵ in his *African Philosophy, and Traditional Medicine*, urges African governments to incorporate indigenous medicine with orthodox Western medicine. The traditional African practices should be taken seriously, both medically and scientifically in order to dispel its misconception by the detractors of anything that has an “African flavour”.

Today, among the churches in Cameroon there is a very interesting debate around the question of the integration of African traditional medicine into modern hospitals run by the churches. The point is that there are people who argue that traditional healers who have been treated by the missionaries as sorcerers and demon-possessed persons were genuine medical practitioners.

At the present stage, the only outcome of the current discussion is that there are more and more people, Africans as well as Europeans, who support the view that the success of our health and healing philosophy today depends to a certain extent on a close relationship between traditional African medicine and modern medicine as practised in our hospitals and dispensaries. The many referral cases of patients from both public and church hospitals to the Chinese hospitals in Mbalmayo in the south and Guider and Lagdo in the north where the practice of the medicine allies modern and traditional methods, are but a sign of a successful link between modern and traditional medical practices in Cameroon

²⁸⁵ Makinde, M. A., *African Philosophy, and Traditional Medicine*, Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1988.

If a mother's success in educating her child was obvious in a traditional context in which the image of a good person in general and that of a good wife and mother in particular were strictly regulated by the customs as I pointed it out in chapter three, what about the present situation in which people have to make choices among a variety of social values? Does the African woman still play the same role of educating her children as in the past, even after having been in contact with the Western missionaries? What role did the women missionaries play in Northern Cameroon as far as the education of the Africans was concerned? And what was the impact of the new education brought by missionaries on the African women's social situation in Northern Cameroon? These are some of the questions that I tried to answer in this chapter on the women missionaries and their contribution to missionary endeavours in Northern Cameroon.

As I conclude this chapter on women missionaries and their involvement in education, health care, and social development in Northern Cameroon, an important question still remains to be answered as to what impact all these missionary activities have had on the people's condition of life and most particularly on African women's position, hence, the necessity of the following chapter on the role of the African women in mission and church in Northern Cameroon.

Chapter Five: The Role of the African Women in Mission and Church in Northern Cameroon (1933-1995)

Introduction

The women's organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was constituted in 1975²⁸⁶ under the official name of the *Femmes Pour Christ (FPC)*, at a time when more than two thirds of the total membership of the Church then being either women or children. Such a move would have been inconceivable to Cameroonian women of earlier generations.

Prior to the arrival of the Western missionaries in Northern Cameroon, there was no organisation among the African women like the movement of "Women For Christ" (WFC), which could mobilise hundreds of thousands of women, from different ethnic groups to come and work together for their common interests.²⁸⁷ Certainly, there were occasions or circumstances in which the women from the same family or tribe could show solidarity by coming together as a support group. These were the cases of bereavement and the farming work among the Massa people for instance. Among the Massa or Gbaya people, the women could assemble themselves as weepers²⁸⁸ during a funeral ceremony. They could also gather spontaneously to help a member of their community in the farming work. All these gatherings were spontaneous and lasted for the duration of the funeral ceremony, or a day or so for the work on a given group member's farm. This type of women's gathering, before the arrival of the

²⁸⁶ "Women For Christ in Cameroon", an undated leaflet, by Verna Syverson.

²⁸⁷ See Appendix 2, Pictures 18 and 19.

²⁸⁸ In most African societies in Northern Cameroon, the time of bereavement is seen as one of the crucial times for the members of a community to show solidarity and love for one another. The bereaved family is cared for many days. The members of the community will gather in the house of the deceased for several days to sing and weep together, and on these occasions, women play a very important role in comforting the bereaved family. See also Appendix 2, Picture 14.

Christian missionaries in Northern Cameroon, only occurred within a restricted ethnic group. For this reason, it was unthinkable for the African women to create a movement which would unite them with other women from other ethnic groups to promote their common interests as an oppressed and marginalised group in their respective tribal societies. However, in religious matters, the African woman does not have a fixed religion of her own since once married, she belongs to at least two religions, namely the traditional religion of her parents and that of her husband's family. This state of affairs makes things easier for African women to congregate with people from other ethnic groups in such a way that they can easily build up religious pious associations. Regarding the solidarity of the African women as a religious group, the same phenomenon has been observed in Lesotho in Southern Africa.²⁸⁹

With the advent of the Christian missionaries and the setting up of a women's organisation within the Church, however, women from different ethnic groups in a given area could come together and work not only for the advancement of the Gospel, but also for the cause of their own emancipation.

Like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon itself, the women's organisation originated from the will of the Western missionaries in general, and most particularly women missionaries of different mission societies, to create a movement to support the mission's work among the African women in Northern Cameroon. Therefore, according to Kare Lode,²⁹⁰ the women's work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon can be traced way back to the year 1933, when missionary Ruth Christiansen, a missionary of the Sudan Mission, handed over to Elizabeth

²⁸⁹ See M. Epprecht, "Domesticity and Piety in Colonial Lesotho: the Private Policy of Basotho Women's Pious Association", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19/2 (June 1993), pp. 202-224.

²⁹⁰ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 170.

Zek, one of the first native Gbaya women converted to Christianity from the Mboula mission station, the responsibility of leading a group of twelve native Christian women who were involved in the missionary work among Gbaya women in the Mboula area. In 1940, this group of twelve increased in size and formed a women's indigenous organisation called "The Women's Missionary Society" whose main activities were the farming, the selling of the farm products the income from which money was given to the Church in order to support the mission's work. In this way, "The Women's Missionary Society" which was formed essentially by the African women, helped to support the evangelistic ministry of some indigenous catechists by means of donating money for their salaries and buying clothes and salt and other necessary items for their families. In an interview, which I conducted with pastor Ingebrigt Roen, a former missionary of the NMS in Cameroon and the Central African Republic, pastor Ingebrigt emphatically declared that the African women were very strong, well-organised and good manageresses in the church. They could easily collect money to help with the church expenses in various needs like paying salaries or buying bicycles for the evangelists, and yet they could not be given a leadership position because of the patriarchal organisation of the church.²⁹¹

To envisage adequately what happened in the historical development of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon, as far as the African women's role is concerned, this chapter will focus on short biographies of some leading figures among the women of Church as well as a thorough survey of the women's organisation within the Church.

Thus, based mostly on a critical analysis of official documents of the Church such as its constitutional texts, the missions' reports and, most

²⁹¹ See Interview with Ester and Ingebrigt Roen on October 28th, 2000 in Trondheim, Norway.

significantly, the oral data collected during interviews conducted with different individuals whose contribution to the planting of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon was of considerable importance, this chapter aims at investigating the importance of a women's organisation in a women's new emancipation process in both church and society in Northern Cameroon. In this sense, a historical overview of the background of the women's work is facilitated by a study of some of the leading African women in the Lutheran church, while researching their involvement in Church policy will help the reader to better understand the key role played by the women's organisation in creating a strategy conducive to the process of integrating women in both church and society leadership in Northern Cameroon today.

5.1. From Maids' Status to Voluntary Evangelists

Maria Rosa Cutrufelli²⁹² in her book on *The Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*, referred to earlier in this chapter, argued that the African women were very conservative and did not want to accept the new changes brought in by the Western colonial administration the goal of which was to exploit African people in general and to reduce African women at the stage of mere object of production in particular. Therefore, the idea according to which women are more apt to adjust to new situations; coping more easily with any life circumstances in which they find themselves than their male counterparts prove to be a mere social construction of the human mind based mostly on biases. To support her argument, Cutrufelli pointed to the fact that in most African societies, women were among the last to open up to new changes. They were said to

²⁹² Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, an Italian writer and journalist, carried out extensive research into the position of women in many countries on the African continent such as Angola and the Congo (ex-Zaire). Being both a feminist and a Marxist, she argued that there was an inescapable relationship between the social and domestic roles of women, and the exploitation of their labour as part of the capitalist system introduced by the Western colonialists on the African continent.

be faithful guardians of the African tradition against the invasion of the Western imperialism. The women of Africa, Cutrufelli observed, were one of the African reactionary social groups that closed themselves to the European influence. Since the European presence contributed to take away from the African women the influence, which they had on the food production systems in their respective societies, the African women were not ready to accept the new changes proposed by the Europeans. However, in the case of the establishment of Christianity in Northern Cameroon, women were rather open to missionary work, and for this reason they could count among the first converts of the Christian mission societies that worked in the region to implant the churches and Christian institutions.²⁹³

At the time of the encounter between the Western and the African civilisations in Northern Cameroon at the end of the nineteenth century,²⁹⁴ the African woman living in this part of Africa was described by the Westerners as a pure slave or a beast of burden for her husband. Given the fact that in most African societies, a woman was not entitled to inherit either from her parents or a deceased husband, and that in many cases she had to marry a polygamous husband for whom she merely became part of his social welfare, the Europeans took it for granted that an African woman was simply like her husband's slave. Therefore, for the agents of the colonial imperialism, the African women were not of a great interest. Apart from the fact that they could contribute with their physical strength in farming and harvesting cash crops for the benefit of the masters which could include both the Whites and the African husbands, the African women were simply considered of no value by the Western colonial powers and the mission societies.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ See Appendix 2, Picture 12.

²⁹⁴ See chapter 2 on historical background of the region.

²⁹⁵ This is the point, which Cutrufelli refers to in her argument about the reaction of African Women towards European colonization.

As recently as 1950, in a report of more than twenty-two typed pages presented to his mission society about the women's condition in Africa, Johannes Skauge,²⁹⁶ a mission secretary of the NMS, depicted the women's situation in Northern Cameroon as one of most undesirable in which a human being can live.

Skauge's report starkly reveals that the women's condition in Northern Cameroon was desperate. According to this mission report, one of the main obstacles facing the Western missionary enterprise in Northern Cameroon was the inhumane condition in which the African women were kept by the African traditions. The women were dispossessed of their ability to think and to have access to the spiritual message brought by the missionaries. This situation was generated by the way in which women were treated by their fathers, husbands, and siblings in the African societies.

From his short visit to Northern Cameroon, and basing his report mainly on what the missionaries in the field reported to their sending mission society about the life of the African people, Skauge came to the conclusion that the situation of the African women in the mission field constituted a serious problem for the mission. The life of a total submission to the men behind the walls of their harems seemed to have taken away from the women any interest in spiritual things. For Skauge, the African women had been long treated as mere merchandise or as the beasts of burden by the African traditional societies. They had been so profoundly affected by such a treatment that they had lost their human dignity. Bought, sold or given at will by the men, the women of Africa were desperately lacking a moral force to uplift themselves to a level of

²⁹⁶ Skauge, J., "*Rapport fra inspeksjonsreise til Kamerun 1950*", Translated from the Norwegian to the French by Ole Eriksen, former missionary of the NMS in Cameroon, Archives of the NMS, Stavanger, Norway.

life where they could enjoy human freedom. Very often, the African woman was subjected to an unstable conjugal life, since she was obliged to change husbands many times during her lifetime. Most dramatic was the fact that, within the same harem, a woman could be deprived of her right to be on her own and was only valued for the social ascension of her husband. For these reasons, the Western missionaries thought that polygamy and slavery were in reality the same thing, and the oppression of the women in Africa, a result of a bad social and political systems referred to as the “anathema of the African people”.

Therefore, only the Gospel of Jesus Christ could liberate the African women. But, paradoxically the mission strategy proposed by the mission inspector, Johannes Skauge to liberate the women in Northern Cameroon was rather what Mercy Oduyoye, in her book entitled, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, referred to as a method of cultural conditioning of compliance and submission of the African women by the Western Christianity. In fact, what Skauge suggested for his mission society to undertake in order to free the African women from their social bondage was in a sense a contradiction as shown in the following quotation:

What is difficult for the work of the mission is that their masters [the husbands] are not interested in letting them [the women] learn something for themselves, Skauge pointed out. The Gospel can set the African women free, but it can also make them recalcitrant. Therefore, they [the women] must be lowered and may not be given any opportunity to become insubordinate. Even among our catechists, argued Skauge, I have found very often the idea that the women should be prevented from learning to read or from acquiring any other knowledge. For the knowledge can make them difficult and rebellious.²⁹⁷

Although, he strongly recommended that his mission society should take seriously the mission work among African women, Skauge also

²⁹⁷ See Skauge’s inspection report mentioned above on page 1.

recognised the fact that the key to success for any missionary work in Africa lay in the hands of the men who wielded power in traditional African societies, hence, the concluding remarks of his report:

It is very important to 'win' those who have the influence on the others in this country [Cameroon]. If one wins the *Lamido* [the title given to a Muslim chief in Northern Cameroon], one has won the entire population. But if the chief rejects the Christian message, then the messenger is also rejected.²⁹⁸

Despite the discriminatory missionary strategy set up by the Western mission societies in Africa, whereby the African women were given very little importance, there were women among the Africans who saw in Christianity an open door to freedom. They welcomed the Christian message brought by missionaries and found themselves among the first African converts of the mission societies. Thus, in the case of the region of Northern Cameroon, there were women who became leading figures in the establishment of the Lutheran church in Cameroon. Since it is difficult to write a biography of each of these women in the frame of this research, I have chosen to present two biographies of these African women who illustrated themselves as key role players in the development of Christianity in Northern Cameroon, namely Marie Tazam and Rebecca Numjal.

5.1.1. Marie Tazam, the Breaker of “Wicked Men’s Social, Economic and Religious System” in Northern Cameroon

I never met or saw Marie Tazam. In my research on Tazam’s life, I was unable to establish the precise date of her birth or when she passed away. This very important leading figure in the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon became familiar to me when, for the first time, I heard of her from one of my interviewees. It was the late president

²⁹⁸ See Skauge’s Mission Report Mentioned on the Previous Page.

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, pastor Paul Darman, who mentioned her name during the interview I conducted in Meiganga, for this research. He then mentioned her name as one of the outstanding African women who played a crucial role in the evangelisation of the Gbaya people in the early time of the development of Christianity in Northern Cameroon. This increased my interest in researching the life of Marie Tazam and her ministry in the Church.

While reading reports from different mission societies that worked in the area, particularly those from the missionaries of the Sudan Mission, I ascertained a number of insights regarding Tazam of which the most important was the fact that in the correspondence of Ruth Christiansen to her sending mission society (the Sudan Mission), from 1935 to 1937, and these are documents of many pages typed as well as handwritten, there was not a single letter in which the name of Tazam was missing.²⁹⁹ This to me was in a way a proof that Tazam had indeed been a major role player in the mission work in the eyes of the missionaries. Therefore, I thought it was an important matter to present Tazam to the readers of this study dedicated to the role of women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon.

From what I discovered through the reading of the missionary reports, Tazam can be listed among the church founders in Northern Cameroon. She is said to have played such a great role in the history of Christianity in Northern Cameroon and especially in the spreading of the Gospel among the Gbaya people who, today, constitute the great majority of the church members in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, that any research undertaken on the contribution of African people to Christianity in Northern Cameroon that does not mention Tazam can simply be labeled a biased study.

²⁹⁹ See "Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen, 1935-1937", Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

This biographical study of Marie Tazam is largely based on notes taken from my reading of the mission reports, from Ruth Christiansen's book, *For the Heart of Africa*³⁰⁰, which contains a paragraph on "Marie Ra'uthu Tazam", and from the interviews conducted with the late president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in Meiganga in 2000, a few months before he passed away, as well as some other members of the Church and Tazam' family in Meiganga.

5.1.2. Tazam, a Victim of a Male Centred Society.

In the Gbaya society as well as elsewhere in African societies in Northern Cameroon, marriages were arranged for young people, girls and boys alike by their parents. In some cases, girls were even proposed by parents for marriage before they were born. For example among the Massa people, a pregnant woman would be respected by a boy's father or mother who wished their son could marry her as yet unborn baby, should the baby be a girl. The notions of love and consent for marriage were unknown or not taken into consideration in most African societies. Marriage was thought of as a family or a community matter and therefore was too important to be left to the individuals' private decision. In most cases the interested persons, who were the future spouses, were not even consulted. In the case of the girls, it was like selling out a personal good for the fathers, because once the marriage was arranged by the parents, the girl had no choice but to be taken away from the family and given to her proposed husband. When this happened while the child was still very young, it could be viewed as a slave trading in the eyes of people today. Although the customary significance of the dowry in African societies would have no

³⁰⁰ See, Christiansen, R. *Op. Cit.* pp. 193-198.

exchange value but served as a sanction of the social order, Cutrufelli explained that

Following the stabilization of the political situation, the transfer of cattle [the dowry in most African societies used to be evaluated in terms of heads of cattle that the family of the groom has to give to the bride's family] has increasingly been replaced by cash transfer and accordingly the woman has increasingly become a commodity.³⁰¹

Between the age of ten and twelve, Tazam was given by her father to one of the king of Ngaoundéré's men. Later on, this man was said to be one of the wealthier Muslims closely attached to the *Lamido* (Great Chief) of Ngaoundéré. If one takes into consideration the fact that at the age of ten, marriage may not be as meaningful as it may be for a grown up person, Tazam was probably given to that Muslim man without her consent, for she was too young to understand what it means to be a married woman. Tazam's father may have received valuable goods as a bride price from the wealthy man of Ngaoundéré before he handed her over to that man. Therefore, it was easy not only for missionaries, but also for any one else to draw the conclusion that "Tazam's father had sold her as a young girl to a wealthy Mohammedan in Ngaoundéré."³⁰²

Although Tazam had borne her husband no children, she became his favorite wife because she took more interest in providing for his comfort than any of his other wives. For reasons one could easily imagine to be related to the sexual activity of the men³⁰³, the barren women were closer to their husbands than the other wives who had children to look after. This

³⁰¹ Cutrufelli, M. R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 50.

³⁰² See Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 193.

³⁰³ According to my own observation of the Massa society, there is a sense of fear among the people towards the pregnant women. They are said to be fragile like eggs and for this reason, should not be approached by any man, be it the husband for sexual intercourse. I strongly believe that polygamy somehow finds its justification here because this attitude has led some wealthy men of the Massa society, not only to send their wives to their families once they fall pregnant, but also to marry other wives to keep themselves sexually active.

practice within African societies had very often created a situation of jealousy among the wives of a polygamous husband. The reason why Tazam, more than any other wife of her husband, was allowed at times to visit her people in her birthplace might be due to the conflict situation in which she was living in her husband's harem among other wives. According to the missionary reports³⁰⁴, however, Tazam won her Muslim husband's confidence through hard work, honesty and dedication.

It was during one of her visits to her people in Mboula that Tazam, then a Muslim wife, converted to Christianity. Shortly after her cousin Paul Sanda³⁰⁵ was baptised, Tazam, while visiting her family, was drawn to Christianity. She told the story of her life to the missionaries at Mboula sometimes later:

I heard the story of Jesus, both from the Mission and from Paul Sanda. During the evening meetings, I would remain outside and listen to what was being said. It was during the Mohammedan's Ramadan month of fasting. As the wife of a Mohammedan, I kept the fast, but my heart was with the Christians. After I returned to Ngaoundéré to my husband's harem, whenever I found myself alone, I would pray to Jesus to ask Him to work out His will for me, to help me follow Him. I knew I could not do it in a harem surrounded by so many wives.³⁰⁶

This was a turning point in Tazam's life. Shortly after she came back from this visit to her family members in Mboula, things did change quickly for Tazam, especially when her Muslim husband grew ill and eventually passed away shortly after.

³⁰⁴“Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen”, November 8th, 1935, Archives of the Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

³⁰⁵Paul Sanda, cousin of Tazam who later on became the Chief of Mboula, was among the first natives to be baptised at the Mboula mission station on December 11th, 1932. See Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

5.1.1.3. Tazam, a Woman's Struggle for Freedom

Before his death, Tazam's Muslim husband told his brothers to let Tazam return to her people without any reimbursement of her dowry. But his wishes were not carried out; for after her husband's death, Tazam was taken with the other wives and concubines to the King's court. It was the custom among the Fulani Muslims that the king had first choice among the widowed wives and concubines to work for him.³⁰⁷ But fortunately Tazam was not among those chosen by the king as his share of her husband's inheritance. The reason why she was not chosen by the king to be one of his concubines might be related to the fact that she was not of a Fulani origin.³⁰⁸

The fact that Tazam had been presented to the king among the concubines showed that she was not a wife to her husband; instead, she was a slave and had to simply change masters. This fact distressed Tazam and knowing that her late husband had stipulated that she was to be set free after his death, she decided to gain that freedom by herself.

Owing to her childless state, Tazam knew that her new owner (one of her late husband's relatives) would require the dowry to be repaid if she were allowed to return to her people. Therefore, she had no option but to work hard for her freedom. She then decided to leave Ngaoundéré and go back to her people at Mboula where she would look for a job at the Mission

³⁰⁷ See Appendix 2, Picture 9.

³⁰⁸ Intermarriages between the Fulani Moslems and the so-called pagan tribes of Northern Cameroon were strictly forbidden by the Islamic tradition. A non-Fulani as in the case of Tazam, even converted to Islam because of her late husband was considered by the Fulani Moslems as a slave rather than a wife to their brother.

station to earn money and repay her husband's brother.³⁰⁹ Despite the fact that it was not easy for Tazam to obtain permission from her new master to visit her family in Mboula, she managed to secure this permission to visit her people in the beginning of the year 1935.³¹⁰ This was Tazam's opportunity to run to the Mission station and tell her story to the women missionaries who were ready to help her to secure her freedom from her late husband's family in Ngaoundéré. After six months of absence from Ngaoundéré, Tazam received a message from her late husband's brother, Hammandjida that she should return to him. The missionaries for whom she was already working refused to let her go, however, and sent word to her late husband's family that Tazam was working to repay her dowry. When Tazam husband's people in Ngaoundéré realised that she was at the Mission and would not come back, they were furious and took the case to the French colonial government. From this time on, Tazam's resolve was severely tested. From all the struggles she had to go through, she perceived with greater clarity her role as a woman living in a forcefully patriarchal society. She also learned how to manage such a precarious life and above all how to be a role model later on to those in similar plight.

Into her struggle came the missionaries and agents of colonial administration who did play a determinative role as elsewhere in the social, political, economic and religious changes in African societies.

After Tazam's case had been brought before the colonial government in Ngaoundéré by her Fulani Muslim owners, the missionaries who were against the African system of dowry and who did not agree with the

³⁰⁹In most of the African societies where marriages consist of an arrangement between families whereby the family of the groom pays a bride price to parents of the bride, this very price is paid back to the groom's family when the marriage comes to an end by ways of divorce or when the bride dies without having born any children to her husband. In the case of a husband's death, the woman should stay in a levirate marriage with a member of the deceased's family.

³¹⁰ See Ruth Christiansen, *Op. Cit.*, p. 195.

colonial administration on this matter, did all they could to keep Tazam away from her husband's brother. The French officers in Northern Cameroon, however, had a policy that in a sense was in favour of the Fulani Muslim chiefs. As pointed out by Ruth Christiansen, "It just seems that the government is afraid to do anything against the Mohammedans [Muslims]; they are afraid of them."³¹¹ They sent Tazam back to Ngaoundéré where she was kept in the French custody and was given two months to repay her dowry before she might go free. As already mentioned, however, Tazam had already secured some money by working at the Mission station in Mboula. She then had no other choice but to send her sister Bentu from Ngaoundéré to Mboula to collect that money which she had left with the missionaries. The outcome of Bentu's journey was beyond expectations. Tazam not only got her money from the missionaries, but the Christians from Mboula rallied to her aid and managed to send more than half of the money required. When she received the money, she went to the French Commandant and paid this amount. The Commandant gave her a receipt and sent her back to her people to find the rest of the dowry, which she was asked to pay in within three months.

In a news letter sent out to her mission society in the USA on a monthly basis, missionary Ruth Christiansen pointed out that in the mid of February 1935³¹², Tazam left Ngaoundéré and went back to the Mission station in Mboula where she was received with open arms by her people. When the Commandant asked why she wanted to stay at the Mission, she replied that she "loved the Word of God and wanted to study it." The French Commandant therefore acknowledged Tazam's faithfulness and made it openly known to everyone in the town that "Tazam was a woman

³¹¹ From "Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen to the Sudan Mission", Mboula, February 25th, 1935.

³¹² From "Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen", July 10th, 1935.

of truth and that any other woman under the same circumstances would have run away.”³¹³ For this reason, the French officials in Ngaoundéré, despite the fact that the family of Tazam’s late husband were demanding more money, absolved her from paying more than her dowry. Otherwise, she could never have made it up; she would have had to remain a slave to them forever.

After many years of hardship and struggle for freedom from what Tazam later referred to as, “the hands of wicked men”, the time had finally arrived for her to make an important choice. Having paid back her dowry, Tazam had ceased to be a man’s property. She was no longer a husband’s or a father’s property. Rather, she began to feel responsible for her own life and for the life of those who were yearning for more freedom and respect in her society. No sooner had she gained her freedom, than Tazam went straight to the Mission station and made herself at home, with the missionaries and native Christians who had stood by her side to help her to gain her freedom from a social system “where women were considered little more than cattle, and where wives were battered away like animals.”³¹⁴

5.1.1.4. Tazam, “a Splendid Christian, a Fine Speaker, and a Role Model among Gbaya Women”

In the above-mentioned letter to the Secretary General of the Sudan Mission dated from Mboula, July 10th, 1935, missionary Ruth Christiansen wrote:

Tazam’s ‘dot’[the bride-price] has been paid and she is in possession of two receipts. It was truly wonderful the way her sister and friends rallied to her aid. It shows what the natives can do when their hearts are

³¹³ “Correspondence of Ruth Christiansen”, July 10th, 1935.

³¹⁴ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 198.

touched. (...) They surely showed a beautiful spirit. (...) Tazam is doing very well. We believe that she is a true disciple of Christ.³¹⁵

Soon after she was released from the French government custody, Tazam went back to the people of her birthplace and became a member of the Mboula Christian community. She stayed at and worked for the missionaries in Mboula from that time. Missionaries in general and missionary Ruth Christiansen, with whom Tazam worked most of the time, in particular, were full of praise for Tazam. As the time progressed, one could read from missionary reports from Mboula³¹⁶ that Tazam was working hard in the kitchen for the missionaries, that her life was showing a deepening spirituality, and that they [the missionaries] were very glad to have her at the mission.

In August 1935³¹⁷, Tazam was mentioned as one of those rare African women in the region who took part in the Bible class held by missionaries for the training of indigenous evangelists. But, according to Ruth Christiansen, it was only in January 1937³¹⁸, almost two years after she was set free from her husband's family, however, that Tazam was baptised, along with four other natives, by missionary Raymond Mathre of the Sudan Mission in Mboula. She was still a very young childless widow who had undergone many hardships. In dedicating herself to the work at a Mission station, Tazam was now trying to rebuild her life. As any woman in her society at the time should have done, Tazam kept looking for a man with whom she could live, and if possible, bear and bring up children. She was still young enough to find a suitor and marry, so she was not a desperate widow. As pointed out by Ruth Christiansen:

³¹⁵ Ruth Christiansen, "Correspondence to the Secretary General of the Sudan Mission", July 10th, 1935.

³¹⁶ Ruth Christiansen, "Correspondence to the Secretary General of the Sudan Mission, November 8th, 1935.

³¹⁷ Ruth Christiansen, "Correspondence to the Secretary General of the Sudan Mission", August 26th, 1935.

³¹⁸ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p 197.

Tazam has been having quite a time. She has been having suitors without number. (...) What we [the missionaries] wish for Tazam is that God may have His will in her life. As she realises full well, God in His mercy snatched her out of the hands of wicked people, and her life is His.³¹⁹

Just before Christmas in 1939, almost three years after her baptism, Tazam married Thomas Baouro. Their wedding took place in Mboula at the close of a Bible conference attended by native catechists from all over the Sudan Mission field. Thomas Baouro was one of the native catechists of Mboula origin. He had grown up with Tazam, but had married another woman who had died in 1937, the year Tazam was baptised. According to Ruth Christiansen, the marriage between Tazam and Thomas Baouro was a fulfillment of an attachment that had begun when they both were still little children.³²⁰

Now, married to a man of her own choice who was also involved in doing evangelistic work among his people, Tazam was going to play a decisive role in the missionary enterprise in the area. Although they did not have children of their own, Tazam and her husband, Thomas Baouro, worked as house-parents at the orphanage established by missionaries in Mboula in 1936. Tazam might be also known as one of these people who made it be possible for missionaries to establish an orphanage in Mboula. For her work at the Mission from the beginning consisted mostly of doing house-work for the missionaries and looking after the children that were sent to the missionaries for care.

Later, Marie Tazam and her husband, Thomas Baouro, adopted two children, a boy and a girl from the orphanage. Tazam's dedication to the

³¹⁹ Ruth Christiansen, "Correspondence to the Secretary General of the Sudan Mission", January 2nd, 1936.

³²⁰ Christiansen, R., *Op., Cit.*, p. 193.

work among the orphans, most of whom became members of the Church, made the Gbaya people refer to her as ‘Ma’a Tazam’ which means, Mother Tazam. Her early and long involvement in the Bible study, and women’s work in the mission work had gained her a widespread reputation among the missionaries. In her book, *For the Heart of Africa*, which Fredrick Schiotz, then President of The Evangelical Lutheran Church, referred to as “a Book of God’s Acts among the Baya, the Fulani people, and their neighboring tribes in their part of the Sudan”, Ruth Christiansen described Marie Tazam as “a splendid Christian, a fine speaker, and a wonderful influence among the Gbaya women.”³²¹ It is a pity that one cannot find more about Tazam’s contribution to the implantation and growth of Christianity in the Gbayaland. Although she was a leading figure among those who contributed their talents and dedication to spread Christianity in Northern Cameroon, Marie Tazam, like many other dedicated women of the Church, remains unknown among her own people, the Gbaya. In my interview with the late President of the Church, Pastor Paul Darman, I insisted on knowing whether or not he had knowledge of an African woman who had played a role, be it a very insignificant one, in the spreading of the Gospel in the area. After a while, he came up with the name of Tazam, and with emphasis, stated that:

Without the contribution of women like my aunt Marie Tazam, my people, in Mboula would have not been so determinant in the spreading of Christianity in Northern Cameroon. The reason why Christianity, when it was brought to Mboula, was mostly the business of women might have something to do with the fact that the first missionaries stationed in the town were in majority the women.³²²

Tazam was an African woman of her time and of her society. Knowing neither how to read nor how to write, she did not leave any written document about her life and her work in the Church. For years, she did

³²¹ Christiansen, R., *Op. Cit.*, p. 198.

³²² Interview with Paul Darman on November 2nd, 1999 in Meiganga.

work with the missionaries, mostly as housewife and housemother for the orphans. The scanty information gathered about her work in the Church came mainly from the missionary reports, which, in a sense, had a propagandist agenda for their sending Mission Organisations rather than telling the whole truth about the African's involvement in the mission work. It is therefore a risky intellectual task to write more about Tazam's life. From Paul Darman who knew Tazam and from an analysis of the missionary reports, the conclusion can be drawn that she was among those African women whose early contact with Christianity helped to break the oppressive systems of their time to become themselves sources of liberation for the oppressed and the outcasts of their societies.

5.1.2.1. The Ministry of Rebecca Numjal (1962-1985?)

The family origin of Rebecca Numjal is not clear. Sometimes she is presented as from the Mbum tribe, sometimes as a Tikar. When asked about her own family origin, Numjal was not as clear as one would have expected from her either.

First of all let us investigate the hypothesis that Numjal is a Mbum. The Mbum of Northern Cameroon today are said to be one of the first groups of African immigrants who occupied the region of the "Plateau of Adamawa", in the centre of Cameroon, in the course of the twentieth century³²³. The "Plateau of Adamawa", was named after Modibo Adama. *Modibo* (singular) or *Modibé* (plural) in Fulani language designates scholar(s) in the Muslim community. Adama was the first leader to carry the standard of the Islamic holy war or Jihad, launched by Uthman dan Fodio from Sokoto, Northern Nigeria, to submit to the Islamic rule, the so-called pagan people of Northern Cameroon, in 1804.

³²³ Mouctar B. T., "Le facteur Peul et les relations inter-ethniques dans l'Adamaoua au XIX^e siècle", in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 65.

Before the invasion of Northern Cameroon by the Fulani Muslims, the Mbum were considered as ‘pagans’ or ‘animists’ people who did not worship God or Allah (the God of Islam). In fact, according to Thierno Mouctar Bah,

The religious beliefs of the Mbum people belong to animism. Their adventurous migration was long placed under the protection of a “great fetish”, type of totem of the group. The disappearance of this totem is said to have marked, for the Mbum, the lost of the historical initiative and the dispersion of the group. The cults practiced by this group are in connection with the agricultural activities and take on a propitiatory character, with sacrifices of sheep and offerings of millet beer.³²⁴

The Mbum settled in the region around Ngaoundéré, which is now the capital city of the Cameroonian administrative province of Adamawa³²⁵, as farmers and breeders. After having resisted the penetration of Islam in their region for some years, the Mbum were conquered by the nomadic Fulani who were better equipped militarily than the Mbum farmers. Although, Islam did not immediately become the religion of the Mbum people after the Fulani conquest of the Northern Cameroon, the Mbum submitted themselves strategically to the Fulani Muslims who, in return, granted them some rights within the newly formed Fulani Islamic kingdom of Adamawa.

According to Thierno M. Bah:

Given the fact that they had a relatively well-structured society and had established early relationships with the Fulani, the Mbum could enjoy a privileged treatment from the Fulani. Although they accepted the lordship of the *Lamido* of Ngaoundéré to whom they paid tribute, the Mbum succeeded in preserving their political traditional organization, under the leadership of their *Belaka* (king). The *Belaka* of the Mbum were regularly associated in the ruling of the country. Thus, Mboula,

³²⁴ Bah, M. T., “Le facteur peul et les relations inter-ethniques dans l’Adamaoua au XIX^e siècle”, in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 66.

³²⁵ See Map 4.

chief Mbum of Kalan Gonn, nominated *Kaigama* (minister) of the *Lamido* of Ngaoundéré was entrusted with the administration of the Gbaya territories on the east with residence in Meiganga. The matrimonial alliances led, in particular within the Fulani aristocracy, to an important phenomenon of peoples' mixture. This mixture gave the Mbum a greater role to play in the State decision making structures: the Mbum dignitaries were associated in the making of the decisions and as the time progressed, it was made a rule that the *Lamido* of Ngaoundéré should be of a Mbum mother and a Fulani father.³²⁶

It is, therefore, clear that in general the Mbum were not enslaved by the Fulani Muslims in Northern Cameroon. Despite the fact that the Mbum traditional chiefs payed tribute to their Fulani Muslim conquerors, they were relatively free compared to the other tribes that made up the "Fulani lamidat" or Fulani chieftaincy in Adamawa.

Therefore, as a Mbum woman, Numjal would have never been given to a Muslim husband as a slave. Unlike Tazam whose Gbaya origin prevented from being a free woman in a Fulani Muslim husband's harem, Rebecca Numjal should have married, though maybe not freely, but at least a man of her parents' choice, and not given as a slave to a Muslim master. Yet, Kare Lode, in his book on the historical development of Christianity in Northern Cameroon, referred to Numjal, who had always accompanied the missionaries' wives in their effort to reach out to the African women, as a former slave.³²⁷ This mention of Numjal as a former slave made by Kare Lode was cause for further investigation about Numjal's social and religious family background.

Some of my source materials about Numjal's origin present her as born of a Tikar mother. According to Solbjorg Bjoru³²⁸ and Ole Eriksen,³²⁹

³²⁶ Bah, M. T., in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 79.

³²⁷ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 172.

³²⁸ The Norwegian title of Mrs. Bjoru's book about Numjal, *Haremspikens flukt*, which means 'the running away of the girl from harem', is suggestive to the fact that Numjal was 'liberated' from the chief's harem by the missionary Flottum.

³²⁹ Eriksen, O, 'Information sur Madame Noumdjal', Electronic message of October 1st 2001.

Numjal was taken away from her family by the *Lamido* of Tibati to be given to one of the princes as concubine or wife when she was only nine years old. She had an older brother who was Christian by then, but Numjal was brought up in the *Lamido*'s harem as a Muslim. However, at the age of fourteen, Numjal was taken away from the *Lamido* and hidden in Yoko by one of the first Norwegian missionaries in Cameroon, pastor Flottum. There started a new life for Numjal.

With the only exception that Numjal is still alive and therefore, I managed to have an interview with her during my fieldwork in Cameroon, her biography like Tazam's biography is mostly written, based on the missionaries' reports, on interviews with the missionaries and the people in the church in Cameroon who collaborated with her in the church work.

Born in Tibati, one of the various places in which the Norwegian missionaries were interested in bringing the Gospel to the Mbum tribe of Northern Cameroon in 1926, Rebecca Numjal is the mother of nine children of whom eight are alive today. She was married to a man from a different tribe who worked as a bricklayer in the region of Tibati. She first worked as a housemaid³³⁰ for the missionaries, then, was trained at a Bible school. Later on, she became a teacher in the same Bible school. She explained also that she was given a catechist's position, which was and still is the men's preserved domain in the Church. She also performed the itinerant ministry of an evangelist of the Church for many years. These facts were confirmed by the former President of the Church, the Rev. Songsaré Amsé Pierre, in an interview conducted with him for this research in November 17th, 1999, in Yaoundé.

³³⁰ From a written source, which is Numjal's ID Document, Numjal is referred to as a *ménagère* (the French word for housewife), while Numjal speaks of herself as a *domestique* (the French word for housemaid) of the missionaries.

5.1.2.2. Numjal's Social and Religious Family Background

As briefly mentioned above, Rebecca Numjal, when I asked her to introduce herself, quickly handed over to me her national identity card which reads: "Numjal Rebecca, born in 1926 in Tibati Djerem, occupation, housewife". There was no indication of her origin or any information, which would help us trace her family origin.

When the ID indicates occupation housewife, it simply means that that woman is a married woman and that her main duty is to look after her home. Married women, unlike the single women, were not allowed to be employed outside their homes.

There was a time in Cameroon when people were identified as belonging to a particular ethnic group, whether or not they were of Cameroonian origin, and whether or not they were being subjected to a master who, in most of the cases was a Muslim chief. That was the time of the colonial administration. Cameroon obtained its independence in 1960. Today, people's identity cards in Cameroon carry no information about one's origin or about one's religion, because there is no longer mention of them in official documents. These elements of personal identification have now a reputation of being politically incorrect. It remains, however to ascertain from an ID document the social status of an individual, for there is a place provided for the holder's profession. The relevance of this is explained later. So, in Numjal's case, I had no other indication but her name and her place of birth to deduce that she might belong to the Mbum tribe of Northern Cameroon. The other element in favour of her Mbum origin is the fact that Mbum is her mother tongue. Being born in Tibati and belonging to the Mbum tribe might have also contributed to the fact that Numjal was particularly supported by the Norwegian missionaries whose

first objective was to evangelise the Mbum tribe of Adamawa, whereas their American counterparts of the Sudan Mission were concerned about bringing the Gospel to the Gbaya of Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

The assertion by the Norwegian missionary and church historian, Kare Lode that Numjal, when she was working with the missionaries, was no longer a slave³³¹, but a free person, seems to indicate something of Numjal's childhood, and foremost, of her dislocation from her society of origin. Otherwise, as a young girl from the Mbum society, Numjal would have not been allowed to be in contact with the missionaries in her early childhood. She would have been brought up according to the traditional customs of the Mbum and would have married a Mbum husband. Instead, Rebecca Numjal as a young girl started doing domestic work for the missionaries. She might have helped the new missionaries to learn the Mbum language, which they desperately needed to carry on the missionary work among the natives. As it was then a rule among the missionaries to use the same and with good credentials house workers for a number of missionary families who succeeded one another on the African mission field, Numjal might have been one of these African natives whom Western missionaries had found a great support to their missionary enterprise. She is a well-known figure to most of the Norwegian missionaries who worked in the region of Tibati in the early 1950s. There were missionaries who have written on Numjal's life, like Mrs. Bjoru whom I mentioned earlier.

Although the information provided by the missionaries seem in this case the only ones which one could rely on, unfortunately these sources are neither accessible to non Norwegian readers nor pertinent to my research,

³³¹ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 172.

first objective was to evangelise the Mbum tribe of Adamawa, whereas their American counterparts of the Sudan Mission were concerned about bringing the Gospel to the Gbaya of Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

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Although the information provided by the missionaries seem in this case the only ones which one could rely on, unfortunately these sources are neither accessible to non Norwegian readers nor pertinent to my research,

³³¹ Lode, K., *Op. Cit.*, p. 172.

for they are mostly written in Norwegian and their content in this case consists of praise for Numjal's docility to Norwegian missionaries as opposed to her work for the Lutheran church of Cameroon.

According to Numjal's own remarks, she worked for the missionaries for many years as a housewife.

It was long before I gave birth to my two first children and before I married to my husband that I started working for the church. It was only after my marriage and the birth of my two children that I started working for the Church. I went to the Bible school for a two-year training programme. And after these studies, I became a catechist and taught at the same Bible school. I also travelled from one place to another, preaching and teaching in the women's meetings as well as in the Church's meetings where mostly the men attended. I was encouraged and supported by the missionaries. I had a bicycle and then a motorcycle for my work. But I did work many years for the Church without being paid for it. But after years of work without salary, they started paying me a small salary. I was also responsible for the women's work in the Church.³³²

Born only a year after the arrival of the first missionaries of the NMS in Northern Cameroon, and due to her uncertain family origin, Numjal was forced to be in contact with the missionaries in her prime childhood. She was seemingly brought up and employed by the Norwegian missionaries who were stationed in the Tibati area. Her marriage, after the birth of her two first children, to a bricklayer who was not from her ethnic group, showed the degree of Numjal's independence from the tradition of her own ethnic group and the type of influence she had from the missionaries. It also showed that Numjal was already a mature person who made her own decisions, even after her marriage about the type of activity she wanted to perform, and this with the support of her new "parents", the missionaries.

³³² Numjal, Rebecca, Interview of November 15th, 1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Although, it was expected by the society that a husband of that time be more restrictive when it came to his wife or wives' freedom of movement or to be on their own, Numjal's husband was what one may call today a "gender-minded husband." He allowed his wife leave him for evangelistic campaigns.

My husband was a great support to me and to my ministry in the Church. I used to travel for days and weeks for my work. He was not annoyed at all. Rather, he was willing to look after our children whom I always left at home with him. I used to carry the younger ones on my back and climb the hills with them in order to go and preach to the people in the villages around.³³³

Despite the fact that Numjal's conversion to Christianity or her call to evangelistic work within the Church, were not mentioned in her interview, she was adamant about the necessity for the heathen people of Northern Cameroon to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unlike Tazam whose conversion from Islamic faith to Christianity was grounded on the fact that, in the work of Christian missionaries at Mboula, she had seen a real opportunity to rid herself of the male dominated and oppressive Islamic and Gbaya social systems, Numjal's attachment to the Church was similar to the attachment of a child to his or her parents' religion. In fact, the Norwegian missionaries in Tibati were considered as parents to Numjal. Therefore, Numjal's involvement in the Church work was a normal progression. Although she complains about being employed by the Church for many years without a salary, that may have been the way in which all the Church workers were treated by the missionaries at that time. Even if Numjal was not paid a monthly salary for her work as a catechist or as an evangelist of the Church, one may surmise that she may have received gifts from the missionaries, which would have been considered as part of her reward or salary for having worked for the mission. For example, the education of her children was sponsored by the missionaries, and one of

³³³ Numjal, Rebecca, Interview of November 15th, 1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

her older sons, David Aoudi is today among the high ranking civil servants from Northern Cameroon, which is considered a region of less educated people.

To the Norwegian Mission Society and its missionaries, Rebecca Numjal represents one of the rare African women who significantly contributed to the spreading of the Good News among the African people in Northern Cameroon. She was and still is a leading African woman figure in the Norwegian mission field in the region. In a picture taken in Tibati in 1953, probably by a Norwegian missionary, among seven persons amongst whom were Numjal's husband, two other men, and Numjal's older son (Baba whose father was not her husband) Numjal is presented as the main character. The commentator of the Norwegian Mission Society Archives identified the picture as "a group of persons composed of Numjal's family and their friends. Baba, the older son of Numjal."³³⁴ During my interview with Numjal in 1999, she was still very strong and healthy. Despite my effort to provide the reader of this work with a recent picture of Numjal, the picture I took of her in 1999 could not be printed, because the whole film got spoiled.

According to Pierre A. Songsare,³³⁵ former President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, a decision was made by the Church leadership in 1986/87 to train one of Numjal's sons as a pastor, after David Aoudi, the second son of Numjal was trained by the Church as an accountant, but defected to the Government. This decision was taken by the Church in order to honour Numjal's dedication to the work of the Church. This initiative of the Church leaders did not have a successful outcome, for Michel Sambo, the one whom Numjal presented to the

³³⁴ "Photos from the Norwegian Missionary Society in Cameroon from 1950 to 1954", Archives of the NMS in Stavanger. See Appendix 2, Picture 3.

³³⁵ Interview of November 17th, 1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Church to be trained as her successor in the Church work, left the seminary just a year after being admitted, complaining about the poor standard of living experienced by the Church pastors.

5.1.2.3. Numjal's Evangelistic Work in a Church Dominated by a Male Centered Leadership

When I interviewed Numjal at her son's home, in Yaoundé, in 1999, first of all, I aimed at finding out more about what is known in the Church today as "Numjal's successful ministry as catechist and evangelist." When I asked Numjal to introduce herself before proceeding with the series of questions I prepared beforehand, she handed over to me her ID document in which she thought I would find all that I needed to know about her for my research. However, after having gone through her ID document, I was disappointed to discover that there was no mention of Numjal's occupation as either catechist or evangelist. Instead, was written: "Profession: Ménagère", which means: Occupation: housewife. In Cameroon today, the supposed occupation of any woman who is not working in an office outside of her home, is known as a housewife. To me, this mention of "Housewife" in Numjal's National Identity Card is rather suggestive of the type of work and leadership she performed in the Church during her active lifetime. In a sense, this work of a woman catechist or evangelist was neither recognised nor remunerated by either society or Church in Cameroon up to the time of Numjal's retirement in 1985?³³⁶ Although Rebecca Numjal was referred to as a catechist and evangelist within the Church, officially she was never given the title of catechist or evangelist, which remain the male preserve until today. This is also a clear indication that women's leadership role in the church in Africa remains

³³⁶ Numjal stopped working for the Church in 1985, but it unclear whether one should term it retirement since she is not on pension.

ambiguous and needs to be given more attention by the leadership within African churches.

In a conference paper presented in London, James Worthington³³⁷ argued that, to conduct successful research on the women's leadership in church in the African context today, one must clearly distinguish between what he referred to as key themes, namely the "traditional" and the "functional" leadership in the church. Falling within the category of traditional leadership, which Worthington defines as "the leadership structures and roles, which have traditionally been recognised by society as a whole", the ministry of catechist and evangelist in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was considered a male ministry. The fact that Numjal as a woman was referred to as a catechist or an evangelist in the Church was unusual. The title of catechist was given to her, due to the fact that, thanks to her close relations with the missionaries, Numjal attended the Bible school along with the men who were trained to become catechists in the Church. After being trained as a catechist, however, Numjal had never worked in a congregation as a catechist like her male counterparts. Rather, after her training, she was placed in the same Bible school where she taught the wives of the student catechists.

In her capacity as teacher of the women's programme at the Bible school, Numjal was involved in evangelistic work, travelling along with the women missionaries who were also working at putting up a women's organisation within the Church, with the help of native women, like Numjal, who not only were daughters of the region, but knew the people and the people's languages throughout the region around Tibati. Later on, Numjal also became one of the leaders of the women's organisation of the

³³⁷Worthington, J., "Leaders of Black Women's Christian Organisations in Kwa-Zulu Natal", in the forthcoming *Women's History Review*, Vol. 11, No 4 (2002), Triangle Journals Ltd., Oxford, UK.

Church called “Women For Christ” on which I will elaborate more in the second part of this chapter.

To conclude this rather short biography of a woman who was fit to play her leadership role as an African woman in a male dominated Church structure, it is noteworthy that, it was only in her position as one of the leaders of the “Women For Christ”, which falls within the functional leadership that “is largely concerned with the practical functioning of the church on a daily basis”³³⁸, that Numjal’s renown spread all over the region. She then became known as one of the African women leaders who contributed significantly to the implantation and growth of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon.

5.2. The Women’s Organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Challenge of Women’s Emancipation in Northern Cameroon Today

By way of introduction to this study of the women’s organisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, called “Women For Christ”, I would like to remind my reader of the specific situation in which most of the African women lived in Northern Cameroon before the missionary era.

One needs not to be a Western visiting missionary to point out³³⁹ that in Northern Cameroon until the early 1950s, women were still kept in a lower position than men and that, in most of the cases, the African system of marriage, mainly based on polygamy, was prejudicial to women. In this sense, the negative attitude of the Western missionaries towards polygamy and dowry as dehumanising practices for the African women proved to be justifiable. Like any other human society in the world, women had defined

³³⁸ Worthington, J., Same Article Mentioned on the previous page.

³³⁹ See Skauge’s report of his inspection visit in Cameroon in 1950, a report we referred to earlier in this chapter.

positions within the social, political and economic structures in Northern Cameroon. As pointed out by Kare Lode,

In the traditional society, women had well defined position. [This] situation varied according to the [social] environments, the ethnic customs, and the religious [practices of the group considered]. There is no doubt, however, that the situation of women [in Northern Cameroon] has significantly evolved and that the Norwegian mission can be listed as one of the forces that [brought] and encouraged this evolution.³⁴⁰

Therefore, as already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the role of women missionaries in organising the work among the African women was of a pivotal importance. The Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) and its American partner in the field, the Sudan Mission (SM), started activities aimed at promoting mission's work among African women in the early 1930s. The missionaries' wives organised home visits to teach African women on topics like hygiene, childcare, sewing, knitting, Bible study, reading and sometimes writing sessions. In this way, the young African girls were encouraged to go to the mission schools on one hand, and on the other hand, the wives of the students in the Bible schools were taught, in addition to the above mentioned topics, how to organise and lead women's meetings and the family prayer meetings. According to Kare Lode, it was this systematic work organised by the women missionaries that opened up the African men to accept that their wives could take an active part in public life, and overall led the women to realise that they had their rights to defend their common interests and that they were entitled to have a movement of their own to make their voice heard in the Church as well as in the society as a whole.

³⁴⁰Quoted from Kare Lode, in Boutrais, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 256.

5.2.1. The Formation of the “Women For Christ” (1975)

In what she referred to as her last “Women For Christ” report in Cameroon³⁴¹, Verna Syverson³⁴² related the story of the beginning of the women’s work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. In this report, Verna Syverson argued that the women’s work had played an important role in the Church in Cameroon. It was begun very modestly by the missionary wives and single women gathering the women together in their homes and churches. Small women’s conferences were held with the programmes written by the missionaries. Sewing classes were also held, focussing especially on the young girls. The wives of the men who were engaged in Church work like the Bible school and seminary students, school teachers and missionaries’ aid in health work, were also given instruction in reading, sewing, Bible study and health care.

In an article published in the September 1959 issue of the “Women’s Missionary Messenger, Mrs. John Watne³⁴³, a missionary in the Sudan pointed out that, to show their faith in a practical way, the African women while coming to their weekly meetings at the mission stations, would bring water, fire wood, and manioc for the needy ones. Once a month, they would take collections to buy meat, manioc, salt or soap for old people in the village, or when a new catechist is sent out they may present

³⁴¹ A Report of the Women’s Work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, presented by Verna Syverson in the General Assembly of the Church, in 1989.

³⁴² Verna Syverson or “Mademoiselle Verna”, as she was called by the Church’s members in Cameroon, arrived in the country in 1961 as a missionary of the American Lutheran Church. From 1961 to 1975, she occupied various positions in the Church such as orphan director, kinder-garden teacher, and bookstore and depot director. Before she was asked by the Church leaders in 1973 to organise the women’s work at a national level, she had already been working with the women’s organisation within two regions of the Church since 1967.

³⁴³ See Watne, J., “Baya Women Believe and Act”, in *Women’s Missionary Messenger*, September 1959.

his wife with a gift. The money they give in these collections they have earned themselves by selling wood manioc or sweet potatoes.

Considering the immense contribution that women had made for years with various local communities, supporting their ministries by the gifts of their time and money, and given the fact that all this work had been fulfilled by women without any coordination at a national level, the Church leaders felt the need to have someone in charge of the women's work, so that it could become a more established organisation within the Church.

It was during the General Synod Conference of the Church held in Ngaoundéré in 1973 that Verna Syverson was asked by the leadership of the Church to fill this position. But according to Syverson's own statement, she was not quite sure of what the Church was expecting her to do in such a position:

How well I remember when I was asked to serve in this position. I really did not know how to begin. I asked pastor Darman³⁴⁴, what he would like for me to accomplish and what my responsibilities would be. He told me to go ahead and do as I felt it should be done.³⁴⁵

When she was appointed to organise the women's work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, Verna Syverson did not go to look for information from other women's church organisations in Cameroon like the "Christian Women Fellowship" of the Cameroonian Presbyterian Church. Instead, as a Lutheran, she wrote to Geneva to the Lutheran World Federation from which she had not received any help in the first place:

³⁴⁴Pastor Paul Darman by then was elected president of the Church. He was the first indigenous pastor to serve in that position from 1962 to 1965 and again from 1977-1985.

³⁴⁵Syverson, V., "Report of Activities of the "Women For Christ", 1987-1989", p. 1.

I wrote to Geneva to hear what had been done in other countries or if they had programme samples or suggestions, said Verna Syverson. [But] they sent me a reply that they had no suggestions but they were sending me a programme. But it was in German so it was of no help.³⁴⁶

From that time, the struggle to set up a structured women's movement in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon began. What were the specific needs of the women in the Church? Did they need such a movement to fulfill these needs? How to go about the establishment of this movement and in which way the movement would help the women to attain their goals? These were some of the questions that Verna Syverson had to address as a first national coordinator of the women's work in the Church.

Having realised that most of the women with whom she was going to work were not literate, Verna Syverson began to have meetings with the women by using pictures to tell them different stories from the Bible as well as teaching them on other topics like health care, family relations, alcoholism, polygamy, marriage and the role of a mother and a father in a home. This proved a successful method of work for the women, as pointed out by the newly appointed director of the women's work, Verna Syverson:

I remembered - pictures, pictures tell a story! So when I presented a message, I had a picture to illustrate the story told. The first sheet I made had no message print on it except "Jesus is the way." Later I decided not only to print a picture on the sheet but also a summary of the message presented. Each person present at the meeting received a copy. They would return to their home where someone would be able to read it to them or they themselves would be able to look at the picture and remember the story that had been told. I feel this was a great help to our women.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶Syverson, V., *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

³⁴⁷Syverson, V., Same Document.

But all this work was still being carried out among the women at a local level. Soon the need to unite all the regions into one national movement of the women was felt. A name for the organisation as well as a constitution and a women's handbook were needed.

During the Church's General Synod Conference held in Ngaoundéré in 1973, a General Women's Work Committee was chosen. The first members were: Jacqueline Darman (the wife of pastor Paul Darman who was elected as first indigenous President of the Church in 1962), Rebecca Numjal whose biography is included in the beginning of this chapter, Atta Marthe Dadi (another pastor's wife), Thérèse Médoukan whose husband was elected President of the Church from 1965-1977, Harriet Stovner (a missionary of the Sudan Mission in Cameroon), Verna Syverson (a missionary of the Sudan Mission who worked as a coordinator of the women's work in Cameroon from 1973-1989), Misses Helga Hetlesether and Solveig Bjoru, both from the Norwegian Missionary Society. The composition of this first Women's Work Committee shows how important was the role played by the pastors' wives and the single missionary women in the process of setting up a women's organisation within the Church. There will be more to say about the contribution of the pastors' wives in the leadership of the women's organisation in the following section, and particularly in the sixth chapter where the ordination of women will be discussed in more detail.

At this stage of the thesis, and for historical purposes, I would like to remind my reader of the important fact that it was only in May 1975, when more than half a century had elapsed since the Western mission societies had started to send missionaries to Northern Cameroon, that the women's work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was officially organised. A missionary woman was appointed to be full time executive

director of the work, a Women's Work Committee, consisting of two representatives from each regional synod of the Church was elected, and a constitution was drawn up. The women's work became part of the Church structure and was placed as a division of the Department of Evangelism and Christian Education. The organisation became a national organisation and took the name *Femmes Pour Christ* or "Women For Christ" in English.

By examining in depth the constitutional texts of the "Women For Christ", the composition of its work committees and its relationship with the Church as a whole, it clearly appears that the organisation of the "Women For Christ" is merely a creation of the Western mission societies to employ their own missionaries and especially the female spouses who accompanied their partners on the mission fields without being given a proper job description. In other words, the organisation "Women For Christ" in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was far from being a genuine attempt made by both the mission societies and the Church in Northern Cameroon to solve the problem of the marginalisation of women. Rather, the creation of a women's organisation by the Western mission societies in Cameroon was mostly meant to create job opportunities for the many missionary vocations that were being expressed by their young people, and especially by the women in their respective countries, to go overseas and work as missionaries.

5.2.2. "Women For Christ" as a Job Opportunity for Single Missionary Women and an Organisation for African Women's Training in Leadership

Among the missionaries who had been sent to Northern Cameroon by the Western mission societies, namely the NMS and the SM since 1924, there was no one especially trained for the work among the African women in

mission field. All the missionaries and particularly the women missionaries, apart from those who received a formal theological training to become ministers in their home churches, were either trained as teachers, nurses, or social workers, with a year or so spent in a Bible school to grasp some simple principles in Bible study, evangelism and Christian education to make use of while on the mission field. Some among the missionary women were sent to the mission field by women's organisations from America like the "Lutheran Daughters of the Reformation" and the "Women's Missionary Federation. It is worth noting at this stage that most of the single women missionaries sent to Cameroon by the Sudan Mission since 1952 were sponsored by the "Women's Missionary Federation" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. For instance, during its 20th General Convention held in 1954, the "Women's Missionary Federation" collected an offering which amounted to a total sum of \$51,000 which was given to the Sudan Mission for the advancement of the mission in Cameroon.³⁴⁸

Although they were not sent by their respective mission societies in Northern Cameroon to work in a women's sister organisation which did not exist until the time when the missionaries created it themselves, most women missionaries from both the NMS and the Sudan Mission in Cameroon were involved in the work among African women.

In the first instance, the women's work in the mission field was viewed as a job opportunity, especially for the single women missionaries³⁴⁹. When they were not employed by their mission societies as teachers or nurses on

³⁴⁸ See the May 1954 issue of the "Women's Missionary Messenger", a News Bulletin of the "Women's Missionary Federation", p. 30.

³⁴⁹ Married wives of the missionaries also involved themselves in the women's work, but it was done mostly as a way of keeping themselves busy doing something, for they were not paid by their sending mission societies for that, while the single women missionaries had it as paid job. Therefore, the women's work opened up greater opportunities for single women to be engaged in overseas' mission fields.

the field, the “*Demoiselles*” (French word for misses) of the mission societies who have worked in Northern Cameroon had been assigned the difficult task of attracting African women with the Christian message. Considering the fact that in most African societies, the patriarchal and hierarchical systems that regulated all aspects of social, economic and religious life did not put women in a good position, but rather contributed to lowering their social status, the image that the Europeans had of the African woman was that of a non-human being. Some of the Western writers had gone as far in their description of the peoples’ life conditions in Africa as to feature the African women in terms of mere merchandise and beasts of burden.

The African woman generally appears in Western literature as an ignorant and incapable person who can hardly be elevated to a level where she can gain interest in spiritual things.³⁵⁰ This rather desperate condition -as it appeared through missionary reports- of the African woman offered a great opportunity to the Western missionary women in general and the single women missionaries in particular, to challenge the leadership of their missionary male counterparts. This is to say that the organisation of women’s work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon was an exclusive female activity and therefore, it was an opportunity for the women of the mission societies to exhibit their leadership skills.

Coming themselves from a background where the women’s leadership in church as well as in society was not recognised as important³⁵¹, the

³⁵⁰In his mission inspection report of 1950, Skauge argued that the African women were no less no more than mere objects, because it was almost impossible for missionaries to get them interested in spiritual things and to uplift their life’s conditions in such a way that they become receptive to the Christian message and liberated themselves from oppressive African and Islamic cultures that are in place in Northern Cameroon. See Johannes Skauge’s inspection mission report mentioned earlier in this chapter.

³⁵¹For instance the Lutheran churches in Norway and the United States of America, which brought Christianity in Northern Cameroon and founded the Lutheran Church of

women of the mission societies had found in the organisation of the women's work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, a golden opportunity to achieve something of their own in a domain in which there was apparently no competition from their male counterparts. It is therefore very important to emphasise how enthusiastic and committed were these women missionaries as far as the women's work was concerned.

The first woman missionary, who was appointed in the position of the women's work coordinator had nothing but her determination to succeed, her enthusiasm to spread the Christian message among the Africans, as well as a positive response from the women of the Church to learn and apply what they had been taught by the missionaries. Throughout detailed reports about the activities of the "Women For Christ", from 1975 when she was first appointed to the post of the women's work coordinator until 1989 when she retired from missionary work in Cameroon, Verna Syverson constantly emphasised the necessity for mission and church to support the work among the African women. In her capacity as a women's work coordinator, Verna Syverson had travelled extensively throughout the regions of the Church to organise workshops and seminars for leadership training among the churchwomen.

The main emphasis in the programme of the "Women For Christ" was placed on the Bible and Christian education as pointed to in their regulations:

The study of the Bible has priority in the "Women For Christ" activities. For it is the Word of God that changes lives and opens the way to meet Jesus Christ, it is she [the Word of God] that creates the

Cameroon, did not accept the ordination of the women to the pastoral ministry until 1961 and 1970 respectively. See Syverson's paper on "The Role of Women in the Church and Society", June 1978, p. 5.

communion with Him [Jesus Christ] and the others, it is she [the Word of God] that roots the believer in the life of the parish.³⁵²

In addition, realising also that the women were desperately in need of being educated in other domains like health, and social development, a number of workshops and seminars were held by the missionary women on topics like health education, reading and writing sessions for adults as well as special household courses.

To better understand what the vision for the “Women For Christ” was, as it was set up as a women’s organisation within the Church, there is but one important source to refer to and that is Verna Syverson’s statement according to which “Women For Christ” works towards at least three main goals.³⁵³ Firstly, the organisation of the “Women For Christ” aims at motivating each woman to consecrate herself more completely to Jesus Christ. By studying the Word of God and by praying to Jesus Christ, the women of the Church were expected to root themselves in Christian knowledge and thereafter to dedicate their lives to the service of the Church. Secondly, the “Women For Christ” gives every woman the opportunity to bear witness to non-Christians. Through personal contacts of daily life with their neighbours and through their home visits and the visits to the sick people in hospitals. The members of “Women For Christ” thus contribute by showing their love in a practical way to those who do not necessarily belong to the Church. Thirdly, “Women For Christ” encourages the women to participate in the work of the Church by developing a study programme that will strengthen their faith and their Christian walk.

³⁵² Syverson V., “Femmes Pour Christ: Que Font-elles?”, An Undated Folder, p. 2.

³⁵³ In her preface to the first Constitution of the “Women For Christ”, adopted in January 1976, Verna Syverson stated that the “Women For Christ” was created in order “to motivate each and every woman to consecrate more fully to the Lord and to follow Him, to encourage and to give each and every member the possibility to become a witness for Christ to the non-Christians, and to develop a study programme that will strengthen their faith and their life in Christ.”

It did not take long for the missionaries or the Church leaders in Northern Cameroon to discover that, once motivated and given the opportunity to serve, the African women enjoyed working together and were able to serve in a variety of practical ways for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. They could sacrifice their time, their energy and their money for the work of the Church and in turn, they received strength and encouragement and joy from their fellowship together and from their growth in Christ. This attempt to make use of the women's gifts and involve them in Christian service is clearly stipulated in the preamble to the constitution of the "Women For Christ", which emphasises the necessity for women to follow and serve Jesus in His Church:

We [the Women For Christ] desire to serve Jesus Christ and to follow His example. Since Jesus accepted the service of women and their dedication, we dedicate ourselves with God's help, to the advancement of His reign by the offering of our life to the glory of God.³⁵⁴

This vision of the women's work was largely sustained by the missionary strategy that tried to emphasise the spiritual dimension of the work among the African women. For instance, in Verna Syverson's view, what the African women wanted most was "to LIVE for Christ, to LEARN for Christ, to WORK for Christ and to FELLOWSHIP in Christ."³⁵⁵ Therefore, to attain their goals, the "Women For Christ" had to make plans to hold meetings and training courses for pastors' and teachers' wives as well as the other women of the Church on topics like the Bible, health, the Christian home, training in witnessing, how to conduct a meeting and singing. Some information was also made available to the women on the Lutheran teachings and doctrines. Programmes for evangelising the non-Christians through person to person contacts, home and hospital visits

³⁵⁴ The Constitution of the Women For Christ, IEELC, Ngaoundéré, 1976, p. 18.

³⁵⁵ Syverson, V., "Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, Women For Christ Report of 1975-1981", p. 9.

were also set up in order to encourage the women to partake in the proclamation of the Gospel. Mostly single women missionaries were appointed to the position of regional leaders of the women's work and they were very dedicated to their work and travelled extensively throughout the regions of the Church holding meetings and workshops for the African women in various places. According to the job description of a regional woman leader, she had, among other responsibilities, to plan and arrange workshops for local leaders of the women's organisation, pastors', evangelists', catechists', teachers' and nurses wives, to encourage the establishment of women's groups in congregations which did not yet have them, to prepare materials for workshops and meetings, to conduct classes for young girls, to make house visits to women, and to encourage the purchase and use of literature in the women's movement. In brief, this appears explicit, well defined and commensurate with the training and natural gifting of the missionary women who were eager to take up the challenge. Two questions need to be answered, however. Firstly, was this an easy task for the missionaries to accomplish among the African women? Secondly, if not, what were the main challenges faced by the missionaries while carrying out their responsibility in the women's work in the Church in Northern Cameroon?

Most reports given by the women missionaries to their mission societies about the women's work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon relate the joy and excitement that the missionaries had found in the work among the African women, but the same reports are also full of frustration, disappointment and anger about the women's life conditions in Northern Cameroon.

According to Verna Syverson, many obstacles hindered the development of the work among African women. There were obstacles related to the

social environment of the women such as illiteracy, confinement, and the men's dictatorial attitude towards their wives. There were also obstacles caused by the women themselves. Sometimes missionaries reported that African women themselves constituted an obstacle to their own emancipation. Their involvement in activities like brewing, selling and drinking beer, prostitution, fetishism and their laziness were presented by the missionaries as the main hindrance to the development of the work among the women in the Church in Northern Cameroon. Further more, the African women were said to lack the necessary confidence to take over their responsibility in Church or in society, because they are not educated. However, it must be clearly understood that the type of education that, not only the women but also the men were lacking in Africa, that type of education of which missionaries have deplored the lack among the women as a hindrance to their emancipation, was the Western type of education that consists of going to a school to learn how to read and write. Since for an African woman, education was something different, there was a misunderstanding between Africans and the Westerners.

The African woman gets her education from her early involvement beside her mother in daily life occupations like drawing water from the well, helping in farming, cooking and so forth. It was therefore hoped that the women's work in Church would enrich the women's Christian knowledge, that it would help liberate them from their fear and that it would help them to have a greater self-respect and to think of themselves as important role players in Church and in society as a whole. Although based on traditional Christian principles according to which,

The first tasks of a woman are her responsibilities to God, to her husband, to her children, and to her home. If her duties and her role as a mother, a wife, and a homemaker fail, then the church also fails and

will not have strength because they, as individuals, make up the church.
If the home is neglected, how can the church survive?³⁵⁶

the Church in Northern Cameroon has been instrumental in opening up opportunities for women by freeing them through education and helping them to take responsibilities in their respective societies. As asserted by Verna Syverson in her final report³⁵⁷, the women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon had gained more confidence in themselves, more interest in their work, a better sense of organisation, a growth in their spiritual life, a sense of working together, a greater participation in Church committees, and a consciousness of serving others. They had also chosen projects that not only benefitted themselves but also the life of the Church and the sharing of the Gospel.

A year before the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the “Women For Christ” in 1985, a Cameroonian woman was elected in the position of the president of the organisation. This position was an honorary one for she did not receive a salary for it. Only the position of the coordinator, which was still held by a woman missionary, was a full time position. But from 1984 until 1989 the time of the retirement of the women’s work coordinator, much effort has been put in for the indigenisation of the women’s leadership in the Church. In 1991, the first African woman was appointed in a full time position as a women’s work coordinator.

5.2.3. The Leadership in the Women For Christ and Its Social Centres as a Test of Responsibility for the African Women in the Church

The constitution of a women’s organisation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was neither a women missionaries’ act of generosity

³⁵⁶ These Christian expectations of a woman’s responsibilities in church, as well as in the society as a whole, are not different from what an African traditional society would have expected of a woman.

³⁵⁷ Syverson, V., “The Report of the Women For Christ, 1987-1989”, p. 2.

nor a churchmen's gesture of good will towards the women of the Church. When missionary Verna Syverson was asked by the Church leadership in 1973 to organise a women's movement in the Church, it was more a reward for the contribution of the women in the spreading of Christianity in Northern Cameroon, than a male gesture of charity towards women.

From the beginning, the women's organisation ambitiously oriented its efforts towards the education and training of women so as to prepare them to play a more significant and decisive role than ever in the future Cameroonian church and society. After twenty years of existence as a women's organisation within the Church, the "Women For Christ", or rather the women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, are still counted among the less educated and the less emancipated women in the country. The fact that pastors and future pastors of the Lutheran church in Cameroon can be listed among the most reactionary church leaders towards the women's involvement in the leadership of the church today, is a significant sign of women's non-advancement in the domain of education and leadership training in Northern Cameroon.³⁵⁸

Finally, the missionaries' efforts in educating the African women did not produce the expected fruit for the women. For hardly a single woman has actually been trained to fulfill a leadership position in the Church institutions, be it in the domain of social and economic development or in the religious and theological spheres. In the women's organisation, the "Women For Christ", a particular accent was put by the women

³⁵⁸In a conversation with a class of seminarians among whom three were women in October 1999, in Meiganga, I found out that fourteen of the fifteen students who were being trained in the Church seminary were against the women's involvement in Church leadership. The argument was that women were not well-educated and trained to take over responsibilities in public life. This attitude of the students was not surprising, because even the Dean of the seminary at that time had a rather low appreciation of the women who were being trained as theologians in the seminary.

missionaries on the training of African women in Bible study, singing, prayer and some elementary notions of hygiene and homemaking.

The training of the indigenous pastors', evangelists' and catechists' wives by the missionary women³⁵⁹ was nothing less than moulding them to play their role as homemakers. Writing on the South African context, which in many cases resembles the Northern Cameroonian context, Deborah Gaitskell pointed out that:

There was a domestic basis to the entire range of activities in which female missionaries were involved. Their instruction of African girls, their religious co-operation with adult women, the social welfare projects they initiated, were all imbued with this particular view of the family, while the word 'home' itself took on a powerful appeal in missionary vocabulary.³⁶⁰

In other words, the education and training of the African women by the missionary women aimed mostly at preparing the African woman to play, and this time as a Christian woman, her role of wife, mother and homemaker. There was less, if nothing at all, done in terms of the preparation of African women to take on leadership role outside their usual sphere of responsibilities which is the home.

The idea of creating a Bible school for the women of the Church in Northern Cameroon mentioned by Verna Syverson in her first report as coordinator of the "Women For Christ" was probably the outcome of a general concern expressed by the Church as a whole about the lack of good education of the women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon.³⁶¹ But this idea was quickly turned down by the Church, since the sponsors like the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to which the application for

³⁵⁹ See Appendix 2, Picture 7.

³⁶⁰ Gaitskell, D., "Housewives, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Women in Johannesburg, 1903-39", *Journal of African History*, 24 (1983), p. 242.

³⁶¹ See Verna Syverson's "Report of the Women For Christ, 1975-1977", p. 2.

funding was sent, found it too costly to build and to maintain separate infrastructures from the ones which were being used for the training of the men. On the one hand, the idea of having a biblical training centre for women was not a bad idea in itself, but on the other hand, one wonders what would have been the outcome of such an undertaking when the Church itself was not prepared to employ biblically trained women. It would have certainly been waste of time and energy as was the case with the schools for girls created by missionaries in the 1950s. The experiences in those schools were nothing but a creation of a special and very limited category of African women in the area who learned to cook in a Western manner, to wash clothes and clean the house, set the table with plates, knives, forks and spoons, and to take care of the children. These young girls trained through the mission schools for African girls were only good at serving as house workers in the homes of the missionaries' or they were good to be given to marriage to the men who were involved in mission work like local catechists, evangelists, health care workers and school teachers. In other words, the mission schools for girls were a proper way for missionaries to prepare spouses for their native helpers in the missionary work.

However, the women's organisation, the "Women For Christ", was viewed by many as an opportunity given to women in the Church to emerge and to make themselves more relaxed and free from their confinement to the domestic work. The creation of "Women For Christ" was a great opportunity for the women in Northern Cameroon and beyond, to demonstrate their ability to be important equally to their families as well as to their communities at large. The conjugated efforts of the founding mission society and church (the Norwegian Missionary Society and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) as well as their international body (the Lutheran World Federation) to support the training of a female

leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in the late 1980s can be interpreted as a general shifting of attitude towards women in the church, as well as in society at an international level.

The situation of the women in the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon, one should say, was not an isolated case. The sole fact that the women's organisation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon was officially constituted in 1975³⁶², a year that was interpreted as a cornerstone in the world-wide pressures of liberal feminists and advocates of women's rights towards eliminating gender-based discrimination, using the United Nations to promote the women's rights, is revelatory of the link between the women's fate in Northern Cameroon and the fate of their fellow sisters in the other parts of the world. By granting the women with scholarships to study theology as well as secular topics, the so-called traditional partners (the church founding mission societies from the West) of the Church in Cameroon expressed their change of mind and their willingness to eradicate the Church discriminatory practices, which they had helped to establish against women in Northern Cameroon.³⁶³

In a recent interview with Executive Secretary of the "Women For Christ", Satou Marthe³⁶⁴, I was told that structures like the "Women's Social Centres" were funded and built up in different cities of Cameroon thanks to the sponsorship of the Church's partners in order to create job opportunities for women within the Church. However, when one looks at the management of these centres today, one wonders what was indeed the

³⁶²1975-1985 was declared as "the United Nations Decade for Women" and specific UN meetings were held in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 to address the issues of women's rights at an international level.

³⁶³ Missionaries from both the Sudan Mission and the NMS were opposed for example to the ordination of women in Cameroon, arguing that the social context of Northern Cameroon was not in favour of the women's leadership in church and in society. This point will be dealt with in the next chapter on the ordination of women in the Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Satou Marthe on November 30th, 1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

real motivation behind the creation of such structures within the Church?” Were the women expected to perform certain activities, which would have led them to a greater sense of responsibility? If this were the case, what are the results of such women’s undertakings as far as their contribution to and integration into the leadership of Church and society in Cameroon are concerned?

According to Marthe Satou³⁶⁵, director of the “Women For Christ” organisation, the women’s social centres are important tools for the women’s social, economic and religious development. The centres represent mighty and empowering means in the hands of the women who desperately needed to be trained in leadership. In the women’s social centres, women are taught various practical things like sewing, knitting, cooking as well as some notions of hygiene and health care in order to enable them to be efficient in their domestic role. There are also programmes like alphabetisation, Bible study, family and conjugal life, which are run by the leaders of these centres for the upliftment of the women’s social life.

What is noteworthy here is that all the activities that are being carried out in the women’s social centres in Cameroon today do not differ from the ones which the female missionaries from the West tried to implement for the women in their respective African mission fields through organisations like the “Women For Christ.” The question of whether or not structures like the women’s social centres are an adequate means to prepare women to take on responsibilities in different positions in Church and in society as a whole is yet to be answered. My efforts to conduct interviews with three

³⁶⁵Satou Marthe was elected as the first indigenous director of the women’s organisation in the Church in 1991. Until today, she remains the only African woman in the Church who has served as a Church representative in committees at national as well as international levels. She was interviewed in the frame of this research in November 30th 1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

of the four leaders of the women's social centres to find out about the functioning of these centres failed, because none of them was available to talk about the management of these centres.

The little information I gathered here and there about the social centres of the "Women For Christ" organisation during my field research revealed a state of mismanagement in these centres due to a lack of well-trained and adequate leadership. For instance, the women's social centre in Ngaoundéré was built in 1990 thanks to a donation from a group of women belonging to a Norwegian political party. The envelope containing a cheque to the amount of the granted sum was handed over to the "Women For Christ" regional leader by the Norwegian women's representative during a visit in Cameroon. Later on, however, when the centre was established, the regional leader of the "Women For Christ" took this as a personal gift to herself and did not want any women's committee in the Church to interfere with her management of this centre. As a result of this misunderstanding, this regional leader of the women's work engaged herself in an open conflict with the "Women For Christ" organisation's director, whom she thought, was taking the management of the centre away from her control.

This state of affairs has repeatedly raised the issue of the quality of education given to the African women, in the framework of a women's organisation such as the "Women For Christ", to prepare them for greater tasks in their Church and society. Hence, the churchmen's argument in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon according to which the women of the Church are not yet ready to take on greater responsibilities in the Church, because they are not well-trained.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶However, Marthe Satou was not of this point of view and emphatically stated that: "The men's argument that the women in the Church are not educated and therefore must

If women are not able to manage small and strictly female institutions like the women's social centres, argue some misogynists in the Church, they would never be able to run Church's bigger institutions, like the health department, with hundreds of employees. This is why the training of the women, within restricted women's organisations like the "Women For Christ", will always remain limited and inadequate as far as women's social, economic and religious integration process is concerned. Therefore, there must be a search for a different way of dealing with this issue of the women's integration in the Church and society and this can be done, by avoiding the traditional divide between what is said to be strictly male responsibility and what is said to be strictly female responsibility, in both the church and the society.

As pointed out by Mrs. Nyiwé Frida:

The work of the 'Women For Christ' concerns only the women. They study the Bible and pray together in order to keep themselves in the faith. They learn practical things such as sewing, knitting, cooking and so forth, but women are also capable of doing much more for their Church and society. For instance, women can be preachers, teachers and also good managers at all levels of responsibility within Church and society. They are not given such opportunities by the men who think that they are more educated than the women.³⁶⁷

If women are kept in lower positions because of the poor quality of the education they receive through specialised organisations like the "Women For Christ", where most of the activities are oriented towards a confinement of the women to domestic tasks, there is a need to widen the horizon of their education for more efficiency in what is to be their future

not be given responsibilities is a lie." (See the above-mentioned interview with Marthe Satou.)

³⁶⁷Nyiwé Frida is the wife of Dr. Thomas Nyiwé, current president of the Church. She was interviewed in November 1st, 1999 in Meiganga where her husband had been appointed to the post of lecturer in the Lutheran Institute of Theology of Meiganga.

role in church as well as in society. In other words, women should no longer be confined to specific training which limits their activities to female spheres. Like their male counterparts, the women of the Church in Northern Cameroon need to be given equal opportunities to attend schools and universities, to receive an education commensurate with their future responsibilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, without minimising the important contribution brought by the women missionaries to improve the social condition of the women in Northern Cameroon through educational programmes like alphabetisation, sewing and health care courses held in the “Women For Christ” Social Centres throughout the country, one important fact must be noted here, and this is the marginalisation of the women from the Church leadership. The women of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon are still being marginalised because they are said to be among the less educated people in the country. The fact that the great majority of women in the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon are illiterate has been and still is used as a reason for denying them opportunities to take positions of responsibility in the Church.

Except for the “Women For Christ” organisation, no other institution in the Lutheran church in Cameroon is led by an African woman. The low number of African women who teach in Church’s schools or work in the department of health or in the department of community development is revelatory of a lack of women’s involvement in the Church leadership. The composition of the various Church committees is almost one hundred per cent male.

Since 1995, when the Church agreed to send women to the theological seminaries, none of those trained up to now has been accepted, even as a lay preacher within the Church. This situation, again and again brings into debate the complicated issue of the women's integration in the various ministries of the Church in Northern Cameroon. The ongoing debate today in the Church in Cameroon is that if the women are not allowed to hold any position in church, then there will never be true equality and sharing of responsibilities between men and women in church or in society. In this sense, if the women's ordination is allowed in the future, some, though a minority, believe the integration of women into leadership positions in the Church will become a reality.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸For Satou Marthe for instance, (see the above-mentioned interview) the ordination of the women will solve the problem of their under-representation in Church's committees, because in any Church's committee there are always pastors.

Chapter Six: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and the Challenge of Women's Ordination Today

Introduction

The issue of the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon cannot be isolated from other issues like the inclusion of women in political, economic and cultural leadership in society as a whole. Despite the fact that the particular context of Northern Cameroon is an important factor to be taken into consideration while dealing with this specific issue, the ordination of women has remained nevertheless a matter of general concern in the worldwide Christian community for centuries.

In the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, the issue of including women in the pastoral ministry of the Church was never raised by the Church leaders. The reason why this question was never discussed within the Church circle was related to the particular context in which the church was working, the lack of properly educated women in the Church, the African culture that did not allow women to hold a position above men, and most importantly the teachings on the role of women in church and society circulated by the missionaries among Africans in the Church.

As already indicated in chapter two, the particularity of the Northern Cameroonian context derived from the fact that Western colonial administrations (the German as well as the French) favoured the hegemony of the Fulani Muslim people over the rest of the population in the area. Thereafter, the region of Northern Cameroon was declared an Islamic region by the Western colonial powers.

Concerning the teaching of the missionaries in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, it is worth noting that the missionaries of the Sudan Mission and the Norwegian Missionary Society, who were the first missionaries to bring Christianity to Northern Cameroon, opposed the ordination of women in the Church. However, this missionary attitude towards the admission of women into the ordained ministry changed after their respective home churches or sending mission societies reached agreement on the ordination of women in the church in America and Norway. In Norway, the decision for the ordination of women was taken in 1938, but the first woman pastor was ordained in 1961, while in America, the first Lutheran female pastor was ordained in 1970³⁶⁹. Thus, despite the fact that there was open opposition shown by the local leaders of the Church in Cameroon towards the ordination of women, the missionaries of the above-mentioned mission societies supported the theological training of women by providing necessary funds for their theological studies, firstly abroad and later on in the Church's seminary in Meiganga.

In the early 1990s, two women were sent to Jos in Nigeria to study theology in a Lutheran theological seminary. Both of them came from non-Lutheran background and became Lutherans while attending Lutheran worship services in a Lutheran English speaking congregation in Ngaoundéré, a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon which up to now has been led by a retired minister from Lutheran churches in the USA and Canada with which the Lutheran church of Cameroon has long lasting relation in partnership.

The selection of these women for Church's scholarships for theological studies in Nigeria was not dealt with in a Church's official decision-

³⁶⁹ See Syverson, Verna, "The Role of Women in the Church and Society", Unpublished paper, presented in the pastoral retreat in Ngaoundéré in June 1978, p. 5. See also Maher, F. (ed.), *The Ordination of Women in Lutheran Churches: Analysis of an LWF Survey*, No. 18, March 1984, pp. 26-27.

making body, but privately arranged by the retired missionary pastor of the congregation. It was with a feeling of bitterness and anger that the Church members received the news that two women had been sent by the Church to study theology in Nigeria with the sponsorship of the Lutheran World Federation. When asked about how these two women were sent to study theology on behalf of the Church without being recommended by the Church decision-making bodies, pastor Pierre Songsaré, then President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, responded that, being under the threat of the mission societies and the LWF to cut their financial support if women were not allowed to get scholarships for theological training, he had no other choice but to sign the scholarship forms.³⁷⁰

The admission of the first five women in the 14th intake at the Lutheran Theological Institute of Meiganga in 1995 was an important point in the transformation of the situation of women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon. Since 1995, with the admission of women in theology, there seems to be an awakening and more concern among the Church members about the involvement of women in the church. At the same time, there were also concerns expressed about the future role of the women theologians in society and church in Northern Cameroon. Questions such as, who had decided to send the women to the theological seminary and what would be expected of them from the Church after their theological training were asked by the Church members. Not knowing exactly what would be the position of the women theologians in the Church, the leaders of the Lutheran church in Cameroon started to express their embarrassment by pointing an accusing finger at the Western sister churches, the mission organisations, or the world Lutheran bodies like the LWF. Those who sent the women to study theology, in this case the

³⁷⁰ See interview with pastor Pierre Songsaré on November 17, 1999, in Yaoundé.

ELCA and the LWF, which were the main supporters of the theological training of the women, were also asked by the Lutheran church in Cameroon to help with their employment since the Church has not yet decided on their admission to ordained ministry. Also if the theologically trained women of the Church had to be ordained as pastors just like their male counterparts, what would happen to their responsibilities *vis à vis* their families? This is the main challenge facing the Church decision on the ordination of women in Northern Cameroon today. Therefore, the main concern with the ordination of women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon is directed towards the practical roles of the women in society and church and does not relate to questions of a systematic nature, such as the question of the image of God or the maleness of Christ, raised to oppose women's admission to the ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic church.³⁷¹

Seizing the occasion that offers me the writing of this thesis on the role of women in church, I would like to bring my modest contribution, not by adding to the already long list of questions about the admission of the women to theological training, but by tackling in depth the crucial question of their inclusion in pastoral ministry in the Lutheran church in Cameroon. Therefore, this chapter will look critically at the question of women's ordination in the Lutheran church in two principal aspects:

Firstly, it will look at the Lutheran understanding of the concept of the ordination and the way in which, it was implemented by the missionaries in Cameroon. Secondly, a discussion will be conducted which will mostly focus on the theological and biblical aspects of women's ordination with

³⁷¹ See Sweeney, T., *A Church Divided: The Vatican versus American Catholics*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1992, Chapter 6 on "Women Priests", pp. 113-129.

the aim of drawing clear conclusions as to whether or not the Church in Northern Cameroon should ordain women in the near future.

6.1. Lutheran Understanding of the Ordained Ministry and the Women's Position in Church Practices in Northern Cameroon

The women's position in the Church's practice in Northern Cameroon today has been mostly influenced by the conception that the Western missionaries had of the African women when they first arrived in the area³⁷² and the Lutheran understanding of women's ministry in the church.

Reporting back to the Church in 1977 about the women's work, Verna Syverson³⁷³ pointed out that the work among the women was hindered by the laziness among the women, their involvement in making and drinking beer, their practice of sorcery and so forth. Therefore, in her plan to liberate the women of the region from the "bondage of sin" and to lead them to a full participation in the "church of Christ", Verna Syverson in her work programme opted for a biblical teaching that "impels each woman to dedicate herself profoundly to the Lord and to follow Him alone."³⁷⁴ In this way, the women of Northern Cameroon could be freed, not only from evil practices like the drinking or the sorcery in which they lived before, but also from the slavery of a patriarchal society,³⁷⁵ to finally reach the status of the virtuous Christian wife and the quiet and loving mother whose main responsibility was to look after her husband and to

³⁷² This is not to say that the missionaries did not have their own (Western) understanding of the role of women in church and society. See Syverson's paper mentioned earlier in this chapter.

³⁷³ Syverson, V., "Rapport 'Femmes Pour Christ'", 1975-1977, p. 2.

³⁷⁴ Syverson, V., "Preface of the Constitution of the Women For Christ", Ngaoundéré, 1976, p. 4.

³⁷⁵ As quoted from Skauge's report and other articles from the missionaries in the previous chapters, the African woman has, very often, appeared in the writings of the Western missionaries as a slave for her husband and the society at large. Victim of a polygamous system in which she was given no choice and in which she was ill-treated by her parents-in-laws, the African woman accepted Christianity as the only way to escape the tyranny of the African custom.

educate her children in the Christian faith. Thus, as pointed out by Yinda and Ka Mana,

If the literature of propaganda in the times of the mission [in Africa] attacked [so harshly] the image of the woman sorcerer and subjection to the diabolic customs, it was to better bring about the good and true image [of the woman] that one should promote in the society: the image of the exemplary Christian wife whose submission to the husband and love for children were the supreme fulfillment in life.³⁷⁶

From this perspective, the practice of the church in Africa in general and in Northern Cameroon in particular did not aim at including the women in leadership positions. Rather, it contributed to the confinement of women to mostly domestic tasks.

Inheriting their ecclesial practices from the Western missionaries, most of the mainline churches in Africa are keen to see women free to hear the Gospel, but not to take initiative or lead in any way. If the EELC, following the example of the NMS General Secretary, Johannes Skauge, who found that the ‘enslavement’ of women by their husbands in Northern Cameroon was unacceptable in 1950, is now open to grant some rights to the women, the Church members, in their great majority are still reticent to accept women in leadership positions and are determined to make it clear for everyone who wants to know their position towards women that:

in the Church, women have some freedoms but have to know their place, which is not in a leadership position. Rather, women should follow the biblical injunction to obey their husbands and not become rebellious against them.³⁷⁷

To help understand the rationale behind Skauge’s statement which I referred to in chapter five, one must point to the following: Firstly, Skauge’s own mission society (the NMS) was one of these Western

³⁷⁶ Yinda, H. and Ka Mana, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 53-54.

³⁷⁷ See Skauge’s report mentioned above.

patriarchal mission organisations in which women did not have leadership positions. Secondly, Skauge's desire for the church in Northern Cameroon was no to disrupt the social order too severely. Thirdly and finally, Skauge held the position that women in church should follow the biblical injunctions and keep the positions in church and society assigned to them by the "Holy Book".

I was baptised in the Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne du Cameroun (EFLC) and now I am serving as a pastor of the Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun (EELC). These two churches were established by the Western Christian mission societies and were allowed by the colonial powers to preach in the Northern Cameroon in the early 1920s. As mentioned earlier in chapter two, the missionaries were from the Mission of the Lutheran Brethren and the Sudan Mission, based in Fergus Falls and Minneapolis in Minnesota respectively, and from the Norwegian Missionary Society based in Stavanger, Norway. The result of these three Lutheran mission societies working in the same region was the creation of two different national Lutheran churches in Cameroon. The Sudan Mission from America managed to merge with the Norwegian Missionary Society to create the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon while the Mission of the Brethren Lutheran stood on its own to create what is known today as The Brethren Lutheran Church of Cameroon (EFLC).

In the EFLC, all Christians are said to be servants of God, and the pastor is the servant of the congregation. He (for only men can be ordained as pastors in the EFLC) ensures that the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments, (Baptism and Holy Communion only according to the Lutheran understanding), are rightly administered. In the EFLC, the minister does not wear clerical clothes and is warned of anything that he

does which distinguishes him in his office as a pastor from the rest of the community.

In the EELC, pastors are allowed to dress up differently from the rest of the congregation. Especially when they are administering the sacraments, they are compelled to put on their clerical robes. A minister must be different from the ordinary congregation member and one of the visible signs of distinctiveness is for the minister to wear his robe during the worship service.

In neither church was the idea of a woman pastor on the agenda, because the missionaries had taught the people that the ordained ministry was a male-preserved domain. In the EFLC, women are adamantly denied the right to be elected as elders since a pastor is not anything else, but one among the elders in the church. In the EELC, women are accepted as elders in the congregations, but not allowed to be ordained as pastors. What is therefore the difference? Is there a specific Lutheran understanding of ordained ministry in the church? If yes, what has happened to this doctrine now that women are being ordained in many Lutheran churches, not only in the West, but also in Africa and Asia?

6.1.1. The Lutheran Understanding of the Ordained Ministry and Its Impact on the Church in Cameroon

According to a Lutheran World Federation survey on the ordination of women³⁷⁸ in the worldwide Lutheran churches conducted in 1980/81, the Lutheran churches do not allot the same degree of importance to the women's ordination issue. In many Lutheran churches throughout the world, the matter is of great importance and is the object of lively debate;

³⁷⁸ "The Ordination of Women in Lutheran Churches: Analysis of an LWF Survey", in Maher, F., (ed.), *LWF Documentation* No. 18, Kreuz Verlag Zeitschriften, March, 1984.

in others the issue has not yet become the focus of attention. Very few Lutheran churches in Africa have taken clear decisions about women's ministry in the church. Even in churches where women's ordination is accepted and some women have been ordained to the pastoral ministry like the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, no precise regulations have been tabled which include theological, cultural, economic and socio-political or traditional justification of the ordination of women in church. Some churches, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic, have said yes to the ordination of women, but have no women ordained yet and some others, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, have taken no decision and are not even ready to discuss the issue up to the present day. This situation of diversity of viewpoints within Lutheran communion does not help to answer the question whether there is a common Lutheran understanding of the ordination of women or not.

In a well-documented article on "Women in Lutheran Tradition", Gracia Grindal³⁷⁹ observed that although Luther was a man of his time: an Augustinian monk, heir to over 1500 years of Western misogyny, he made a significant contribution as far as women's full participation in the life and ministry of the church is concerned today. Rejecting the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church and insisting on the idea of the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry, Luther opened up new possibilities for the inclusion of women in ministry. In his *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Althaus³⁸⁰ argued that Luther's theology of the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry stem from the fact that Luther only recognised one priest, that is Christ who bears and intercedes for the sinful world. Since the believers participate in the life of Christ,

³⁷⁹ Grindal, G., "Women in Lutheran Tradition", in Preus, M., (ed.), *Serving the Word, Lutheran Women Consider Their Calling*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, pp. 21-33.

³⁸⁰ Althaus, P., *The Theology of Martin Luther*, translated by Robert C. Schultz, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984.

they all become priests by taking up their cross and intercede for the world; that is every Christian's vocation or ministry to the world. On this basis, there is no difference in status within the church. The church as a whole and each of its members are, therefore, also responsible for the preaching of the Word and for the distribution of the sacraments. The ordination of an office-bearer thus merely transfers a task and not an indelible character as in the Roman Catholic Church. For the Roman Catholic, as Jane E. Strohl pointed out,

The Tridentine teaching [indicates that], the Sacrament of Priestly Ordination imprints an indelible character upon the recipient, which cannot be effaced or invalidated. [The priest] receives the power to confect a true sacrament, that is, to make the grace of God available to the faithful. Thus, the ordination [in the Roman Catholic Church] becomes the foundation of the whole sacramental system and the sacrificing priesthood the indispensable link between the church and its salvation.³⁸¹

For Luther, ordination is not a sacrament. Only baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments and they are the only ones, which can confer a new being on the baptised person, that is participation in the new life of Christ. Therefore, there is no special priesthood except the priesthood of all believers. In this sense, a Christian vocation or ministry is deeply rooted in this baptism. Since both men and women have been baptised, Christ is born in each of them equally. Here, as pointed out by Grindal³⁸², the impact of Luther's theology on women begins to be visible. If baptism is the sacrament, which radically changes people and frees them for the priesthood of all believers and their vocations in the world, then women, being included, can take courage from their new sense of vocation as members of family and partakers in various ministries of the church, including the ordained ministry.

³⁸¹ Strohl, E. J., "Ministry in the Middle Ages and Reformation", in Todd Nichol and Mark Kolden, (ed.), *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, pp. 35-48, p. 37.

³⁸² Grindal, G., in Preus, M., *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

Having in mind this Lutheran theological background, it becomes much easier to understand the involvement of Lutheran women in the mission work in Northern Cameroon. The missionary work actually opened up new possibilities that led many women in the Lutheran churches in America and Europe to the ordained ministry. The women missionaries were among the first preachers. In their stories of the mission field, one learned that they preached the Word, cast out demons, baptised infants in emergency, and prophesied, things they could hardly do in their home countries, given the patriarchal structure of the church at the time.

Despite the opportunities granted to the Lutheran missionary women to act as occasional ministers of the church among the so-called non-Christian populations, women's ordination was and still is a controversial issue in the Lutheran churches throughout the world. For instance, in the Lutheran churches in America, there was a major debate going on about the ordination of women in the 1970s. As pointed out by Grindal:

The few articles which treated the issue in the church press argued almost exclusively from Scripture, with some references to *The Book of Concord*, or Luther's writings, that women should or should not be ordained. The study booklet, *The Ordination of Women*, condensed from the study documents of the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA)³⁸³ by Raymond Tiemeyer in 1970, dealt mainly with the difficult biblical texts. In the specific chapter on how the Lutheran tradition viewed women, there is a preponderance of references to comments on how Luther or his contemporaries viewed women, since there was nothing in the *Augsburg Confession*, which either included or excluded them as pastors.³⁸⁴

In the African context, the situation of women in the Lutheran churches is even more confusing. Lutheran churches in Africa in their great majority

³⁸³ The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) are predecessor bodies to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which is one of the founding churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon.

³⁸⁴ Grindal, G., in Preus, M., (ed.), *Op. Cit.* p. 30.

do not accept women as pastors for reasons, which sometimes do not relate to Christian theology. Hence, the important remark made by the Lutheran bishop Judah Kiwovele of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania on the African Lutheran understanding of the priesthood of all believers, a Christian doctrine which should give African Christian women full participation in the church: “In principle”, Kiwovele pointed out,

the Lutheran church remains in harmony with the biblical and early Christian understanding of the priesthood of believers. Unfortunately, even Lutherans tend to elevate the ordained ministry above the priesthood of believers and see the ordained ministry as a privilege secured for a few (...). We still understand the ordained ministry in terms of men, and that relegates women to a segregated class similar to South Africa’s racial segregation. We should stop condemning South Africa until all the Lutheran churches in the world ordain women!³⁸⁵

Most of the objections advanced against women’s ordination, not only in Lutheran churches but also in other Christian denominations³⁸⁶ established in Northern Cameroon, are either biblical, theological, practical or ecumenical. It is therefore appropriate to focus on some biblical, theological, practical and ecumenical aspects of the question under discussion in the second part of this chapter.

³⁸⁵ Kiwovele, J., “An African Perspective on the Priesthood of All Believers”, in Pero, A., and Moyo, A., (eds.), *Theology and the Black Experience The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African and African-American Theologians*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1988, pp. 57-75, p. 74.

³⁸⁶ Apart from the Roman Catholic Church’s position that the decision on women’s issue belongs to “the Holy See”, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon and the United Baptist Church of Cameroon are among the first mainline Churches which have already agreed upon women’s ordination. We will come back to this when we try to understand the ecumenical dimension of this question in the case of the EELC.

6.2. The Biblico-Theological Aspects of the Ordination of Women and Its Practical and Ecumenical Implications in Northern Cameroonian Context

According to Thomas Schreiner³⁸⁷, some contemporary evangelical writers appeal to the ministries of women in the Scriptures to support the notion that there should be no limits on women's roles in ministry today. Those evangelical writers maintain that women and men should have equal access to every ministry function and that any limits on women derive from culture and tradition, and not from the Bible which, they believe supports the full inclusion of women in any ministry. In the Bible, argue these evangelical writers, one finds that women had functioned as prophets like Miriam in Exodus 15: 20 and Deborah in Judges 4: 4-5. In the New Testament, too, women are known as prophets, cf. Luke 2: 36-38 or Acts 2: 17-18. Like their male counterparts, women are reported as being in possession of various spiritual gifts. They had also held offices such as deacon, cf. 1 Timothy 3: 11 and Romans 16: 1, elder, cf. Titus 2: 3, and apostle, cf. Romans 16: 7.

Schreiner, in his article on "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching", however, argued against the full inclusion of women in ministry. Women's ministry in both Old and New Testament, according to his argument was "a complementary and supportive ministry, a ministry that fostered and preserved male leadership in the church, since 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16 makes it clear that women, who prophesied in the New Testament, were to do so in such a way that they acknowledged and

³⁸⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, author of *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, is one of the contributors to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, a book in which the authors, calling themselves the Evangelicals, try to argue against what they termed as "the evangelical feminist position which does not really reflect the pattern of Biblical truth."

supported male leadership.”³⁸⁸ In other words, the biblical ministries in which women participate are restricted to the ones which do not put them in leadership position over the men, like the teaching of the Word, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14: 33-36.

Warning the Church members in Cameroon against the decision taken by the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) in December 1989 to send ordained women to serve as pastors in the overseas sister churches like the EELC, pastor Lars Lode, one of the NMS missionaries stationed in Poli, Cameroon, wrote to the Church leaders about what he thought to be a great danger which was going to destroy the whole Church in Cameroon.³⁸⁹

In a document of several pages, pastor Lode whose knowledge, in both Biblical Hebrew and Greek, is above the average student in Biblical studies, addressed the Church leaders in Cameroon by arguing against the decision of his sending mission society to accept ordained women. Proceeding from a grammatical analysis of the texts which he considers the most important from both the Old and New Testament, our Norwegian missionary pastor attacked the biblical interpretation of texts such as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2 made by his mission society to allow women to work as pastors in the church.

³⁸⁸ Schreiner, R. T., “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching”, in Piper, J. and Grudem, W., (ed.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, 1991, pp. 209-224, p. 217.

³⁸⁹ Alerted by the implication of the decision taken by the NMS in December 1989 to send ordained women as missionaries overseas, Lars Lode, in the form of a pamphlet letter, addressed the leaders of the Church in Cameroon. The letter was sent from Poli, Cameroon, on February 10th, 1990 and was written about, “The Relations Between Men and Women in the Work of the Church: Whether a Woman Should Be Allowed to Serve as a Pastor.”

After having conducted interviews with the church members and the clergymen³⁹⁰ in the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon on the ordination of women, I realised that the question of the ordination of women in the EELC has never been publicly debated in the Church general assemblies before. With the exception of Syverson's paper on "The Role of Women in the Church and Society" presented during the pastoral retreat of 1978 in which she raised some questions to be discussed about the women's ordination in the future, Lode's above-mentioned paper is indeed the only document which tries to pose the problem and challenge the Church in Cameroon not to fall in the "Norwegian and American sin of ordaining women."

Therefore, my biblico-theological and practical approaches to the women's ordination in the second part of this chapter will consist of a critical examination of Lode's arguments advanced against women's ordination in the Church in Cameroon and proposals in favour of women's ordination based on both social and theological considerations.

6.2.1. Arguments Against the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon

The critical examination of Lode's writings on the issue of women's ordination is in my opinion, the most important issue to deal with at this stage of the thesis, not only because these writings were addressed to and are widely spread in the EELC, but also because pastor Lode is the only scholar in the EELC who has expressed his position against the ordination of women based on a biblical and theological interpretation. It is therefore an honest intellectual exercise for me to expose his views, which in a way, are well circulated among and largely accepted by the Christians in Northern Cameroon, before making my own proposals on the issue.

³⁹⁰ See the list of informants in the bibliographical details.

In 1981, probably prompted by Syverson's questions about the role of women in the Church and society in Cameroon, Lars Lode circulated a text on the issue of polygamy and divorce in the EELC. In this text, he vehemently criticised the current practice of the Church in Cameroon, which excludes the polygamous from church membership and accepts divorcees and remarried as members. He pointed out that,

Neither Jesus' words nor the Apostles' prevent polygamy. What God does not allow is not the fact of having many wives, but to be unfaithful to them. The woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. She cannot marry another man without committing adultery. But the husband can take many wives without being unfaithful to anyone of them. This means that a polygamous marriage is also a true marriage before God. It binds the husband to his first wife. And it also binds him to his second, third and tenth wife. The rules of the EELC, which require of a polygamous husband to separate with his wives, except one, and not necessarily the first wife, are therefore contrary to the Word of God.³⁹¹

Thus, Lode's appeal to the leaders of the EELC to

Admit the polygamous to Baptism and Holy Communion, to tell them to be faithful to all their wives, and to take seriously what the Bible says about fidelity in marriage and to not admit the divorcees and remarried persons as workers in the Church.³⁹²

In examining his writings, I come to the conclusion that Lode reached his current position on polygamy and divorce in the church in Africa, after having considered some biblical passages, which he found, were not against polygamy. He also pointed to the fact that in a society in which polygamy is widely accepted like the African society, a man who is married to more than a wife does not necessarily commit adultery. For him, adultery occurs when one separates what God has bound. And in a polygamous society, he argued, a woman dismissed by her husband can

³⁹¹ Lode, L., "Sur la polygamie et le divorce", Ngaoundéré, April, 1981, p. 6, found in the Archives of the NMS, Box No 0001, 22.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

still return to him, even after the marriage of the latter to another wife. What the Bible condemns, he says, is separation or divorce of the spouses. Since, however, polygamy does not separate, it does not imply adultery as long as the husband equally gives to his wives their conjugal rights. Therefore, the Church's current practices in Cameroon, as far as polygamy and divorce are concerned, were purely imposed by the missionaries who brought with them the Roman regulations which imposed monogamy as the only marital practice and allowed remarriage of the divorcees in the Western countries, and applied them in the mission field without any consideration of polygamous system of the people found in place.

These controversial views of pastor Lode on polygamy and divorce in the EELC show how interested our Norwegian missionary was in the issue regarding the woman's position and role in the church and society as a whole. The author's reflection on women's inclusion in pastoral ministry culminates in his criticism of the Norwegian Church in a letter sent to "his friends" (the church members) of Cameroon from Stavanger in May, 1998, when he pointed out that:

The Norwegian Lutheran Church is indeed in a deplorable state. It goes from bad to worse. She [the Norwegian Lutheran Church] is closely linked to the State, and the impious governments presented the bills for which the national assembly voted and the church, following the decision of the national assembly, had accepted.³⁹³

The Norwegian Church, by accepting the government decisions to permit abortion, to allow people living together without being legally married to one another, to impose the ordination of women and to recognise the union of two persons of the same sex as a legal practice, all things that God has forbidden in the church of Christ, the Norwegian Church,

³⁹³ Lode, L., "Letter of May 11, 1998, addressed to the Church leaders in Cameroon", Archives of the NMS, Box No 000, 22.

hammered pastor Lode, has forgotten that God promised to punish the disobedient by throwing them in the everlasting fire.

Continuing with his warning against the disastrous implications of the ordination of women, Lars Lode stated that, “to destroy their Church, the people of Cameroon have to do nothing but simply to follow the example of the Norwegian Church, and they will be assured of going into hell with the impious.”³⁹⁴

Lode’s more elaborate arguments against women’s ordination have been developed in a seven page typed letter³⁹⁵ addressed to the Church leaders in Cameroon, a letter in which he refuted what he calls “the false interpretation of the biblical texts that led his mission society astray to accept the ordination of women” and tried to demonstrate and show a different understanding of biblical passages which, he thought, the defenders of women’s ordination had misunderstood.

According to pastor Lode, those who advocate the ordination of the women basing their arguments on biblical texts have a wrong interpretation of passages like 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2. For instance, the Norwegian Mission Society’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 which states that the advice given by the Apostle in these passages was appropriate only to the context of the time and was not meant to be automatically followed by people in different circumstances and cultures, and that even in that time, it was a wiser way of arranging the life of the church, and today we are free to do differently, is a misleading interpretation. Such an interpretation, Lode pointed out, “does not take into consideration the importance of what 1 Corinthians says

³⁹⁴ See his letter of May 11, 1998 mentioned above.

³⁹⁵ Lode, L., “A l’EELC, par le Président Songsaré Pierre, BP. 06. Ngaoundéré”, dated February 10th, 1990.

about the life of the church as a community and how the Lord of the church Himself is involved in the life of His church.”³⁹⁶ For Lode, his mission society’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 is wrong because in 1 Corinthians, the Apostle has clearly distinguished between the Lord’s Commandments and his own Apostolic advice as it clearly appears in 1 Corinthians 7: 5. To the Lord’s Commandments, asserted our Norwegian missionary, one has the obligation to obey without any discussion. The Apostolic advices, however, should be discussed and decided upon whether it is to be applied or not to a given circumstance.

For pastor Lode, if one does not obey the Lord’s Commandments, the result is nothing but his or her eternal perdition, but if one fails to follow the Apostolic advice, the result will be unhappiness in this present life. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 14: 37, he pointed out, the Apostle says that what he presented to the Corinthians was the Lord’s Commandment and that no one can change it without running the risk of being eternally lost.

Since the immediate context of what the Apostle said in 1 Corinthians 14: 37 is what he says about the role of the women in the assemblies of the church in 1 Corinthians 14: 33-36, and the broader context is that of the relation between men and women developed by the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, let us not go astray but follow the Apostle’s way which is clearly indicated in 1 Corinthians 11: 3, that is, “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ”.

Going on with his interpretation of scriptural passages to defend his position against the ordination of women, Lode argues that

³⁹⁶ Lode, L. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

a parish Pastor functions without any doubt as the leader of the parishioners, it is he who is the head. If a woman functions as a Pastor, she will thus become the head of the men, even the head of her husband if she is a married woman. Consequently, the installation of women as Pastors violates the biblical principle of hierarchy between God, Christ, the man and the woman as it is also shown in Ephesians 5: 22-24; Colossians 3: 18; Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 2: 11-14; 1 Peter 3: 1-6 and Genesis 3: 16. The violation of such a principle will do no good but be the ruin of the community's life as in the case of Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and the 250 elders of Israel mentioned in Numbers 16-17.³⁹⁷

For having claimed the rights to act as priests in Israel according to their understanding of Exodus 19: 6, Lars Lode pointed out, Korah, Dathan and Abiram with their followers were destroyed by God's anger. Today when people argue about why women should be excluded from the ordained ministry, since in Christ we are all equal, they tend to forget what happened to the disobedient people of Israel who tried to argue with God on the established priesthood order.

For pastor Lode, the church of Corinth was actually obedient to what the Apostle transmitted to them from the Lord. That is the reason why for almost 2000 years, all Christian churches throughout the world, following the example of the church of Corinth, have respected the principle of "no ordination of women as pastors". Therefore, the EELC, which is a very young church of about seventy years of existence, should not engage in this disastrous debate on women's ordination. The people of the EELC should remember their past, said pastor Lode. In those days, after having received the light of God, they victoriously suffered all sorts of prejudices from their detractors. Sometimes, they were insulted and publicly ill treated; they took part in the sufferings of the prisoners and when they were dispossessed of their goods, they accepted with joy, knowing that their reward will be of greater value than what they had lost for the sake of their faith.

³⁹⁷ Letter of February 10, 1990, p. 2.

Going on with his argument by emphasising a particular grammatical analysis of verses 34, 35 and 39 of 1 Corinthians 14 as well as the text of 1 Timothy 2, our missionary concludes that women were firmly forbidden by the Apostle to teach the men. They must receive the instruction in silence as it appears in 1 Timothy 2: 11 and 12. The interdiction, however, does not concern the teaching in schools, but the teaching of the Word of God, for women were not allowed to take authority over the men, and this is what the Apostle basically confirms in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

By way of conclusion, pastor Lode in his letter draws the attention of his correspondents to the fact that

the Bible does not allow women to fulfill pastoral functions. Women are not allowed to teach the Bible to the men in the biblical or pastoral schools. This also implies that a woman is not allowed to lead the Sunday worship service. This does not, however, forbid her from announcing publicly the Word of God in the villages, for this does not imply that she becomes leader of the men.³⁹⁸

In other words, missionary Lars Lode's main concern was not that women were not physically, intellectually or spiritually fit for the pastoral ministry, but that by becoming pastors, they will become religious leaders in our communities which also means that the relation of subordination which characterises our patriarchal systems will be challenged in its very foundation, which is the religion itself.

Furthermore, Lode's position on the issue of polygamy in the EELC poses greater difficulties for the Church's current practice in matter of matrimony. If it is true that polygamy was a biblical practice, it does not automatically imply, however, that the Church in Cameroon must adopt such a practice, since not every biblical practice is necessarily Christian.

³⁹⁸ Letter of February 10, 1990, p. 6.

And if the Church in Cameroon is to accept the practice of polygamy which, according to Lars Lode, is not contrary to African practices, the question of the mutual consent and love between the spouses based on the Christian principle of complementing and respecting each other in marriage will still remain unresolved.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, it has been argued by Lars Lode that, according to the Bible a man is free to marry as many wives as he can, provided that he is equally faithful to each and everyone of them, but a woman is bound to one man, that is her husband, even in the case of divorce, as long as the latter is alive. Therefore, it clearly appears that even in matters of matrimony, Lode's understanding of the Bible tends to undermine the women's perception of the social life and their role in both society and church. Such biblical interpretations accord very little importance, if any at all, to the right of women to play their socio-political, cultural and foremost religious roles equally in their societies with their male partners. The question remains, do the church and the Bible which the church applies to the lives of its members, prevent women from taking responsibilities and fulfilling ministries in the church like the pastoral ministry?

6.2.2. Proposals in Favour of the Ordination of Women

In a scholarly paper on the ordination of women in Africa, the well known Kenyan woman theologian and writer, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro³⁹⁹, the then Executive Secretary for the Desk for women in church and society of the Lutheran World Federation, and now the General Secretary of World Young Women Christian Association (WYWCA), pointed out that in the

³⁹⁹ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, "The Ordination of Women in Africa", in Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, (ed.), *In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Theology and Church Leadership*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1997, pp. 147-152.

African context, the debate, the decision and practice of women's ordination are mainly centered on each and every particular church and not necessarily according to denominations or countries. Usually, the decision as to whether or not to ordain women depends on the practices, the vision and the wish of the so-called mother churches from the West. This viewpoint corroborates with what has been going on in the last ten years⁴⁰⁰ between the Lutheran church in Cameroon and its founding mission societies as far as the place and the role of women in the church was concerned.

In a wider context, and using inscriptional and archaeological, as well as literary evidence, Bernadette Brooten⁴⁰¹ provides a scholarly discussion on the issue of women as heads of synagogues, leaders, elders, mothers of synagogues, and priests in her book entitled, *Women Leaders in Ancient Synagogue*. She demonstrates that these titles were not honorific but designated women performing the same functions as men with similar titles in Israel.

In his *Church Divided: The Vatican versus American Catholics*, Priest and ex-Jesuit Terrance Sweeney⁴⁰² pointed out that a significant number of North American Bishops today think that the mission of the Church and the pastoral needs of the faithful would be better served by a priesthood that includes marriage and celibacy, women and men. In his investigation on the Roman Catholic Church's canons mandating celibacy for priests

⁴⁰⁰Here I especially refer to the various letters of missionary Lars Lode about the ministry of women in the church and the issue of polygamy as well as the recommendations of the Lutheran World Federation on the equal treatment between men and women within its member churches.

⁴⁰¹ Brooten, B., *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Scholars Press, Chicago, 1982. Brooten's book is a useful book to read to clarify the debate on whether or not the exclusion of women from the church's ordained ministry today derives from an ancient Judaic practice of the synagogue.

⁴⁰² Sweeney, T., *A Church Divided. The Vatican versus American Catholics*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1992.

and “maleness” for ordination, investigation mostly based on biblical, historical and ethical perspectives, Sweeney asserted that the Church’s laws which impose continence on the priests and exclude the women from the priesthood are no more or less than a violation of human nature and an insult to the dignity of Christian women in whom God and Christ have chosen to reveal themselves through their lives of faithfulness and love.

After having conducted a number of interviews with the Church’s members and read reports and other writings by the missionaries on the issue of women’s ordination, my understanding of the current situation of women is that, the exclusion of women from ordained ministry is, firstly, a missing out on the biblical sense of the ordained ministry, secondly an undermining of the women’s various gifts and a denial of their ability to lead based on social biases, and finally a lack of taking into consideration the challenges of the new socio-political and religious environment in which the Church in Cameroon evolves today.

By standing for the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry of the church, I am conscious of the fact that the majority of my Church’s members of which women constitute a significant number, are against the ordination of women. I also know that some of my colleague pastors in the Church will look at me as an agent of the Western feminism, which for most of them is a vehicle of “evil practices” such as lesbianism and homosexuality legalised in many Western countries, and that the Bible does not allow women to be ordained as pastors. If, however, I do agree with the point that the churches in Africa do not have to emulate the Western models which the churches in the West try to impose on churches in Africa by means of their financial aid⁴⁰³, the Biblical argument against

⁴⁰³ For instance, in the Church in Northern Cameroon, women were sent to the seminary in Meiganga, not because the Church had a purpose and decided to train them in theology, but because the LWF and ELCA had decided to make scholarships available

women is a hermeneutical one and cannot be a matter of choosing some biblical passages to justify a position. Rather, it is a question of how one reads the Bible at the deepest level. On this issue of the interpretation of the Bible, I entirely agree with the Lutheran doctrine of the Word as “living, preached, not dead letter or new law.”

Luther’s understanding of the Word of God as the living self-communication of the living God to a living human being has been widely commented on by Luther’s theologian biographers like Ebeling⁴⁰⁴ and Lull.⁴⁰⁵ The content of this self-communication is redeeming love, grace, good tidings, the Gospel. The Word is thus always *viva vox evangelii*, the living voice of the Gospel. As such, it is in essence the preached Word. The written word alone is a dead letter. The Holy Spirit must make the written word the Word of God in that in this Word the living God addresses a living person. As in the case of the written word, the Holy Spirit must also transform human preaching into the Word of God. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit creates the Word within the human spirit. The Word of God always comes from outside a person (*verbum externum*) and should be proclaimed according to the apostolic witness which is only to be found in the Scriptures, and interpreted according to the needs of the community of the believers of the time.

6.2.3. New Perspectives on the Ordained Ministry in the Lutheran church in Cameroon

The Lutheran church in Cameroon today needs new styles of ministry as partnership in service. Addressing the issue of the women’s full

for women to do theology. Therefore, the Church had no other choice to use the money than sending the women for whom they had no future plan for employment to the seminary.

⁴⁰⁴ Ebeling, G., *Luther An Introduction to his Thought*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1972.

⁴⁰⁵ Lull, T. F., (ed.), *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

participation in ministry in the Lutheran churches in the Third World as an invitee of the Lutheran World Federation in 1980, Letty Russell, an ordained pastor of the United Presbyterian Church in America and lecturer in Biblical Theology at Divinity School of the University of Yale rightly pointed out that:

We [the Christians] must go back to hearing anew what the Bible says to us about our calling to service. [And] we must also go forward with experimental life styles that seek to overcome old dichotomies that we have inherited of: clergy/laity, male/female, rich/poor, black/white, eastern/western, if we are to discover again the *One Calling* of God as partners with Jesus Christ.⁴⁰⁶

However, in going back “to hearing anew what the Bible says to us about our calling to service”, we must be careful lest we fall into the same mistake of interpreting the Bible to justify the male egocentrism, which prevents us from sharing the leadership positions in both church and society with our female counterparts.

Having gone through materials dealing with biblical arguments against and for women’s ordination, I have come to understand that one does not do justice to either the pros or the cons by holding a biblical interpretation, which either favours or denies the rights of women to the ordained ministry. Rather, one should carefully examine what the ordained ministry is all about and what kinds of principles the church followed to arrive at women’s exclusion from this core ministry of the church.

In his attempt to define the church’s ordained ministry, Gerhard O. Forde⁴⁰⁷ stipulated that ordination is the act by which one is placed in the public office of ministry, ministry understood as service to the needs of

⁴⁰⁶ Russell, L., “Flight from Ministry: Women and Ordination”, in Matthiessen, M., (ed.), *Women’s Full Participation for a Renewed Community*, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, 1981, p. 41.

⁴⁰⁷ Gerhard O. Forde, “The Ordained Ministry”, in Nichol, T. and Kolden, M., (eds.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117-136.

God's people. However, perhaps misled by the Latin concept of *ordo*, people often think of ordination as elevation to a higher spiritual order, a higher class, and from there, the trouble starts. Not only does this perception of the ordained ministry provoke resentment and anticlericalism among the unordained members of the church, but it also raises the question of who possesses the authority or power to ordain and who is to be ordained in the church?

Answering my question about the current practice that discriminates against women as far as the admission in the ordained ministry is concerned in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, the Rt. Rev. Pierre Songsaré, former president of the Church, pointed out that

to ordain an individual to the ministry, it does not depend on the decision of one person, be it the president of the Church. Most of our pastors, he continued, come to the pastoral ministry in response to a clear call from God and after having gone through the Church system of approval, which mainly consists of theological training, and a period of internship.⁴⁰⁸

In other words, ordination in the EELC means both God's calling and the response of the person called and the Church's intervention through her regulations of the ministry, which can only be carried out through the Church's institutions.

From my observation of the Lutheran church practices in Northern Cameroon, I have come to understand that ordination in the Church involves the call, the examination, the laying on of the hands and prayer of the Church as well as its public questions put to and the response requested from the ordinand and the promise faithfully to fulfill the conditions of this public office of the church. This is how most of the Christian churches in the world proceed when they ordain or consecrate

⁴⁰⁸ Songsaré, P., Interview of November 17, 1999, in Yaoundé.

their members for specific tasks within their church organisations. As rightly pointed out by Gerhard O. Forde,

The candidate is to serve, proclaim, care, and make argument for the public message and theology of the church. This cannot be stressed enough. One is not called to this office to peddle private opinions. (...) The ordained are to care and seek to gain hearing for the public theology of the church in a particular time and place.⁴⁰⁹

In other words, the ordained ministry is not something that has been precisely defined in the Bible once for all, since in the New Testament, the duties of the early bearers of ministries in the Christian communities were varied and interchangeable, and the needs of the church down through the centuries were subject to variations. Therefore, the ordained ministry in the EELC is to be developed according to its needs and the challenges of its present environment.

How the long-standing debate around the ordination of women observed in the history of the church, alters, confirms or contradicts in anyway the question of the women's ordination in the Lutheran church in Cameroon today is worth consideration. As pointed out by the Rt. Rev. Songsaré in the above mentioned interview, the ordained ministry may be entrusted to anyone who is called, properly prepared to meet the demands of the church examination process, and ready to make the promise to preach and teach according to the public and confessional theology of the church. Since the ordained ministry is rooted in God's call to serve and to bear witness to the eschatological age, where, according to the Letter of Paul to the Galatians⁴¹⁰, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus". Therefore, candidacy for ordination cannot be dependent on distinctions rooted in the old age's concepts, such as gender, class, race, or

⁴⁰⁹ Forde, O. G., in Nichol, T. and Kolden, M., (eds.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.

⁴¹⁰ See Galatians 2: 28, quoted from *The New American Standard Bible Version*

even the supposed religious superiority, that is fitness for sacrificial priesthood. In this sense, men and women are equally called by God and can be ordained if the church's demands of the office are met.

In the EELC today, the urgent step that needs to be taken in favour of the women's ordination is the amendment of the Church's constitution. Like any other constitution of a church in which the ordination of the women is not accepted, the constitution of the EELC in its passages, which speak about the clergy, speak about it exclusively in terms of "man" or "he" who can be ordained. Today, what we need in the EELC is to have a proposed amendment to strike the word "man" and insert "person" in those constitutional passages, which speak about the clergy. Once we have a constitution in which the word "man" for clergy is dropped and "person" inserted, women will then be allowed to contribute with their many and various gifts to the building up of a church in which they have been excluded from the ordained ministry since the inception of Christianity in Northern Cameroon. And only after this, will the Lutheran church in Cameroon hear the stories of women in ordained ministry, and recognise its slowness in acknowledging the stories of women as vital to the history of the church; the congregations will be encouraged to embrace the gifts of ordained women and the Church as a whole will adopt policies and implement practices that include the leadership of women in congregations, in regional as well as national institutions of the Church.

Although, the acceptance of women in the ordained ministry in the EELC will imply proper theological and pastoral training of the women, the solving of social and practical issues like the marriage of the clergy women which have already proved to be a challenge to churches in Cameroon like the Evangelical Church of Cameroon and the Union of

Baptist Churches of Cameroon⁴¹¹ where the ordination of women has been officially accepted, the ordination of women in the EELC, I believe, will have positive results. It will bring different perspectives, more heart/compassion, increased awareness of different but unique gifts of women in ordained ministry, a strengthened culture of cooperation and support, increased acceptance of women clergy from sister churches, acceptance of other marginal communities, changes in style of governance and leadership, a fuller appreciation of a God who promises to include all humanity and all creation, increased tolerance, gender balance, bringing life and spirit into the worshipping community.

On the whole, the result of the interviews conducted with the women of the Church in Northern Cameroon reveals that many of them are looking forward to a time when men and women in ordained ministry will work together in cooperation as the Holy Spirit will lead them. To reach this level of mutual understanding and effective cooperation between men and women in the ordained ministry, some social and political considerations still need to be resolved between the leadership of the Church and its membership.

The main reason invoked by the Lutheran church in Cameroon to oppose the ordination of women today is more of a state political and cultural consideration than a purely theological argument. From the state viewpoint, it has always been advised that for a pacific coexistence with

⁴¹¹ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some protestant churches in Cameroon have accepted the ordination of women. However, the practice of women's ordination within these churches is still hindered by various obstacles in the number of which the marriage of the theologically trained and candidate women for ordination is the most prominent. In fact, from my conversation with the students of the 14th intake at the Lutheran Theological Seminary of Meiganga among whom were some three women on the issue of the marriage of theologically trained single women, the reaction was that no sound minded man would agree to marry a woman theologian and that it was out of question for a single theologically trained woman to dream of being ordained, for the church's practice does not allow non married people to be ordained.

adherents of the Islamic faith and a mutual respect of the others' cultural customs, the church in Northern Cameroon must not ordain women. This argument, however, has never been made public, since the state in Cameroon has always claimed its neutrality in matters of religions practiced by its populations. This situation, however, poses the problem of the role the church plays in society. Does the church have a prophetic role to play, or does it merely reflect the political and cultural context in which it lives?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I must make it clear to my reader that this chapter is not a chapter on the history of the ordained ministry in the EELC, for there is no history of ordained ministry in the EELC. The question of the ordination of women has never been the focus of the Church's members. Apart from the attempt made by Verna Syverson during the pastoral retreat in Ngaoundéré in June 1978⁴¹², where she openly raised the question of women's inclusion in the ordained ministry, from my interviews with the Church leaders which gave them opportunity to express themselves on the issue and from some sporadic reactions of certain missionaries who are against the ordination of women, there was nothing being discussed on the ordination of women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon.

In this chapter, I have tried to raise the problem of the women's inclusion in the ordained ministry in the EELC. By indicating that the socio-political, economic and cultural context in which the woman of Cameroon in general and the woman of Northern Cameroon in particular lives today is not the same as it was seventy-five years ago, I also meant that, if the woman was denied the right to be ordained in the past because of her particular status in African societies of the time, today things have

⁴¹² See Syverson's paper mentioned earlier in this chapter.

changed and it is time for the Church to benefit from the women's full participation in its various ministries and especially in the ordained ministry.

A critical analysis of the opponents' arguments against the ordination of women based mostly on questionable biblical interpretations and some outdated cultural practices of the so-called African traditions proved that, to continue with the old practices of the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon which consists of excluding women from full participation in the leadership positions is nothing but the abdication of our responsibility to heed the urgent call to serve the needs of the world in justice and equality of all in God's creation.

As pointed out in my proposals, the acceptance of women in the ordained ministry in the church in Cameroon will help the EELC to play its prophetic role which is to warn and alert the people of any wrong doing in their midst of which consequences are the misleading and the loss of people, and to speak out God's message to His people for repentance and change for the good of all.

The acceptance of the women in the ordained ministry in the church in Cameroon will show whether a church like the EELC is merely a social institution which perpetuates the ideology of the dominant class at the expense of the marginal or not. Furthermore, the plain fact is that the women of the EELC do speak for themselves today. They speak, that is they preach and teach, quite as well as men when they are trained and are given the opportunity to do so. The example of Rebecca Numjal, whose biography I presented in chapter five, testifies that women are just as capable as men of performing any function in the church as well as in society. Since we live today in a society which is utterly different from the

societies in which our forefathers lived almost a century ago, and since women have claimed for themselves and have justly obtained entry into every other profession in life such as law, the army, industry, medicine, and so forth, why should we continue in church to deny them the right to be ordained?

When one looks at this issue of the women's ordination from an ecumenical perspective, one notices that only certain parts of the Christianity, like the EELC, forbid women to become pastors in Cameroon. Among the protestant churches with which the Lutheran church of Cameroon had a good working relationship since its inception, the Union of Baptist Churches in Cameroon was the first to ordain women. Louise Tapa, the first female Baptist minister was ordained in the early 1990s. Then came the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, one of the largest protestant denominations in the country. Its first woman pastor was ordained in 2001, after having gone through an extremely long period (between six to ten years) of internship⁴¹³. Meanwhile, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, a church that works mostly among the English speaking people of Cameroon, recently agreed to ordain women, and already has a woman pastor heading one of its ecclesiastical districts.⁴¹⁴

The Cameroonian Presbyterian Church, another large protestant denomination with which the Lutheran church collaborates closely, has up to now refused to ordain women and the struggle this church has been going through recently says much about its leaders' love for power. It is, therefore, legitimate to wonder with Richard Hanson

whether the leaders of those Christian communities who today continue to deny women access to the priesthood, realize how ungenerous, how

⁴¹³ See Interview with Rev. Fossou Pascal, on April 4, 2002 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Rev. Fossou Pascal, April 4, 2002 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

ignoble, how narrow and indeed how selfish they appear to those women who desire ordination and to those men and women who agree with them.⁴¹⁵

Today, if there is an urgent need to be addressed in the EELC, it is the question of the women's inclusion in leadership and ordained ministry of the church. Today in the EELC, there are women who are convinced that they have a calling from God to be ordained as pastors. If the convictions of some may be mistaken, as may be the convictions of some men who desire the same, we have no right to declare that their convictions must be mistaken, just because they are women.

⁴¹⁵ Hanson, R., *Christian Priesthood Examined*, Lutterworth Press, Guildford and London, 1979, p. 114.

Chapter Seven: Challenges Facing Women in Church and Society in Northern Cameroon Today

Introduction

The exclusion of women from public institutions where political, economic and cultural decisions are made within African societies is the result of a long historical process. To fully understand how this women's marginalisation came about in the social history of the Africans, one needs to consider the way in which people are socialised in the African context.

Today, with the advent of the political democratisation of the modern societies, there is more and more opportunity for the then marginalised peoples of the world to make themselves heard and to claim better positions in political, economic and cultural structures of their respective societies. In Africa as elsewhere in the world, the time has come for the empowerment of the outcasts. Therefore, the role that these marginalised peoples have to play in social, political and cultural matters becomes increasingly important for the well being of the society as a whole. In this concluding chapter of my thesis, I would like to discuss some important issues pertaining to the women's education as a *sine qua non* for their access to leadership and to formal economic, political and cultural structures in church and society in Northern Cameroon today. The main argument in this chapter is that the educational, economic and cultural situation of women in contemporary Cameroon, concern the church.

The church's ethical responsibility and role in ensuring justice, equity and respect for all people in society, the various gifts they contribute with to build up their respective communities, are very important. Therefore, the church's engagement with the government and other institutions in

making better the life of women through education, economic and cultural empowerment, is the focus of this concluding chapter of my thesis.

7.1. Education as Enabling Factor for Women's Access to Leadership

In an article on education, Margaret Sutton pointed out that since the early 1970s,

the education of girls and women in the Third World has become an increasingly prominent item on the agenda of scholars of education and international assistance agencies. Educating girls, she noted, has lately been heralded as one of the most significant steps that can be taken to ensure social and economic development in poorer countries.⁴¹⁶

Despite the widespread international support given to the empowerment of the women through education, however, the opportunity to develop female participation and achievement in schools in Northern Cameroon lags behind that of their male counterparts. As mentioned early in chapter three, the traditional systems of education in Northern Cameroon, as in most African societies, were meant to provide knowledge about societies' mores, values and practical skills. Girls and boys were initiated to life differently, especially when past the stage of the early childhood. Although the women (the mothers) were the most concerned with their children, both males and females' education, there was a clear distinction between bringing up a boy and bringing up a girl in African traditional societies. In this sense, the African educational system in Northern Cameroon was rarely found to be coeducational. Even today, in the rural communities people still rely on the traditional system of education to provide their members with general knowledge and specific skills for agricultural activities, art as well as the political and cultural leadership. In this sense, individuals were brought up in such a way that they might be fit

⁴¹⁶ Sutton, M., "Girls' Education, Access and Attainment", in Stromquist, N., (ed.), *Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues*, Gasland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1998, pp. 381-396, p. 381.

to play the role assigned by the community to which they belong. The outcome of such an educational system is the division of labour along gender lines. Given the fact that this single-gender education system is widespread in Northern Cameroon, the women in this region up to now are mostly orientated toward domestic tasks while their male counterparts are prepared to face the challenges of the modern society in the public sphere.

The Western type of education as well as the Quranic school system introduced in Northern Cameroon by the agents of the Western colonial powers, the missionaries, and the Muslim people respectively have been and still are discriminatory in their orientation as far as the education of the women is concerned. A system of education inspired by the Western and Islamic types of education like the one which is being implemented by the government of Cameroon today cannot assist the furthering of the women's education without a significant change in its orientation. As rightly pointed out by N'Dri Assié-Lumumba,

Although, the Muslim population challenged European education on religious and other grounds, in terms of its patriarchal foundations and gender imbalance, Quranic education presented, at least at the higher levels, some structural similarities with European, Christian-based formal education.⁴¹⁷

No school system, be it Islamic or European, put in place in Northern Cameroon, whether it is organised by the state or by the religious institutions like the churches, share the same value regarding gender roles. For instance in the Christian tradition, the place of a woman is limited to the domestic or private sphere of life while the man's domain is the public. An evaluation of the church educational institutions in Northern Cameroon today shows clearly that the attempt made by the missionaries

⁴¹⁷ Assié-Lumumba, N., "Women in West Africa", in Stromquist, N., (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 533-542, p. 534.

to educate the indigenous people was mostly based on this principle of separating women from men in the school. The education of the female population designed by the missionaries in Northern Cameroon was meant to fulfill the needs of a life that revolves around the home, while the male population was prepared to take responsibilities outside the home, in public sphere.

When they took over from the Germans after the First World War, the French colonial government created schools in Northern Cameroon for the Muslim chiefs' sons in order to train them so that they could protect the French people's interests and transmit orders to the people whom they lorded over. Although in many cases, when the Muslim chiefs were forced to send their sons to the colonial schools, they fooled the administration by sending children from lower strata, the girls were exempted from enrollment in these schools. This point confirms what Assié-Lumumba criticises in the Western educational system introduced in Africa during the colonial times, when she pointed out that:

The Europeans wanted to reproduce their system of a social division of labour in which women had little education and lived a domestic life. They [the Europeans] would have rejected any attempts by the African men, to enroll girls and women in the schools, which were designed to train future leaders and clerical workers.⁴¹⁸

And yet a modern education that equips people to fulfill adequately their social roles is what the women of Northern Cameroon need the most in their fight for recognition today. Why the women of Northern Cameroon so desperately need a modern education and what the importance of an inclusive educational system for the women in this context is, is an important aspect of the question under discussion in this chapter. My attempt in the following section of this chapter is, therefore, to show the

⁴¹⁸ Stromquist, N., (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 534.

importance of the training of the women for both the church and the society, and to bring out some difficulties that hinder the modern training of the women in Northern Cameroon today.

7.1.1. The Importance of Modern Education of the Women in Northern Cameroon

In modern societies, schools are often considered as the main vehicle for achieving individual mobility and collective progress. They are also viewed as institutions that promote social and economic development, as well as the development of democratic ideals the practice of which is based on universalistic values such as equality, meritocracy and justice. During the colonial times and in the beginning of the missionary work in Northern Cameroon, some African children (exclusively the boys) were provided with “technical education” in colonial or missionary training centres. African girls had no access to such Western type of training, despite the fact that they were the ones whom their mothers associated in their early ages to activities like agriculture production, the transformation of agricultural products, the fabrication of utensils and trading.

After the independence of Cameroon in 1960, the colonial educational system was abolished and there was an attempt to create educational institutions for both males and females by the new national government and its partners like the churches, which continued to share the responsibility of educating the indigenous people. However, the number of girls enrolled in the new schools was far below that of the boys. In the region of Northern Cameroon for instance, the statistics given by the department of education of the EELC confirms the imbalance between the schooling of boys and girls in the region. For instance, in the Church school district of Meiganga, only forty-seven out of 145 pupils enrolled at

the Ngam mission school in 1959, were girls.⁴¹⁹ What resulted from this new school system was the legalisation of an imbalanced social system by the national government that continued to deprive women of their basic rights. Although women are always in the forefront of any production activity in the society, they could not benefit from the new school system and be acknowledged for their important contribution to social, economic and cultural development. Today, the women of Northern Cameroon count among the poorest of the society because of their lack of education. The need for educating the women appears, therefore, as one of the crucial issues facing both the government and the religious institutions like the church in Northern Cameroon today.

In his balance-sheet report presented before the general assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in 1991⁴²⁰, the President of the Church, the Rt. Rev. Pierre Songsaré in a section on the education of women pointed out that the education of the women is the most important issue to be considered by the Church in the future. Basing his argument on some statistics, provided by the national government of Cameroon and the LWF, Songsaré⁴²¹ drew his auditors' attention to the fact that the majority of the Church members were women and for this reason, the Church should seriously examine the fate of women in a society that is rapidly changing. Women represent 52% of the Cameroonian population, he indicated. So in all international meetings, he went on with his argument in favour of the women, it should be constantly required that women be given a certain quota of representation.

⁴¹⁹ See the Statistics of the education secretary's office of the Lutheran church of Cameroon in 1998/1999.

⁴²⁰ "Rapport du Président de l'EELC au 16^e Synode Général réuni du 8 au 12 mai 1991 à Poli", in the Office of General Secretary of the Church in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

⁴²¹ This section of the report of the President on the education of women shows how often the church leaders play the game of politicians within the church. For the Rt. Rev. Songsaré A. Pierre was not in favour of women's ordination. See "Interview with Songsaré Pierre in appendix 1.

The importance of educating women in Northern Cameroon today lies in the fact that, educated, women will be equipped to overcome the harsh conditions in which they live; skilled for the informal sector of economic activity; skilled for the labour market as well as trained for the unemployed worker and re-skilling those already engaged in labour market; and preparing them for political and cultural dimensions which address civic issues, social justice, and social participation in civil society. In that, education is sine qua non for women's effective participation in political, economic and religious or cultural life in Northern Cameroon. The obstacles to be dealt with in order to reach this level of women's participation in church and society in Northern Cameroon through modern education, however, remain considerable.

7.1.2. Difficulties Facing the Training of Women in Northern Cameroon Today

As indicated earlier in the beginning of this section, African parents responding to the needs of the colonial school were reluctant to send their daughters to school. Unfortunately, this attitude of the parents towards their daughters' schooling has had an enduring impact on today's female education in Northern Cameroon. Despite the fact that parents are now encouraged by both the government and religious institutions to send both their sons and daughters to school, boys are still more likely than girls to progress through primary and secondary education. Girls repeat classes and leave school before completion of their schooling more frequently than boys do in Northern Cameroon.⁴²² However, it must be clearly made known that it is not the simple fact of being born a girl that determines one's educational chances in Northern Cameroon today. To understand

⁴²² See the statistics of the education secretary's office of the Lutheran church in Cameroon mentioned earlier in this paragraph.

why girls' schooling is a big challenge for the educational system in the region of Northern Cameroon, one has to consider other determinant factors in the matter such as the state policy, the social, economic and religious status of each individual in the society. When parents are asked to send their children to school, they prefer to send their boys when the schools are far from the village. The lack of a boarding service in public and private schools, the poverty in which most of the families live, the gender division of labour as well as the division of social and religious tasks within the society, greatly hinder a good and modern education of the women in Northern Cameroon. Encouragement from relatives, teachers and peers, the political will and commitment by the state and religious institutions to education in general and gender issues in particular can constitute assets for the education of women in Northern Cameroon.

With regard to the economic aspect of the lives of the women in the Lutheran church in Cameroon, The Rt. Rev. Songsaré warned that earning money by means of prostitution and the making of beer and alcoholic drinks must be replaced by healthier occupations. In Benin and Nigeria, he pointed out, trading is the monopoly of the women. To begin a business, however, one needs enough money which most of our women in Cameroon do not have. Furthermore, the phenomenon of urbanisation in Africa makes things much more difficult to bear for our women in the rural areas. When a woman has to carry a basket of sweet potatoes or cassava on her head and walk for ten kilometres or more before she reaches the nearby town where she can find a market place to sell them, the church should sympathise with such sufferings. Hence, the following appeal made to the Church general assembly by Songsaré:

Our women deserved the contribution of anyone among us to help them out with the problem of their economic dependency. All the Christians of good will should come out and help in preventing our young girls from getting married at the age of twelve or thirteen years old. It is the

early marriage of women, which prevents them from pursuing further studies and training. In our Church [the Lutheran church], there are regions where only a few women possess a school certificate. The HIV-AIDS pandemic constitutes a great threat to our population and we need to strengthen the education of the women in order to prepare them for the fight against this pandemic.⁴²³

7.2. The Women's Access to Formal Economic, Political and Cultural Structures as a Survival Strategy.

Despite the fact that everywhere in the world, women play an important role in the production of goods, they still remain the most marginal group when one considers the official institutions where economic, political and cultural decisions are made for the advancement of national or international communities. Writing on the marginal situation of the women in the so-called Third World countries, Shirley Walters pointed out that:

Most women in the Third World are outside of formal economic, political, or educational structures. They often do not have easy access to education and training. It is only through informal and non-formal education that they can have an opportunity to learn new skills, develop different attitudes, or acquire new knowledge.⁴²⁴

The economic, political and cultural situation of the women in Northern Cameroon is no exception from the point made by the author of the article mentioned earlier in this chapter. On a national level, the women of Northern Cameroon, due to the early spreading of the Islamic religion and the strong African traditional practices in the region, are said to be less emancipated than the women in the southern part of the country, who are relatively better integrated into formal sectors of public life.

⁴²³ Songsaré A. P. "Report of the President of the EELC at the 16th General Synod Held on May 8-12, 1991, in Poli", p. 7.

⁴²⁴ Walters, S., "Informal and Nonformal Education", in Stromquist, N., (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 436-443, p. 436.

In Northern Cameroon, women have been and are still being kept outside of the formal economic, political, and cultural life. To involve them in every dimension of the public life is the main concern of any political, economic, or religious organisation working towards a harmonious social development in which the concepts of social justice, gender equality and freedom for all cease to be empty slogans and become the driving forces for the expected new change in Northern Cameroon.

7.2.1. Women and Economic Production in Northern Cameroon

In her paper on the women of West Africa, N'Dri Assié-Lumumba⁴²⁵ argues that in Africa, women play a vital role in the economy, especially in agricultural production, which historically has been the main economic endeavour and is the most important source of the revenues of African states.

As a nation, the economy of Cameroon is said to depend greatly on agricultural production. According to FAO statistics on Cameroon, about 69.8% of the economically active population of Cameroon had agriculture as the main economic activity in 1980.⁴²⁶ Growing of food crops has been and still is the basic domain of the women's economic production in Northern Cameroon. The introduction of cash crops during the time of the colonisation, carried on by the national governments since 1960, when Cameroon gained its political independence from France, has, however, brought significant changes to the women's economic production role in Cameroon in general and in Northern Cameroon in particular. The women who used to have control of food production in the traditional societies became mere tools of the capitalist economy in the hands of the men who

⁴²⁵ N'Dri Assié-Lumumba, in Stromquist, (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, p. 536.

⁴²⁶ See Ralph Uwechue and al. (eds.), *Africa Today*, published by African Books Limited, Third Edition, London, 1996, pp. 503-529, p. 523.

became after the colonists, the owners of the land. From their position as managers of food crops that they used to process and commercialise in the African traditional context, the women of Northern Cameroon were put in a situation where they had to merely offer free labour for the new economic system in which they had become 'invisible' and yet key producers.

Despite the fact that in the modern economic system, their position became more of an exploited social class, the women of Cameroon, especially those who engaged themselves in women's organisations like the church women's organisations, continue to play an important role in food production which still constitutes the only way for them to participate in trading activity. The overwhelming presence of women who sell the surplus of their production in raw, cooked or processed forms in the open markets in cities, towns and villages in Northern Cameroon demonstrates the vitality of the women's contribution to the economic production in the region. Even in Islamic societies like the Fulani or Hausa societies of Northern Cameroon in which the seclusion of women is a current practice, the secluded women still take part in small trade.

Part of the handicap created by the absence of freedom of movement of Muslim married women in Northern Cameroon is alleviated by the girls (daughters, nieces, cousins), who act as extensions of these women.

In the city of Ngaoundéré, the capital city of the administrative province of Adamawa where the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon headquarters are located, it is a current practice to see young girls selling on the streets and markets a variety of commodities processed by their mothers, aunts and grand mothers within the family compound.

Lisbet Holtedahl, professor of social anthropology at the university of Tromso in Norway and founder of a university research project called “Ngaoundéré-Anthropos”, has written a scholarly paper in which she has thoroughly analysed the ongoing changes that affect the lives of the women, the Muslims, the Christians as well as the adherents of the African religions, living in the city of Ngaoundéré.⁴²⁷

According to Holtedahl’s study, the daily life of the women in Ngaoundéré revolves around buying or selling various commodities.

The women’s market space in Cameroon in general and in Northern Cameroon in particular, expands from rural to urban areas, and at least three categories of women work together in a complementary manner to succeed in their enterprise. Firstly, there are those rural women who are farmers and who sell their products directly at the market in rural or small urban centres. Secondly, there are women whose activity is to buy large quantities of farm products from local markets and sell them wholesale to retailers in towns and cities. And thirdly, the retailers, also called *buyamsellam*, sell these farm agricultural products in the urban centres. The involvement of women in the commercialisation of the farm products and other commodities at the level of small business is not specificity to Cameroon alone. Similar ways of organising trading activities among the women were also noticed by N’Dri Assié-Lumumba in West African countries like Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Togo.⁴²⁸

In short, the introduction of large-scale cash crops production severely reduced the women’s economic sphere in Cameroon. Women have had no power in the production or marketing of those crops or in the use of the

⁴²⁷ See Lisbet Holtedahl, “Education, économie et idéal de vie: les femmes de Ngaoundéré”, in Boutrais, J. (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 274-304.

⁴²⁸ See N’Dri Assié-Lumumba, “Women in West Africa”, in Stromquist (ed.), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 533-542.

profits realised from them. Their sphere of agricultural trade has also been confined mostly to food crops. Having little or no formal education at all, women in Cameroon and especially in Northern Cameroon are still under represented in the modern economic sector. There is still much to be done by the government, the church and the other social institutions for the economic empowerment of women in Cameroon.

7.2.2. Women in the Social and Cultural Transformation Process in Northern Cameroon

One of the African social institutions that has been the least altered by external influences in Northern Cameroon is the family. In a traditional Western sense, a family can be defined as a nuclear unit composed of a husband, a wife, and the children. But in the African context, the family is an extended group composed of a larger number of people sharing various aspects of family life, including the living space, the rights and responsibilities in raising children, and the daily and major decision-making processes. If one looks at the way an African family is organised, one easily notices that one of the main characteristics significantly affecting the lives of the women in the household is the legal or widespread practice of polygamy, that is the right for a man to have more than one wife. Despite the fact that all Western Christian missions involved in the evangelisation of the people of the region worked hard towards the abolition of polygamy, its practice is still widespread even among the Christians.

It has been sometimes argued that Islam spread quickly in Northern Cameroon because some of the Quranic prescriptions or laws, such as the one related to the practice of polygamy, were compatible with the African

culture.⁴²⁹ However, in Northern Cameroon today, there are divergent arguments regarding the problems and benefits related to polygamous marriages. It is not simply polygamy per se, but the corruption of the institution itself, the unequal level of educational and economic power to the advantage of men, that has led to many of the socioeconomic problems that women face today in Cameroon.

Furthermore, there are some new challenges in the area of health that are directly related to the practice of polygamy. For instance, the husband and the wives in a polygamous marriage almost inevitably run the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases if one of them, through whatever means, contracts the disease. With the threat that HIV-AIDS represents for the vulnerable fringe of the society like the youth and the women, there are increased risks to consider, when proper decisions are not taken to fight against certain so-called African social and cultural practices like polygamy.

To address this and other emerging issues related to African social and cultural practices, as far as the situation of women is concerned, the adoption of monogamy as recommended by the churches cannot be sufficient. A major task remains to be undertaken by the government as well as the religious institutions like the church, for cultural, economic and political empowerment of the women, and the social education and awareness of both men and women to effect a change of behaviour that is compatible with the new social reality and changes of the day.

⁴²⁹ See Plumey, Y. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 33-52, a chapter of his book dealing with the reasons why Muslims easily succeeded in converting African peoples to the Islamic faith than the Christian missionaries.

Conclusion

From the discussion of the current challenges facing the full integration of women into society in Northern Cameroon, two important remarks need to be made, by way of concluding this last chapter of my thesis.

Firstly, there must be a clear statement on the importance of giving a modern education to the women in order to enable them to fully partake in the leadership of both the church and the society as a whole. The task of educating women must be carried out by both the government and the religious institutions like the churches in Northern Cameroon. To give a modern education to the women in Northern Cameroon requires more than just allowing them to be schooled at the same learning institutions with their male counterparts. It implies also that the women should be given the same opportunities to carry on a profession of their choice and ability, without being confined to specific tasks as they used to be confined to domestic work.

Secondly, and this relates also to the first point, if the issue of gender discrimination is to be engaged and overcome quickly, this task of educating women to enable them to liberate themselves from old and oppressive systems of our societies, must be the preoccupation of all members of our respective communities, regardless of their religious, social or political identities.

General Conclusion

To put an end to what I consider as my most important intellectual and spiritual journey, I would like to draw some conclusions, which I hope, will help the reader to understand quickly what has been mainly dealt with in this doctoral thesis.

My first effort through this research aimed at depicting the crucial situation in which women live in the church as well as in the society as a whole in Northern Cameroon, and to suggest a way of escaping from it by way of full participation of the women in the decision-making bodies, especially in the church where I think, the relationships between men and women should be based on mutual love and respect of each other.

Therefore, in an epilogue to this study, I gave the main reasons as to why a man like me chose to write about the women's issue. While my first chapter, which is also the introductory chapter of this work sketches out my motivation, my methodological approach to the study as well as an overview of the chapters.

The second chapter of this research locates geographically the region of Northern Cameroon, which is our field of study, and presents though briefly, the historical background of the peoples and the institutions this research is all about.

In chapter three, a precise and concise study of the situation of women of Northern Cameroon in the pre-Christian era, helped to reveal the relative freedom that women used to enjoy in the region before the introduction of the Arabo-Islamic and Western-Christian civilisations. While in chapter four, I deal with the important contribution of the women missionaries as they worked hard towards the implantation and growth of Christianity in

Northern Cameroon. In chapter five, the reader is introduced to some of the greatest African women figures whose contribution to the consolidation of the work of the mission societies and the Lutheran church in the region has been remarkable, and yet not publicly recognised by the society.

In chapter six, the issue of the women's ordination in the Lutheran church in Cameroon has been scrutinised with specific considerations made of some writings of the missionaries who are opposed to the women's ordained ministry in the church. After having analysed the social, biblical and theological arguments developed by some missionaries and the Church leaders against the ordination of women, and after having read a number of publications on the topic from the African as well as the non African perspective, my conclusion is that a church in which all the gifts are welcome for the edification of one another and for the community as a whole is a church that ordains men as well as women.

Finally, in chapter seven, the current issues facing women's full participation in church and in society, like the issue of education, access to economic production as well as to political structures have been considered. All in all, after a critical analysis of the situation, it appears that the women in Northern Cameroon are culturally and religiously alienated, politically oppressed, and economically exploited by the current systems. To restore the image of dignity to the women and to liberate them from these oppressive systems, there is a need for a profound change in the people's mentality. In other words, the fight for the women's liberation implies the unhappiness of those who hold on to the old systems. In this context, how to conciliate the need of a specific liberation for women with the demand of those who feel they are right to keep things going in the same way they have been going for centuries? In other words, in which

way can the issue of gender identity as it challenges us today, be envisaged, not as a hindrance to the building up of a new human society in which both men and women can live in love and respect of each other's gender, but as its solid basis?

The answer to this question, I believe, does not lie in the dissolution of one's gender identity, but in our awareness of being at the same time dependent on our own natural gifts and the contribution of the others towards the building up of a society in which we all will live in harmony, regardless of our gender identity, our cultural background or the religion we embrace.

Based mostly on oral interviews since nothing about the work of women in the Lutheran church in Northern Cameroon, apart from reports by missionaries for their mission societies, the aim of this thesis has been to explore both the past and the present of Christianity in Northern Cameroon in order to make known to a wider public the extent of women's contribution to social, cultural, and religious change.

Northern Cameroon has a quite different historical development from the south of the country, with a significant difference being the presence of Islam in the north, which dates back to the eleventh century. However, the situation of women in the church and society in Northern Cameroon today is no different from that experienced by women throughout centuries of male domination and, indeed, still experience in most of the traditions and cultures of the African continent.

Despite telling their stories to myself, a man, the women were enthusiastic and openly willing to relate their experiences as church members, as well as their thoughts about how they believed relations between men and

women in church should be. An explanation for this attitude is that most of the women were familiar with me as one of a very few Lutheran pastors in Cameroon with a concern for the position of women in both church and society.

The thesis concludes with proposals in favour of the women's full participation in the church ministries, which include the ordained ministry, and some suggestions on the necessary mutual collaboration between men and women in social, economic and political domains in Northern Cameroon.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

1. Oral Interviews

Writing about the methods and tools of doing history in Africa, Claude-Hélène Perrot⁴³⁰ pointed out that compared to the task of historians who make use of written sources, the task of those who use oral sources is double. For the historian who writes using oral data, it is important not only to analyse and interpret the existing sources, be they oral or written, but also necessary to constitute a corpus of sources which, in most of the cases, do not exist, and to constitute them according to the strictness of the scientific requirements.

For the oral interviews, it is important to know how to listen to an interviewee without interrupting him or her. Therefore, a dialogue in the form of questions has in fact the inconvenient to limit the informant in his or her answers. For this reason, all my interviews were conducted in the form of free conversation with my informants, and only after having conducted a given interview that I sat down and sketched a questionnaire to see how far I have gone in my data collection work and what was still lying ahead of me to have a complete view of the issue under investigation.

However, to go from the oral interviews to the written form of a document which can be consulted and referred to as an historical source requires a delicate operation. Therefore, each and every interview conducted in the frame of this research has been selected as a valid document to refer to, and has been labeled with the name of the informant, his or her age, his or

⁴³⁰ Perrot, C-H., "Méthodes et outils de l'histoire: source orale de l'histoire de l'Afrique", in Bah, T M., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 282-299.

her gender identity, his or her position in the church, and the date and place where the interview took place. By doing so, I hope to enable the reader to follow, appreciate and eventually criticize the way in which I argued my thesis from these sources. This will also help any other researcher who might be interested in doing similar research to utilizing the same materials without necessarily going through the same process of data collection like me.

About the Informants and the Information

All in all, about thirty-five people were interviewed in three different countries, namely Cameroon, Norway and South Africa as part of the data collection for the realization of this thesis. Twenty-seven of the interviewees were women and eight men.

The interviews were conducted in French, in *Fulfulde* (an African language spoken by most of the people in Northern Cameroon of which this research is all about), and in English.

Apart from the group of regional women leaders of the Women For Christ interviewed collectively in Ngaoundéré on October 14, 1999, during their annual meeting of the evaluation of their programmes, all other interviews took place on an individual basis.

Fifteen interviewees have either served or are still serving as missionaries in Cameroon. Only one person out of twenty non-missionary interviewees is a non-Cameroon national, the nineteen remaining are all Cameroon nationals.

All the women interviewed in this work, except the one from Madagascar, have worked or are still working in the women's movement in the church in Cameroon. Only one of these women is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon (EEC), a church that belongs to the reformed tradition.

All the interviews conducted in Norway were recorded on audiotapes and will be transcribed and deposited in the Lutheran Theological Institute of Meiganga in Cameroon where they can be consulted. The interviews in Cameroon and in South Africa were conducted in a non-directed way. I first introduced the topic and then let my interviewee express him or herself in a non-directed manner while at the same time I took note of different aspects of our conversation with regard to the role and the position of women both in the church and in the society as a whole. These interviews too, although in hand written form, will be typed and kept in the library of the Lutheran Theological Institute of Meiganga, where they will be accessible to future researchers who are interested in women's studies. All the interviewees, without exception, have given their consent for the information to be released.

The last remark I can make about the interviewees before the following diagram is that, despite the fact that I am a man, all the twenty-seven women I interviewed were very enthusiastic and openly willing to tell their stories and experiences as church members, as well as their thoughts about what they believed the relations between men and women in church should look like.

This attitude of my female interviewees can be explained by the fact that most of them, although they did not all have personal relationship with me, at least knew me as one of a very few Lutheran ministers in Cameroon

who has a concern for women's position in both church as well as in society as a whole.

Name	Date of Birth	Gender	Position in the Church	Date and Place of Interview
Ahmadou J.	23-1-1967	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Alema R.	18-4-1972	F	Theologically Trained Woman	31-11-1999 in Garoua-Boulai, Cameroon
Assabé S.	1961	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Bjorg J.	1958	F	Wife of a Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	16-11-2000 in Stavanger, Norway
Bohnhoff T.	1-4-1938	F	Former Missionary of the NMS, Wife of an ELCA Missionary and Director of the Christian Education in the EELC	28-12-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Bohnhoff L.	1936	M	Missionary of and ELCA's Representative in Cameroon	10 and 29-11-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Bou-Ouray A.	1965	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Braut S.	75 Years	F	Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	18-11-2000 in Stavanger, Norway

Chance M.	?	F	Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	13-11-2000 in Bergen, Norway
Christensen T.	?	M	Missionary of ELCA and Dean of the Lutheran Institute in Meiganga	21-11-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Darman J.	?	F	Pastor's Wife	2-11-1999 in Meiganga, Cameroon
Darman P.	1925	M	First Indigenous Leader of the Lutheran church in Cameroon	2-11-1999 in Meiganga, Cameroon
Doudou K.	26-2-1958	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-11-1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon
Djomghoué P.	?	F	Ordained Pastor of the EEC	15-7-2002 in Douala, Cameroon
Fossouo P.	?	M	Ordained Pastor of the EEC	4-4-2002 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
Hetlesaeter H.	75 Years	F	Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	20-11-2000 in Olen, Norway
Houmlo T.	54 Years	M	Pastor and President of South Region of the EELC	15-11-1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon
Kaldhol R.	1951	F	Wife of a Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	9-11-2000 in Molde, Norway
Koulagna K P.	1955	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Magueu M.	36 Years	F	Student in Theology	16-11-1999 in

				Yaoundé, Cameroon
Moundoum J.	1934	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Nambossi J.	1947	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Numjal R.	1926	F	Retired Catechist?	15-11-1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon
Nyiwé F.	40 Years	F	Pastor's Wife	1-11-1999 in Meiganga, Cameroon
Razaka R.	?	F	Member of the Marie-Marthe Association	1-5-2002 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
Roen E.	?	F	Wife of a Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	28-10-2000 in Trondheim, Norway
Roen I.	?	M	Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	28-10-2000 in Trondheim, Norway
Sandvik E.	1935	M	Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	25-11-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Satou M.	?	F	Director of the WFC	30-11-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Solveig Lunde	?	F	Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	20-11-2000 in Olen, Norway
Songsaré P.	16-11-1937	M	Former President of the Lutheran church in Cameroon	17-11-1999 in Yaoundé, Cameroon
Strand E.	?	F	Former Missionary	4-11-2000 in

			of the NMS in Cameroon	Brammen, Norway
Vatne E.	2-8-1958	F	Wife of a Former Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	4-11-2000 in Oslo, Norway
Yatabé M.	1952	F	Regional Leader of the WFC	14-10-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon
Eliassen E.	15-10-1935	F	Missionary of the NMS in Cameroon	27-12-1999 in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon

2. Archival Materials

As part of my effort to collect the maximum of data pertaining to my topic, I visited the national office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, as well as the archives of the founding mission societies, the NMS and the SM/ELCA in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon in 1999. After having obtained from my sponsors photocopies of necessary documents pertaining to my research from the ELCA's archives in Saint Paul, Minneapolis, I travelled to Norway at the end of 2000, to interview some retired missionaries of the NMS in Cameroon, and to visit the archives of the NMS in Stavanger.

The outcome of all this archival research is the abundance of the primary sources composed of the minutes of the church general meetings, the annual reports and correspondence of the missionaries, which I extensively used to write this thesis.

2.1. Archives of the ELCA, Region 3, Lutheran Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA. (1923-2000)

The Region 3 archives center of ELCA holds records of the work of synods in the region. It also houses materials from the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, later named the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which merged in 1960 into the American Lutheran Church, and records from the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America's predecessor bodies: The United Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Hauge Synod, and the Norwegian Synod.

In addition to that, the Region 3 archives of the ELCA has all the information and materials from Lutheran missionaries of the SM/ELCA who work in Cameroon since 1923 until today. These documents are

composed of reports and letters written by the missionaries to their sending mission society in the US and Canada, the articles published in various reviews related to the missionary work as well as the minutes of the missionary meetings held in the mission field.

All the materials from the Region 3 archives of ELCA that I used in this thesis were written by the women missionaries. These documents are either in the handwriting or typed forms. They were mostly written in English, except one or two reports and letters written in Norwegian and Danish. In my footnotes, I referred to these materials as “Correspondence of...”, “Reports of...”, “Article by...”, “Annual Reports of...”, “Sudan Mission Reports”, or “Station Reports”, depending on the note under which the archivist put the concerned document.

2.2. Annual Reports of the Missionaries of the Sudan Mission in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon (1961-1998)

From the archives of the SM/ELCA in Ngaoundéré, I photocopied all the reports written by both single and married women missionaries from 1961 up to 1998. As it was the normal practice for any missionary of the SM/ELCA to write an annual report of what she or he has done in the course of the year, some married women, even though they were just accompanying their spouses on the mission field, took the opportunity to write about their experience of being present with their husbands and children in the mission field.

In my footnotes, I referred to the above documents as “Personal Reports of...”

2.3. Archives of the Norwegian Missionary Society in Stavanger, Norway (1925-1998)

The Norwegian Missionary Society, known under its Norwegian initials NMS (Norske Misjonsselskap) and whose headquarters are located in Stavanger in southern Norway, started working in Cameroon in 1925. Besides evangelism work, this mission society was also involved in health, educational and development work. All these various activities entailed much writing that was kept in records by individual missionaries and those who acted as the representatives of the society in Cameroon.

Before visiting the archives of the NMS in Stavanger in 2000, I had knowledge of the classification of records of the missionary work compiled by missionary Lars Lode. He succeeded in putting together about forty boxes of documents, which with a few exceptions, are all written in Norwegian. These documents originated from two sources: the official administrative records of the mission society on the one hand, the papers deposited by individual missionaries on the other hand. Besides the usual written materials, these boxes also include maps, books, and audio-visual documents (films, speech and music recordings).

In my footnotes as I quoted from the materials found in the NMS archives in Stavanger, I used "Archives of the NMS, Stavanger, Norway".

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcribed Oral Interviews

1. Interview with Satou Marthe

This interview is with Satou Marthe, Director for the women's work, "The Women For Christ" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. It took place in her office in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon on November 30, 1999, and was conducted in both French and English.

SF: Good morning, Madam. I hope that you know me very well and that you do not need further presentation of my person, do you? Anyway, I am in your office today, in order to collect some information about the women's work in our Church. Let us begin our interview by asking you to say a little bit on your family background.

SM: Uhh... Je m'appelle Satou Marthe. Je suis née à Ngaoundéré, plus précisément à la Mission Protestante. Mes parents étaient de la tribu *Laka* et ils étaient musulmans. Mais ma mère fut baptisée avec mon grand frère et moi en 1950. Mon père était resté musulman jusqu'à sa mort. Il était polygame. Sa première femme qui très âgée n'avait pas eu d'enfant avec lui et ma mère qui était la deuxième qui avait eu 5 enfants. Mon père était très âgé lorsqu'il avait épousé ma mère.

J'ai une soeur et trois frères. Je viens en deuxième position. Mon grand frère, un infirmier breveté, a travaillé à l'hôpital protestant de 1966 à 1996, date de son décès. Il a laissé neuf enfants. Mon petit frère qui vient après moi était médecin et a travaillé à Kaélé, Guider et Yaoundé où il est décédé en juillet 1984. Il a laissé une fille qui a aujourd'hui 19 ans. Celui qui le [son petit qui venait immédiatement après elle] suit était gardien de la paix, mais a été démis de ses fonctions et exerce en ce moment le métier d'agriculteur. Il est marié et a perdu la seule fille qu'il avait avec sa

femme. La dernière de la famille qui a eu son bac technique était allée continuer ses études en France depuis 1985. A cause de l'Opération Antilope, elle a été rayée de la fonction publique. Elle est donc restée en France où elle enseigne dans les Lycées. Elle est mariée à un français avec qui elle a eu une fille.

J'ai fait mes études primaires à Ngaoundéré, à Galim, Bankim puis Ngaoundéré. Les études secondaires au Collège Protestant. Puis j'ai suivi des séminaires de formation sur la production des émissions radio à Yaoundé en 1969. J'ai été, moi et mon mari, à l'Ecole préparatoire de Théologie de Montpellier de 1981 à 1982, puis à Lutheran Bible Institute à Seattle aux Etats-Unis de 1995 à 1996. J'ai suivi plusieurs séminaires durant ma vie professionnelle sur la communication, le leadership, le management, le développement, la planification, etc.

Avant de travailler à plein-temps avec les FPC [Femmes Pour Christ], j'ai été vice-présidente des FPC de la Région Centre, puis présidente de 1984-1991. J'ai également été vice-présidente du département des femmes de la FEMEC [Fédération des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques du Cameroun], membre du Conseil de la FLM [Fédération Luthérienne Mondiale] de 1992 à 1997, vice-présidente de LUCWA (Lutheran Communion in West Africa).

J'ai commencé à travailler comme enseignante à la Mission Protestante en 1966, puis à la radio Sawtu-Linjiila avec mon mari de 1967-1982. De 1974 à 1977, nous avons travaillé à Addis-Abeba, mon mari au service des nouvelles et moi comme pigiste au département français. De retour au pays, j'ai été nommée chef du département des programmes à Sawtu-Linjiila de 1978 à 1982. Après notre formation en France, le Studio a été fermé. Je suis donc recrutée comme secrétaire au Collège Protestant de

1983 à 1991, et comme Directrice des Femmes Pour Christ de 1991 à ce jour.

Mariée le 29 juillet 1967, je suis mère de six enfants dont les premières sont des jumelles. J'ai cinq filles et un garçon et sept petits enfants. Les trois premières sont mariées, le garçon est admis à l'ENAM [Ecole Nationale d'Administration et de Magistrature] et les deux dernières poursuivent leurs études universitaires.

Je dis merci à Dieu qui a voulu faire de moi ce que je suis aujourd'hui.

J'aime bien travailler avec les femmes, car elles sont dynamiques. Pendant les tournées, c'est un privilège de les rencontrer, de les voir chanter, danser, d'écouter leurs problèmes, leurs témoignages sur leur vie chrétienne et de partager avec elles les expériences vécues.

Mon souci, c'est amener ces femmes à mieux connaître personnellement le Seigneur et de vivre une vie d'enfant de Dieu. Dieu est fidèle, et lorsque nous mettons toute notre confiance en Lui, Il agit et se manifeste à nous dans notre vie quotidienne.

J'aimerais également voir les femmes augmenter leur connaissance biblique, améliorer leur niveau de vie dans le domaine économique, éduquer leurs enfants en les aidant également à poursuivre leurs études au plus haut niveau, donner les mêmes chances d'éducation aux filles qui sont souvent lésées.

J'aime chanter, j'aime lire, j'aime dialoguer, j'aime la créativité et la franchise. J'aime rêver et faire des projets.

Et comme je dis en tout temps, Dieu m'aime beaucoup, car je vois tout ce qu'Il fait pour moi dans ma vie de chaque jour. C'est pourquoi je Lui dis merci.

SF: A vous écouter, on ne peut s'empêcher de dire que vous aimez vraiment le travail parmi les femmes. Mais qu'est ce qui, selon vous, peut justifier l'existence d'un mouvement des femmes dans une église comme la nôtre?

SM: Je ne peux pas vous dire, Pasteur, tout le travail que nous faisons au sein de notre mouvement. Si vous voulez découvrir les raisons d'être d'un tel mouvement, je vous conseillerai de faire des photocopies de nos textes de base qui vous permettront, j'en suis sûre, d'avoir une idée globale des nos objectifs et les moyens mis en oeuvre pour atteindre ces objectifs.

SF: Oui, je vais certainement faire des photocopies de vos textes si vous me le permettez. Mais toujours est-il que j'aurai recours à vous pour mieux comprendre certains aspects de votre travail dans les structures telles que les Centres Socio-Ménagers.

SM: Oh, oui, c'est vrai; nous avons quatre Centres Socio-Ménagers opérationnels dans le pays. Il y a un Centre à Garoua, un à Yaoundé, un à Meiganga et un autre ici à Ngaoundéré. Nous y formons les jeunes filles et les jeunes femmes dans les domaines tels que la couture, la broderie, l'art ménager, ainsi que la lecture et les soins de santé primaires. Cela marche bien malgré quelques difficultés de gestion liées au fait que les femmes apprennent encore à jouer pleinement leur rôle de responsabilité dans divers aspects de la vie de nos communautés.

SF: Comment avez-vous fait pour construire ces grands Centres qui ont certainement coûté beaucoup d'argent? Est-ce l'Eglise qui les a construits pour vous ?

SM: Non, ce n'est pas l'Eglise qui les a construits pour les femmes. C'est sur la demande des femmes que les bailleurs de fonds, partenaires de notre Eglise, ont donné de l'argent nécessaire pour la construction de ces Centres.

SF: Qu'est-ce qui, selon vous, fait que les femmes ne soient pas encore pleinement responsables de diriger même les Centres qui sont des Centres Femmes Pour Christ? Est-ce que c'est un problème qui est lié au retard dans la formation des femmes, ou alors pensez-vous à une autre cause ou explication à cela ?

SM: Je n'ai aucune idée de cela. Mais l'argument souvent avancé selon lequel on ne peut pas responsabiliser les femmes dans notre Eglise à cause de manque d'éducation, est un alibi, voire un mensonge de la part des hommes. Les femmes doivent être encouragées à prendre leur pleine responsabilité dans l'église et dans la société.

SF: A propos de l'éducation des femmes dans notre Eglise, il y a quand même une ouverture maintenant, puisque les femmes ont été acceptées dans notre séminaire de théologie. Considérez-vous cela comme une victoire de votre mouvement, ou bien cette admission des femmes en théologie n'est qu'un trompe l'oeil?

SM: Oui, il y a eu un appel lancé, je ne me rappelle plus par qui, que les femmes devaient maintenant donner leurs candidatures pour la théologie. Au niveau des FPC, nous avons supporté l'idée et avons demandé à la

FLM de fournir des bourses d'études à celles qui voulaient aller se former en théologie. ELCA a envoyé un fonds, mais sans informer la direction des FPC. Nous avons néanmoins remercié ELCA pour ce geste et continuons à nous battre pour que nos filles qui désirent se former en théologie aient la possibilité de se former.

SF: Avez-vous pensé à ce que les femmes théologiennes pourraient exercer comme métier dans notre Eglise, ou bien pensez-vous qu'elles pourraient aussi être ordonnées comme leurs camarades hommes?

SM: Ce n'est pas à moi de répondre à cette question, Monsieur le Pasteur. La Commission de Réflexion Théologique de notre Eglise avait déjà fait une déclaration sur ce sujet, référez-vous au procès verbal de cette réunion (Rire).

SF: Ainsi, concernant le sujet de l'ordination des femmes dans notre Eglise, vous n'avez rien à dire. Néanmoins, que pensez-vous du rôle joué par les femmes dans la vie de notre Eglise en général?

SM: En dehors du ministère ordonné, les femmes jouent un rôle très important dans l'EELC. Toutefois, elles ne sont pas dans les postes de direction. Par exemple, les femmes ne sont pas représentées dans les sphères de décisions dans notre Eglise. Elles sont seulement bonnes pour faire la cuisine lors des grandes réunions de l'Eglise et à animer par leurs chants ces moments de rencontres. Mais quand arrive le temps de prises des décisions, on les exclut. Le jour où les femmes seront admises au ministère pastoral, ce problème de sous-représentation des femmes va se résoudre, puisqu'en tant que pasteurs, elles seront aussi admises dans les sphères de décisions de l'Eglise, comme le sont tous les autres pasteurs.

SF: If you allow this last question which, unfortunately, is again related to the ordination issue, I was going to ask you about what you think we, as a church, should do in order to quicken the ordination of women?

SM: There are many steps to be taken. Firstly, as a church, we must conscientize our people who are actually against the ordination of women because they have been taught so. We must teach them the truth about church ministries. I once suggested that we should have a Sunday per year for women to lead worship services throughout our church, so that our people have an opportunity to judge women at work, not according to the biases of our society. But no one took this seriously. And so, there is nothing being done for women to be involved in leading worship services up to now.

SF: Thank you so much for your time and your valuable information about the women's work in our Church. With this we closed our interview with Madam Satou Marthe.

2. Interview with Madam Doudou Kolomeni Marie

This interview is with Madam Doudou Kolomeni Marie, one the rare high-ranking female civil servant of Northern Cameroon origin. Member of the National Bureau of the women's organization of the ruling party, the CPDM (Cameroon Peoples' Democratic Movement), Madam Doudou Kolomeni is the founder of an NGO (Organisation Africaine d'Assistance) with the main objective to provide assistance for the young and single mothers who are desperate and who indulge themselves in the prostitution. She also coordinates the Evangelical Lutheran women's work in the south region of the EELC.

The interview took place at her home in Yaoundé, Cameroon on November 14, 1999, and was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Madame Marie, et merci de m'accepter chez vous et de m'accorder cette interview à laquelle j'attache beaucoup d'importance.

Selon ma petite connaissance de votre personne, vous venez du Nord-Cameroun et vous êtes l'une des rares femmes de la région à avoir atteint ce niveau d'éducation et à remplir aujourd'hui de hautes fonctions dans la vie publique au sein de la nation camerounaise. Pouvez-vous vous introduire un peu plus et me dire ce qui a été à l'origine de votre succès?

DK: [Rire!] Huh... Oui, pasto. Merci aussi de venir parler avec moi. Je me sens honorée en cela.

D'abord, mon père était d'une famille de cinq enfants, trois garçons et deux filles qui ont donné naissance à plus de quatre-vingt dix enfants dont seulement environ quinze étaient des garçons. Parmi nous tous, je suis la seule fille à avoir fait des études, et cela s'était passé ainsi parce que mon père m'avait beaucoup soutenue. Il a enduré les moqueries de la famille et m'a envoyée à l'école. Ceci, malgré le fait que les coutumes de ma tribu sont très opprimantes et discriminatoires contre les femmes. On envoyait les filles en mariage très tôt. Les parents craignaient que leurs filles prennent des grossesses chez eux à la maison; ce qui était considéré comme un grand déshonneur pour toute la famille.

SF: Ainsi grâce au support de votre père vous avez été envoyée à l'école. Comment s'est déroulée votre éducation à l'école pour que vous soyez aujourd'hui au niveau où vous vous trouvez, malgré les coutumes discriminatoires de votre tribu à l'égard des femmes?

DK: J'ai commencé l'école chez les Catholiques. Mais les missionnaires norvégiens nous ont amenés à Tibati dans leur école. Mes parents étaient les premiers à être baptisés à l'Eglise protestante dans notre région.

Après cela, les missionnaires m'avaient offert une bourse d'aller en Norvège pour étudier dans leur école de diaconesses. Mais j'ai refusé pour continuer mes études secondaires ici au Cameroun. Les missionnaires voulaient agir exactement comme nos parents qui disaient aussi qu'il n'était pas nécessaire pour une fille d'aller à l'école. Dans la plan des missionnaires, ils ne voulaient pas que les gens poussent de longues études.

SF: A ce moment, tout était encore sous le contrôle des missions. Mais aujourd'hui, l'Eglise est dirigée par les nationaux. Voyez-vous un changement dans les attitudes vis-à-vis des femmes dans l'Eglise? Qu'est-ce que vous pensez que l'Eglise doit encore s'efforcer de faire en faveur des femmes?

DK: Oui, vous voyez, mon Pasteur. Dans notre Eglise, les femmes ne sont pas respectées. Il y a tellement des choses à faire dans l'Eglise si nous voulons améliorer la situation des femmes. J'ai créé une ONG (Organisation Africaine d'Assistance) pour encadrer les filles-mères qui sont abandonnées par et leurs parents et les pères de leurs enfants, et qui de ce fait, se lancent dans la pratique de la prostitution comme un métier pour survivre.

SF: En tant que présidente des Femmes Pour Christ de la Région Sud de notre Eglise, quel rôle entendez-vous jouer dans le processus d'intégration de la femme dans les structures dirigeantes de l'Eglise?

DK: Pasteur, même parmi nous les femmes, il y a beaucoup de problème. Par exemple, le tribalisme est un mal à combattre parmi nos femmes. Il y a aussi la lutte pour l'acceptation des femmes au ministère pastoral dans notre Eglise.

Telle que la situation se présente à nous maintenant, je peux soutenir qu'on ouvre la possibilité à nos femmes d'être ordonnées comme pasteurs, mais pas n'importe quelle femme.

Je souhaite de tout mon coeur que les femmes de notre Eglise soient traitées avec dignité et respect, et qu'on arrive un jour à leur donner la possibilité d'être responsables dans n'importe quel secteur de la vie de notre Eglise.

En me présentant plus haut, j'avais même oublié de vous dire que je suis née le 26 février 1958.

SF: Il n'y a pas de quoi Madame.

Enfin, je voudrais très sincèrement vous exprimer ma reconnaissance pour ce entretien. Je vous souhaite la bénédiction de Dieu dans vos lourdes responsabilités tant au sein de l'Eglise que dans la vie de la nation camerounaise tout entière.

3. Interview with Numjal Rebecca.

This interview is with Numjal Rebecca, one of the leading figures among the churchwomen in Northern Cameroon. Numjal was among the most useful individuals that the NMS utilized to spread the Christian message

in the region of Adamawa, Northern Cameroon. She was interviewed at the home of her first-born son in Yaoundé, Cameroon on November 15, 1999. The interview was conducted in Fulfulde language and translated into French by one of her younger son whom I met at his brother's house on the day of the interview. The following is a summary in English of the two hour interview I had with Numjal Rebecca.

I, first, started to introduce myself to mama Numjal, as I guessed that she might not know me. I expressed to her my interest in researching on women's contribution to the implantation and growth of Christianity in Northern Cameroon.

I, then, saw a big smile on her face, and she asked me: Who sent you to me? Oh, no one, I responded. I knew a little bit of all you did for the growth of our Church. I also know most of your children some of whom are among the best friends of mine. So no one actually sent me to you. I can say, I decided on my own to come and have an interview with you to help me appreciating from a man's side what you, as a dedicated Christian woman, had fulfilled in your active lifetime.

NR: My son, to tell you my story will take you hours and even days of talk. To start, this is my national identity card. You can read and find out some information about me.

I begot nine children of whom one died. I, first, worked with the missionaries as a housemaid. After my marriage and the birth of two of my children, I started working for the Church. I went to the Bible school for two year-training programme. On the completion of my studies at the Bible school, I became a catechist and teacher for the students' wives in the same Bible school. A few years later, I started an itinerant ministry in

the Church whereby I went from one place to another, teaching and preaching the Word of God to both men and women. I received a lot of support from the missionaries. I had a bicycle to travel around. I had also a salary after many years of benevolent services rendered for the Church. In this itinerant work, I did not only preach and teach people from one place to another, but I also coordinated the work among the women as the responsible for the WFC in the region.

SF: How did your husband take your involvement in the Church's work? Was he supportive or annoyed by all your traveling around?

NR: My husband greatly supported my ministry in the Church. That is why I could travel around to preach and teach the Word of God. He was a mason (brick layer). He was not bothered at all even when I travelled and stayed for days away from home. When I got the bicycle for my work, I also used to carry the younger child on my back and climb hills in order to reach the people in the farthest village from where we were staying.

I think my husband was what you can today call a "well gender-minded man". He was very keen on looking after our children, by cooking food for them and bathing them when I was away from home.

SF: This is my last question to Mama Rebecca. Do you have any wish for our women of Church as far as the ordination issue is concerned?

NR: Oh, yes, I strongly support the ordination of women in our Church. I wish I could see at least one of our daughters becoming pastor. I have knowledge of a woman missionary from Norway, her name is Ellen. She was here in Cameroon as a missionary. She was ordained pastor when she returned to Norway from Cameroon. She is now a pastor in Norway.

For what reason our Church still opposes the ordination of women, I do not know?

SF: I would like to say thank you Mama Rebecca, for accepting to tell me your story, which I hope, will enhance the quality of the research I am currently doing on the women, not only of our Church, but also of the Christian community at large. I will probably travel to Norway next year for the same research, so maybe I will get a chance to talk to pastor Ellen whom you have just mentioned.

4. Interview with Rita Alema

This is an interview conducted with Rita Alema, one of the first women theologians trained in the Church's seminary. She received her certificate a few months prior to our interview. At the time of the interview, she was appointed responsible for the women's training programme at the Bible School of Garoua-Boulai.

The interview took place at her home in Garoua-Boulai, Cameroon on October 31, 1999, and was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Madame, et merci de m'accorder cette interview dans le cadre de mes recherches en vue d'écrire une thèse de doctorat en théologie sur la contribution des femmes dans l'histoire du christianisme en Afrique, avec un accent sur l'Eglise luthérienne du Cameroun.

Pouvez-vous brièvement vous présenter pour que je sache qui vous êtes et qu'est-ce vous faites comme travail dans l'Eglise?

RA: [Sourire]... Mais professeur [Elle m'appelle ainsi parce que je l'ai enseignée pour un trimestre dans sa dernière classe à l'Institut Luthérien Théologie de Meiganga].

Je m'appelle Alema Rita. Je suis née à Ngaoundéré le 18 avril 1972. Je suis parmi les premières femmes de notre Eglise à recevoir une formation théologique. J'ai été très influencée par l'attitude de ma mère vis-à-vis de l'Eglise. Elle est très dévouée à l'Eglise et m'a beaucoup encouragée dans ma foi chrétienne.

Mon mari a été aussi un grand support pour moi, spécialement quand il a fallu que je compose le dossier pour entrer en théologie.

C'est le Pasteur Koulagna Abel qui m'a écrit la recommandation pour entrer au séminaire et mon mari a trouvé l'argent nécessaire pour composer le dossier. J'ai été envoyée à l'Institut pour me former pour travailler parmi les femmes de notre Eglise, c'est-à-dire, les FPC.

SF: Vous devez être un exemple unique en son genre dans notre Eglise, vu le support que vous avez reçu et de votre mère, de votre pasteur ainsi que de votre mari, pour aller étudier la théologie. Je peux dire votre environnement immédiat a joué un rôle important dans votre formation théologique. Vous devez, à mon avis, être une femme comblée et contente de la situation de la femme dans notre Eglise?

RA: Oui, professeur, je suis contente du support de ma famille. Même mes beaux-parents qui sont des musulmans ne sont pas opposés à mon travail dans l'Eglise.

Mon affectation à l'École Biblique s'est faite suivant les procédures normales et je suis contente d'enseigner les femmes des étudiants.

SF: Quelle est votre position par rapport à la question d'ordination des femmes au ministère pastoral dans notre Eglise?

RA: Je n'ai pas reçu l'appel d'être ordonnée. Je ne suis pas en faveur de l'ordination des femmes dans l'Eglise. Mais, ce n'est pas mon point de vue qui peut influencer l'Eglise dans sa décision sur le sujet.

Je me rappelle aussi qu'en 1998 lors d'une réunion des femmes à Garoua, la question a été posée aux femmes de se prononcer pour ou contre l'ordination des femmes dans notre Eglise. Presque les deux tiers des femmes présentes à cette réunion se sont prononcées contre le ministère pastoral des femmes dans l'Eglise. Ainsi, même la majorité parmi nous les femmes aujourd'hui ne pensent pas que c'est une bonne chose pour l'Eglise d'avoir les femmes ordonnées pasteurs.

SF: Hein! C'est vraiment intéressant d'écouter ce point de vue. Encore une fois merci pour votre disponibilité et bon courage dans votre enseignement.

5. Interview with Madame Nyiwé Frida

This interview is with Madam Nyiwé Frida. Frida is the wife of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Nyiwé Thomas, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. She was interviewed at their home in Meiganga, Cameroon on November 1, 1999. The interview was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Madame.

NF: Bonjour Samuel.

SF: Madame, je voudrais vous demander de partager avec moi vos expériences d'être la femme d'un pasteur. En effet, je suis en train de faire des recherches sur les femmes dans notre Eglise en vue d'écrire une thèse de doctorat en théologie.

En tant que chrétienne et femme de pasteur dans notre Eglise, j'ai besoin de votre version de faits en ce qui concerne la situation générale de la femme chrétienne au Nord-Cameroun et de la femme du pasteur dans l'Eglise luthérienne, en particulier.

Pouvez-vous commencer par vous présenter et me dire comment vous êtes devenue la femme d'un pasteur?

NF: Je suis Madame Nyiwé Frida et j'ai quarante ans aujourd'hui. Mon père fut un catéchiste et a enseigné dans l'Eglise.

J'ai fréquenté jusqu'en deuxième année de l'enseignement secondaire. Je passais en troisième année l'année où je suis allée en mariage.

Je me suis mariée à un séminariste qui était à l'avant-dernière année de sa formation pastorale.

Mon mari m'a aussi enseignée quand j'étais à l'école primaire. Quand il m'avait demandée d'être son épouse, j'avais pensé que c'est Dieu qui voulait peut-être que je le serve comme femme de pasteur, alors j'ai accepté.

Nous sommes restés ensemble au séminaire pour les deux dernières années de sa formation. Cela m'a permise aussi de recevoir une formation en tant que femme de pasteur. Cette formation nous était donnée par les femmes des professeurs du séminaire et des demoiselles missionnaires.

SF: Qu'est-ce qu'on vous a enseigné concrètement pour être femme de pasteur?

NF: Comme femme de pasteur, j'ai appris que je devais avoir des rôles spécifiques à jouer à la maison et dans l'Eglise. Je devais bien recevoir les gens à la maison, m'occuper de mon mari et de nos enfants. A l'Eglise, je devrais être un modèle de soumission et d'obéissance pour les autres femmes, etc.

SF: Comment trouvez-vous l'application de tout cet enseignement reçu? Est-ce que cela vous libère en tant que femme, ou bien c'est plutôt un lourd fardeau qu'on a mis sur vous pour vous maintenir à l'écart d'autres responsabilités dans l'Eglise telle que la responsabilité pour les femmes devenir pasteurs elles-mêmes, par exemple?

NF: Oui, Samuel, les temps durs pour la vie d'une femme de pasteur ne manquent pas. Par exemple, quand la paroisse utilise la maison du pasteur comme un lieu public pour toutes leurs manifestations, la femme du pasteur peut trouver cela comme une invasion de son domaine privé par la congrégation. C'est vrai que j'ai accepté avec joie ma responsabilité comme femme de pasteur d'être une ménagère. Mais si une femme veut devenir pasteur et si elle a la vocation de servir comme pasteur, on doit lui permettre d'exercer comme pasteur.

SF: Ne pensez-vous pas, Madame, que le travail parmi les FPC est largement suffisant pour employer toutes celles qui ont une vocation de servir à l'Eglise dans un ministère public?

NF: Travailler dans FPC n'est pas suffisant. Il y a des femmes très capables et qui ont des dons différents. Il ne faut donc pas les limiter au travail parmi les femmes seulement.

Je connais par exemple le cas de la mère de David Aoudi, Rebecca Numjal, qui fut catéchiste et a aussi enseigné à l'Ecole Bilique.

Le travail des FPC est un travail qui se fait seulement pour les femmes. Elles étudient ensemble la Bible, prient ensemble pour se maintenir dans la foi. Mais, les femmes sont capables de faire beaucoup plus pour l'Eglise en général. Elles sont capables de faire tout ce que les hommes peuvent aussi faire. Pourquoi les empêcherait on d'exercer librement leurs dons dans notre Eglise?

SF: Sur ce, je voudrais mettre fin à notre entretien pour aujourd'hui. Peut-être que je reviendrai à vous un autre jour pour continuer notre causerie. Encore fois de plus, je vous remercie Madame, pour votre disponibilité à répondre à mes questions.

6. Interview with Rev. Songsaré Amtsé Pierre

This interview is with the Rt. Rev. Songsaré Pierre. Rev. Pierre Songsaré was elected president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon in 1985, a position which he held until his retirement from ministry in 1997. Before his election as the president of the Church, the Rev. Pierre Songsaré was already holding various responsibilities at national and

international levels within the Lutheran communion. He worked as a Lutheran World Federation coordinator for urban and industrial ministry in West Africa. He was also a lecturer at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Meiganga.

After his retirement from the Church, he was appointed as General Secretary of the Cameroonian Council of Churches in Yaoundé. This interview took place in his office of the General Secretary of the FEMEC (Fédération des Eglises et Missions Evangéliques du Cameroun) in Yaoundé on November 17, 1999. And the interview was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Monsieur le Président et merci d'avance de m'accorder quelques minutes de votre temps pour cette interview.

Rev. PS: Pas de quoi, mon fils. Si je peux être utile à quelque chose, Dieu m'a donné la vie pour cela.

SF: Est-ce que vous pouvez faire une petite présentation de vous-même avant de répondre à quelques questions que j'ai préparées pour vous poser?

Rev. PS: Volontiers mon fils. Je suis Songsaré Amsé Pierre. Je suis né le 16 novembre 1937 et ordonné pasteur le 23 mai 1971 à Yoko. Avant de devenir pasteur, j'ai d'abord travaillé au Tribunal de Yoko de 1954 à 1955, puis j'ai enseigné dans les écoles de l'Eglise de 1955 à 1965. De 1966 à 1970, j'ai fait ma formation pastorale au séminaire de théologie de Meiganga.

J'ai aussi travaillé comme pasteur de paroisse et ensuite j'ai enseigné à l'Ecole Biblique de Meng et à l'Ecole de Théologie de Meiganga.

SF: Mais moi, je vous ai connu surtout comme Président de l'Eglise, mais aussi comme quelqu'un qui a enseigné l'histoire de l'église au séminaire. Compte tenu de votre vaste connaissance dans l'histoire de l'église en général, et de l'histoire de l'Eglise luthérienne au Cameroun en particulier, vous êtes la personne la mieux indiquée pour me parler du rôle que les femmes ont joué et peut-être continuent de jouer encore dans notre Eglise aujourd'hui?

Rev.PS: De ma connaissance du travail fait par les missionnaires, les femmes comptent pour beaucoup. Elles ont évangélisé, enseigné, soigné, en bref, elles ont fait l'essentiel du travail pour implanter l'église chrétienne au Nord-Cameroun.

Je peux citer par exemple Laura Burton qui a travaillé avec les enfants à l'orphélinat de Meiganga, et Ruth Christiansen qui a fait pratiquement le travail d'un pasteur (elle a travaillé comme catéchiste à Mboula). Toutes les deux étaient missionnaires d'ELCA.

Du côté norvégien, il y avait Mademoiselle Enni, la mère adoptive de Yacoubou, Temba et Bobodji. Elle était maitresse d'école. Tu connais Mademoiselle Else Strand qui a beaucoup travaillé pour nos écoles dans l'Eglise. Il faut aussi mentionné les noms des femmes comme Ellen la théologienne (elle est devenue pasteur en Norvège) qui a aussi enseigné dans nos écoles, ainsi que Ingrid Flats qui a élevé Captainé.

De la Sudan Mission, il serait difficile d'oublier le rôle joué par les femmes comme Verna Syverson qui a beaucoup travaillé parmi les FPC,

et Mademoiselle Veschter de nationalité française qui a travaillé pour le compte de la Sudan Mission comme enseignante au Collège Protestant de Ngaoundéré et à l'Ecole Biblique de Garoua-Boulai.

Dans nos rapports de partenariat avec les églises soeurs, nous avons quelquefois demandé qu'on nous envoie des femmes missionnaires pour des postes spécifiques au sein de l'Eglise.

SF: Oui, Président, toutes ces femmes que vous avez citées sont des expatriées. Est-ce à dire qu'il n'y a pas un seul nom parmi les camerounaises que vous pouvez citer comme femme ayant contribué de quelque manière à l'implantation et à la croissance de l'église dans cette région du monde?

Rev. PS: Non mon fils, dans l'EELC, Nous avons des femmes dynamiques qui ont beaucoup oeuvré pour l'avancement du règne de Dieu dans notre pays. Nous pouvons citer les noms des femmes comme Madame Noundjal Rebecca qui était une grande évangéliste, Madame Houma Marthe qui fut l'une des rares femmes de notre l'Eglise à penser à la formation des femmes africaines dans le domaine du leadership. C'est une femme de grandes qualités spirituelles. Sa vie de prière et sa simplicité ont fait d'elle une grande bâtisseuse de mouvement de femmes dans notre Eglise. Je vous conseillerai de la rencontrer. Elle est encore vivante et se trouverait dans un village aux alentours de Ngaoundal, dans le pays Gbaya.

SF: Vous avez mentionné Ruth Christiansen qui a presque fait le travail d'un pasteur. Maintenant, vous parlez des grandes qualités spirituelles d'une des femmes de l'Eglise qui a lutté pour la formation des femmes dans l'Eglise. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire concrètement pour une femme

d'être leader dans notre Eglise? Les femmes peuvent-elles aussi diriger les paroisses et les institutions de l'Eglise telles que les écoles, les hôpitaux, etc?

Rev. PS: Oui, je vous ai déjà parlé des femmes qui ont dirigé nos écoles. Mais pour diriger une congrégation, vous êtes vous-même pasteur et connaissez nos règlements, il faut être pasteur. Or nous n'avons pas des femmes pasteurs, par conséquent, une femme ne peut pas diriger une paroisse dans notre Eglise.

SF: En effet, quelles sont d'après vous, Monsieur le Président, les conditions qu'il faut remplir pour être ordonné pasteur dans notre Eglise? Je vous pose cette question non seulement pour savoir votre position sur l'ordination des femmes au ministère pastoral, mais aussi et surtout pour savoir ce qui est advenu aux deux jeunes filles anglophones, envoyées par notre Eglise au Nigeria, pour suivre une formation théologique là-bas?

Rev. PS: (Rires). Mon fils, vous voulez savoir ma position sur l'ordination des femmes au ministère pastoral... Vous savez que la société où nous vivons constitue un grand obstacle pour l'ordination des femmes. Comme Président, j'avais pas mal des difficultés avec les maris pour les convaincre de laisser leurs femmes aller par exemple représenter l'Eglise dans les réunions internationales.

Si vous parlez d'avoir maintenant les femmes pasteurs dans l'Eglise, je serai un peu prudent à cause de ceux qui risquent de trouver cela comme un scandale dans l'Eglise et abandonner la foi chrétienne, ou alors manquer de respect pour nous les chrétiens. C'est par exemple le cas de nos amis les musulmans qui ne pourront pas tolérer de voir une femme habillée en tenue de pasteur et présider à un culte public.

Si j'ai envoyé les femmes se former en théologie, c'était parce que je voulais de l'ordre dans l'Eglise. Certaines églises soeurs de l'Occident faisaient beaucoup pression, voilà pourquoi j'avais accepté que les femmes aillent se former en théologie. Mais la question de leur ordination relève de l'autorité de l'Eglise. Toutefois, nous devons penser deux fois avant de décider si nous voulons maintenant ordonner les femmes. Car les conditions sociales ne sont pas les mêmes chez nous qu'en Occident.

SF: Monsieur le Président, permettez-moi de vous dire encore une fois merci pour votre disponibilité à répondre à mes questions. Merci également de soutenir les nouveaux responsables de notre Eglise dans votre prière.

7. Interview with Rev. Paul Darman

This interview was conducted with the Rt. Rev. pastor Paul Darman, a few months before he died at his home in Meiganga on November 2, 1999. His wife, Jacqueline Darman, also took part in the interview, on the invitation of her husband, and the interview was conducted in French, English and Fulfulde.

Pastor Paul Darman was born in 1925 and was baptized in December 9, 1941 in Mboula, where the first missionaries of the Sudan Mission, Missionary Eugen Gunderson, his wife, and two sisters from the USA, established the first mission station in the region in 1923.

Paul Darman did not have any formal schooling. His education was mainly based on elementary notion of French and work on literacy in his mother tongue, the Gbaya language, taught to him by the missionaries. In

1943, he was appointed catechist in Betaré-Oya and worked there until 1954, a year in which he started his biblical and pastoral education, first in Tcholliré, then in Baboua in the French Equatorial Africa, now the Central African Republic, and finally in Tibati, Cameroon.

Paul Darman was ordained pastor in 1958 in Meiganga.

Pastor Paul Darman was elected in 1977 as the first native President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, a position he held until 1985, when he retired from ministry.

SF: Bonjour Pasteur. Excusez-moi de vous déranger un peu ce matin avec cette interview. Comme vous le savez déjà par la lettre que je vous ai envoyée l'autre jour; je suis intéressé dans une recherche sur l'histoire des femmes dans notre Eglise. Je viens donc ce matin pour pouvoir m'entretenir avec vous à ce sujet.

D'abord, est-ce vous pouvez vous présenter brièvement pour que mes lecteurs vous connaissent tel que vous voulez qu'ils vous connaissent et, après nous parlerons des femmes de notre Eglise?

Rev. PD: Oui, comme nous allons parler des femmes, laissez-moi appeler ma femme pour qu'elle confirme ou infirme ce que je vais vous dire au sujet des femmes Gbaya en général et les femmes de notre Eglise en particulier. [Il a fait effectivement appel à sa femme qui est venue s'asseoir à côté de lui et, de temps en temps, a fait des interventions très importantes pour mon projet de thèse].

Je suis le premier-fils à mes parents. Quand je suis né, mes parents étaient encore très jeunes. Mon père était très intéressé dans le travail de la

mission, mais c'est plutôt ma mère qui a été baptisée par les missionnaires. Je pense que mon père n'a pas été baptisé parce que les missionnaires de mon village étaient des femmes.

SF: Mais, Pasteur, est-ce que c'étaient les femmes missionnaires qui baptisaient les gens dans votre village?

Rev. PD: Oh, non! Les femmes missionnaires ne pouvaient baptiser les gens. Elles n'étaient pas ordonnées pasteurs. Mais c'était elles qui donnaient les enseignements bibliques et faisaient le catéchisme aux gens.

Le problème pour la tradition Gbaya, les femmes ne sont pas autorisées à prendre part aux cérémonies sacrificielles. Voilà pourquoi, les femmes Gbaya, à l'instar de ma mère, étaient plus libres d'accepter l'Évangile et de se faire baptiser plus facilement par rapport aux hommes qui devaient assumer leurs responsabilités coutumières vis-à-vis de la société.

SF: Ah, oui! Je comprends maintenant que c'était plutôt un problème de la perception que la société Gbaya avait du rôle de la femme en son sein, et non le fait que c'étaient les femmes qui avaient prêché l'Évangile dans votre village.

Rev. PD: Oui, c'est cela. La société Gbaya ne permet pas à la femme de prendre le dessus sur l'homme. Comme conclusion logique à cette tradition, nous ne voulons pas aussi des femmes ordonnées comme pasteurs qui prendront le dessus sur les hommes à l'Église.

Toutefois, dans l'histoire du peuple Gbaya, il y a un exemple d'une femme exceptionnelle. Mais je pense que c'est une exception qui ne vient que pour confirmer la règle générale. Il s'agit de l'histoire de Manden, épouse

de Kaigama, l'un des chefs révoltés contre le *Lamido* de Ngaoundéré qui s'est installé dans un village appelé Ndog-Haoussa⁴³¹. Maa Manden a succédé à son mari Kaigama que les agents du *Lamido* de Ngaoundéré ont tué. Grâce à ses qualités d'une grande guerrière, Maa Manden a non seulement agrandi les dimensions territoriales du royaume laissé par son défunt-mari, mais elle a, grâce à l'aide de son fils Nana, fondé le village de Mboula dont je suis originaire.

Pour revenir à la question du leadership des femmes dans l'Eglise, je pense qu'il est bon de donner la gloire à l'homme avant la femme. C'est ce que la Bible dit et c'est ce que Monsieur Gunderson a aussi encouragé: l'enseignement de la Parole de Dieu et rien que la Parole de Dieu.

SF: Mais Pasteur, vous voyez que nous sommes en train de former les femmes en théologie. Que pensez-vous de leur futur emploi, puisque avec une formation en théologie, on ne peut pas trouver du travail dans la fonction publique au Cameroun? Ne pensez-vous pas que l'Eglise devra dans un proche avenir, résoudre le problème de leur ordination pour leur assurer une place dans ses propres structures?

Rev PD: If we are asked to ordain women, we must be careful and see what kind of women we are to ordain in the ministry. If a woman has a man's moral qualities, she can be ordained. But I am opposed to the ordination of women, given the fact that so many people today come to church without having a vocation at all and ask for ordination. They are merely looking for jobs, men as well as women. Therefore, I am afraid of having a number of wrong pastors multiplied in our Church.

⁴³¹ Voir K. Lode, dans son ouvrage *Appelés à la liberté*, p. 16.

This is not to say that I am against women or I do not acknowledge the valuable contribution of women in our Church.

If I consider my own life in the church ministry, I have a lot to thank my wife for. She is my first adviser. Would it not be her encouragement and support in prayer, I would have left the church and would have become Muslim, for I was many times given promises by the government officials to make me becoming rich if I convert to Islamic faith. But my wife was my strength and repeatedly she warned me about such temptations and advised me to not give up my Christian faith.

I have also examples of women who did a tremendous work for the grounding of the church in our region: They are . Larson, former missionary from the ELCA who worked in the orphanage, Mrs. Sand and Mrs. Jorgensen, both missionaries of the ELCA, . Else Strand and Mrs. Farestad of the NMS, and my aunt, Marie Tazam who worked in the orphanage with the missionaries, and of course, my dear wife Jacqueline Darman whose presence at my side is almost comparable with what the holy Spirit does for the believers in times of temptations.

SF: I must say a very big thank you to both of you for helping get this valuable information I desperately needed for my thesis.

Special thank you to pastor Paul Darman who eased my forthcoming exercise of transcribing and translating this interview, by answering my last question in English.

8. Interview with pastor Houmlo Timothée

This interview is with the Rev. pastor Timothée Houmlo, president of the Region south of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. The interview was conducted at his residence in Yaoundé on November 15, 1999.

The Region south of the EELC was of a recent creation, and it was among the first Regions of the Church to send women to theological training. The point to interview pastor Timothée Houmlo was more to know what was the main reason behind the sending of women to seminary from the Region, than getting his own viewpoint on the issue of women in the Church.

The interview was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Monsieur le Président et merci de m'accorder cette interview sur la situation des femmes dans votre Région. Avant d'aborder notre sujet, pouvez-vous brièvement vous présenter, Monsieur le Président?

Rev. HT: Qu'est-ce que vous voulez que je dise de plus sur moi que vous ne connaissez déjà. Je m'appelle Houmlo Timothée. Je suis Pasteur et je dirige notre Région sud depuis sa création il y a un ou deux ans. J'ai 54 ans.

SF: Votre Région est encore très jeune, mais je crois avec l'envoi d'une femme à l'Institut de Théologie il y a maintenant presque cinq ans, vous avez certainement beaucoup fait en ce qui concerne l'éducation des femmes dans notre Eglise. Quelle est en fait la situation générale de la femme dans votre Région?

Rev. HT: Oui, les FPC existent depuis 1997 uniquement au niveau de la congrégation. C'est un groupe très bien organisé. Depuis 1998, nous avons un bureau provisoire organisé au niveau régional et nous espérons avoir un bureau définitif dans un proche avenir.

SF: Quelle est l'importance pour la Région d'avoir un bureau de FPC bien organisé?

Rev. HT: L'importance d'avoir le mouvement des femmes bien organisé n'est plus à démontrer. Par exemple à Garoua où l'Islam est prédominant, les FPC ont un rôle très important à jouer dans l'évangélisation de la population féminine. Car, pour une société influencée par l'Islam, le contact entre les femmes et les hommes est prohibé. Seules les femmes chrétiennes dans ce cas ont la possibilité d'apporter la Bonne Nouvelle à leurs consœurs non-chrétiennes. Pour cela, il est important de favoriser un bon fonctionnement du mouvement des femmes pour leur permettre de s'épanouir.

Je pense aussi à nos femmes théologiennes. Le mouvement FPC est une bonne opportunité pour elles d'avoir du travail dans l'Eglise. Actuellement dans notre Centre Socio-Ménager FPC ici à Yaoundé, tous les employés, sauf le gardien de nuit, sont des femmes.

SF: Oui Président, parlons un peu de ces femmes théologiennes. Au moins deux d'entre elles en formation actuellement sont de votre Région. Quel est votre plan d'avenir pour elles? Seront-elles ordonnées pasteurs après leur formation théologique, ou bien avez-vous d'autres plan d'emploi pour elles dans l'Eglise?

Rev. HT: Nos femmes avaient demandé d'aller se former en théologie pour prendre part dans les activités de l'Eglise et travailler dans leur mouvement, l'organisation FPC. Elles n'ont jamais dit qu'elles voulaient devenir pasteurs. Aussi ma compréhension de la situation, c'est qu'elles ne seront pas ordonnées pasteurs. L'Eglise les forme pour les préparer à prendre part aux réunions internationales où leur présence est sollicitée.

SF: Président, pourquoi avoir attendu si longtemps pour permettre à nos soeurs de se former pour faire face à leur responsabilité, tant sur le plan national qu'international?

Rev. HT: Si les femmes sont en retard sur le plan de l'éducation, ce n'est pas la faute de l'Eglise, mais c'est la faute de la société tout entière.

SF: De quelle société parlez-vous Président? Est-ce qu'il s'agit de nos sociétés traditionnelles africaines, ou bien parlez-vous des sociétés occidentales qui ont introduit ces nouveaux systèmes d'éducation qui promeuvent la ségrégation contre les femmes dans l'église en Afrique aujourd'hui, sous le couvert d'une soi-disant fidélité à l'enseignement reçu par les missionnaires?

Je crois avoir aussi entendu que nos partenaires de LEAF (Lutheran Evangelical Association of Finland) étaient contre l'ordination des femmes. Confirmez-vous cette information qui aurait même fait un problème entre la Directrice des FPC, Madame Satou Marthe et les missionnaires de LEAF au Cameroun dans une rencontre internationale?

Rev. HT: (Sourire...). Mais non, Sam, LEAF ne peut pas s'opposer aux décisions souveraines de l'Eglise. Si notre Eglise décide d'ordonner les femmes aujourd'hui, LEAF peut être amené tout simplement à redéfinir sa

ligne de conduite en tant que partenaire de notre Eglise dans la mission au Cameroun.

Juhensu, l'un des tout premiers missionnaires de LEAF au Cameroun était contre l'ordination des femmes. Mais c'était une conviction personnelle, et cela n'avait rien à faire avec la position de LEAF en tant qu'organisation.

SF: Sur ce, Monsieur le Président, permettez-moi de vous remercier encore une fois de plus pour votre ouverture d'esprit sur la question des femmes dans notre Eglise.

9. Interview with Ellen Eliassen

Ellen Eliassen, commonly known to Cameroonians as Mademoiselle Ellen, a single woman missionary of the NMS, arrived in Cameroon in 1960 and retired from missionary work in June 2002.

Ellen Eliassen was interviewed in her office in Ngaoundéré on December 27, 1999. The interview was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Ellen.

EE: Bonjour Samuel.

SF: Ellen, de tout le personnel missionnaire de la NMS au Cameroun aujourd'hui, vous êtes certainement la plus ancienne sur le terrain. Vous êtes aujourd'hui trésorière de la NMS au Cameroun et c'est un travail que vous avez fait depuis plusieurs années déjà si mes informations sont exactes.

Pouvez-vous vous présenter brièvement avant de me parler de votre travail comme missionnaire depuis que vous êtes arrivée au Cameroun?

EE: Oui, je suis Ellen Eliassen, connue des Camerounais sous le nom de Mademoiselle Ellen. Je suis née le 15 Octobre 1935 à Bergen en Norvège. Je suis arrivée au Cameroun le 25 décembre 1960. J'ai été choisie par la NMS et envoyée au Cameroun comme trésorière de la mission. Mais j'ai aussi travaillé à la librairie.

De 1961 à 1964, j'ai travaillé avec les jeunes et de 1965 à 1970, avec les Femmes Pour Christ. Cela t'étonne certainement puisque depuis que tu me connais, tu me connais seulement comme trésorière de la mission et n'ayant apparemment pas de contact avec les Femmes Pour Christ. Mais c'est certainement bien pour tes recherches de savoir aussi que j'ai travaillé avec les Femmes Pour Christ dans l'Eglise.

SF: Vous avez certainement raison d'attirer mon attention sur le fait que vous avez aussi travaillé avec les jeunes et les femmes dans l'Eglise. Toutefois, ma question que j'allais vous poser sur la nature de votre travail comme trésorière et ce que cela a comme rapport avec le travail missionnaire qui consiste à enseigner et prêcher l'Evangile aux non-chrétiens, demeure.

Pensez-vous qu'être trésorière d'une société de mission en Afrique c'est aussi un travail missionnaire?

EE: (Eclats de rire!). Oui, Samuel, cela fait bel et bien partie du travail missionnaire. Mais je dois aussi te dire que comme missionnaire, j'ai été la première personne à commencer un service pour les prisonniers dans la

ville de Ngaoundéré. Comme femmes missionnaires, nous avions aussi une cellule de prière pour le travail de la mission.

En 1985, j'ai ouvert une cellule de prière et d'étude biblique hebdomadaire dans ma maison et neuf personnes (aucun missionnaire n'y assistait) y prenaient part régulièrement.

SF: Vous êtes Mademoiselle. Cela veut dire que vous ne vous êtes jamais mariée. Est-ce qu'il est aisé pour une femme seule de faire le travail de missionnaire? Comment la NMS vous traite-t-elle comme missionnaire? Y a-t-il une différence dans le traitement que la NMS a vis-à-vis de ses missionnaires hommes et femmes?

EE: Un missionnaire seul avait plus d'avantages qu'une missionnaire seule. Par exemple le salaire des hommes était élevé par rapport aux salaires des femmes.

Mais quand je suis venue comme missionnaire femme seule, je n'avais pas reçu des conseils particuliers de la part de la NMS, en dehors des enseignements qu'on nous a donnés ensemble avec les hommes pour nous préparer à aller en Afrique. Comme trésorière, mon travail m'exposait à toutes sortes de pression et de risque de la part de mes usagers, j'ai trouvé parfois qu'il était peut-être plus difficile de vivre au Cameroun qu'en Norvège. Néanmoins, j'étais très respectée parmi les missionnaires, parce que je faisais mon travail avec amour. J'avais aussi une bonne relation de travail avec mes chefs de la mission au Cameroun.

SF: En dehors de la discrimination salariale à laquelle vous avez déjà fait allusion plus haut, y avait-il d'autres formes de discrimination contre les femmes au sein de la NMS? Par exemple, est-ce qu'on donnait la

possibilité aux femmes de diriger des études bibliques ou des enseignements lors de vos réunions des missionnaires NMS au Cameroun?

EE: Je n'ai jamais prêté attention à ce détail, si oui ou non les femmes dirigeaient aussi nos réunions. Mais en ce qui me concerne personnellement, je faisais mon travail avec toute ma volonté pour être en bons termes avec tout le monde et quelquefois je recevais des félicitations de la part des chefs de la mission et aussi de l'Eglise pour mon dévouement à mon travail.

SF: Comme jeune fille, lorsque vous vouliez vous engager à la mission dans les pays lointains comme le Cameroun, la NMS vous demandait-elle de rester célibataire? Sinon, est-ce que c'était votre désir de rester célibataire comme vous l'êtes aujourd'hui?

EE: (Rire!), Samuel tu sais, quand je suis venue au Cameroun, je n'avais que vingt-cinq ans et il semble que j'étais belle, puisque plusieurs hommes, aussi bien de la Norvège que du Cameroun, me l'ont fait savoir en plusieurs occasions. Mais c'était tout simplement impossible de penser au mariage, car j'étais déjà engagée dans le travail de la mission. Je me serais certainement mariée si j'étais restée en Norvège. Mais étant venue ici au Cameroun, je n'ai pas trouvé un homme avec qui me marier. Par conséquent, je ne regrette pas de tout aujourd'hui cette situation, quand je sais que bientôt, je vais aller en retraite, après avoir fait ce que Dieu m'a appelée de faire dans ce monde, c'est-à-dire, Le servir.

SF: Je voudrais vous remercier de tout coeur pour vous être exprimée sur votre vie de femme missionnaire au Cameroun sans aucune réserve, et je vous souhaite la bénédiction de Dieu dans la continuation de votre travail missionnaire au Cameroun.

10. Interview with Erik Sandvik

This interview was conducted with Erik Sandvik at his home in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon on November 25, 1999.

Erik Sandvik was born in Norway in 1935 and arrived in Cameroon as a missionary of the NMS since 1967. Today, he may count among those rare missionaries of the NMS who made themselves feel at home in their mission fields. Almost at the age of retirement from work, Erik is still very busy at work in the Lutheran church in Cameroon. His longterm service as a single male missionary of the NMS in Cameroon led me to interview him about the position of his sending mission society towards women in general and towards women missionaries in particular.

The interview was conducted in French.

SF: Bonjour Monsieur Erik.

ES: Bonjour Samuel.

SF: Monsieur Erik, vous êtes aujourd'hui l'un des rares missionnaires de la NMS à rester au Cameroun pour plus de trente ans sans changer de champ de mission. Vous vous êtes occupés principalement de l'éducation des jeunes au Cameroun. Pour être resté si longtemps au Cameroun, on a fini par vous prendre pour un Africain, sans toutefois oublier que vous êtes un missionnaire venu de la Norvège. Après plus de trente d'expérience missionnaire au Cameroun, avez-vous un commentaire à faire concernant la situation de la femme dans la société africaine en général et dans l'Eglise Luthérienne en particulier?

ES: Après avoir observé la femme africaine pendant toutes ces années de service missionnaire au Cameroun, je peux affirmer une chose, c'est que la femme africaine n'est pas du tout libre à cause du poids de la tradition. Par exemple au Collège Protestant de Ngaounéré où j'ai passé la plupart de mon temps comme missionnaire, il y a très peu de filles, si on les compare aux effectifs des garçons, qui atteignent le niveau du second cycle de l'enseignement secondaire général. Les quelques rares filles que nous avions venaient du sud Cameroun où la femme jouit d'une plus grande opportunité d'aller à l'école. Ici au nord, nous n'avons pas assez de femmes dans les positions de direction. La plupart des femmes ici s'occupent des travaux domestiques. Toutefois, il y a néanmoins quelques rares qui émergent de la masse. C'est le cas de Béatrice, de Noumdjal Rebecca, etc.

SF: Ce sont là quelques exemples des rares femmes camerounaises que vous croyez avoir joué ou continuent de jouer un rôle important dans l'Eglise Luthérienne au Cameroun. Mais qu'en est-il des femmes missionnaires?

ES: Ah, oui. Si nous parlons des femmes missionnaires, elles sont nombreuses celles que j'ai connues dans le travail de la mission comme personnalités de premier plan. Je peux vous citer entre autres, Mademoiselle Veschter, de nationalité française, qui a profondément marqué la vie des élèves au Collège Protestant de Ngaoundéré dans les années 1970. Elle a montré une assurance de sa vocation comme missionnaire en servant la communauté du Collège Protestant par un dévouement sans nul pareil. Mademoiselle Bredeli, qui s'est mariée après son retour en Norvège à la fin de son séjour missionnaire au Cameroun, a aussi beaucoup apporté dans le domaine de la musique au Collège

Protestant. Un autre nom qui me vient juste à l'idée est celui de Mademoiselle Reidun Bue.

SF: Parmi les noms des femmes missionnaires que vous venez de mentionner, je constate que vous avez oublié Mademoiselle Else Strand qui pourtant fut pendant longtemps votre supérieure hiérarchique dans l'ordre de l'enseignement privé protestant au Nord-Cameroun.

ES: Ah oui, Mademoiselles Else Strand était secrétaire à l'éducation pendant plusieurs années. Elle était une femme dont l'autorité était reconnue par tout le monde. Elle était très respectée au Cameroun, aussi par les membres de l'Eglise que parmi les membres du gouvernement camerounais. Grâce à sa très grande taille (elle ne pouvait passer inaperçue devant les media), Mademoiselle était considérée par beaucoup comme une des grandes actrices du système de l'enseignement privé protestant au Cameroun. Son amour pour la jeunesse camerounaise et son dévouement au service de cette même jeunesse lui ont valu des gestes de reconnaissance de la part du gouvernement à plusieurs occasions.

SF: En regardant la liste des missionnaires femmes que vous venez de citer, je constate qu'il s'agit uniquement des femmes non-mariées autrement appelées "demoiselles". Voulez-vous par là signifier que seules les femmes célibataires étaient envoyées comme missionnaires en Afrique? Ou bien, avez-vous tout simplement oublié les noms de celles parmi elles qui étaient des femmes mariées?

ES: Je connais le modèle de la NMS à laquelle j'appartiens. Selon le modèle de la NMS, il fallait à tout prix et de manière permanente que chaque station missionnaire ait une famille (le Pasteur et sa famille) et deux demoiselles. Mais à la station de Ngaoundéré où j'ai passé tout ma

carrière missionnaire au Cameroun, il y avait toujours plus de demoiselles que des familles et cette situation n'a pas été facile à gérer et a même par moment créé des problèmes à la mission.

SF: Quels genres de problèmes?

ES: Rires. Je ne peux spécifier le genre de problèmes que cela a créé, mais je sais qu'il y a eu pas mal de problèmes liés à la présence en surnombre des demoiselles missionnaires ici à la station de Ngaoundéré.

SF: Etait-il permis à ces demoiselles de se marier pendant leur service missionnaire?

ES: A ma connaissance, il n'y avait pas d'interdiction de la part de la mission empêchant les demoiselles de se marier pendant le temps de leur engagement comme missionnaires à l'étranger. Il y en a qui se sont mariées à d'autres missionnaires hommes célibataires. Toutefois, si je ne me trompe pas moi-même, le mariage entre les missionnaires et les Africains n'était pas encouragé par les dirigeants de la société de mission.

SF: Rappelez-vous des temps où lors de vos conférences missionnaires, une femme missionnaire a dirigé soit une étude biblique soit une exhortation?

ES: Non. De ma connaissance, aucune femme missionnaire ne nous a dirigés dans quel que aspect que ce soit lors de nos réunions des missionnaires au Cameroun.

SF: Ne pensez-vous pas que la situation qui prévaut aujourd'hui dans l'Eglise au Cameroun où les femmes ne sont même pas autorisées à faire

des simples lectures bibliques en publique est le résultat de l'enseignement donné par les missionnaires concernant le rôle de la femme dans l'église? Que me répondriez-vous, si je disais que les missionnaires sont les premiers responsables de l'exclusion des femmes dans le leadership de l'église en Afrique aujourd'hui?

ES: Il serait totalement faux d'accuser les missionnaires européens d'avoir enseigné la discrimination contre les femmes dans l'église. La tradition africaine elle-même, vous le savez bien, est très négative vis-à-vis des femmes. Au contraire, je peux dire que le travail missionnaire au Cameroun a beaucoup fait pour libérer la femme africaine du poids, souvent trop lourd à porter par cette dernière, c'est à dire le poids de la tradition africaine.

SF: Je voudrais encore une fois vous dire sincèrement merci pour m'avoir accordé cette interview qui, j'espère, m'aidera à coup sûr de cerner d'avantage le problème que pose l'intégration des femmes dans les structures dirigeantes de notre Eglise aujourd'hui.

11. Interview with Torbjorg Bohnhoff

This interview is with Torbjorg Bohnhoff, known to many people in the Lutheran church in Cameroon as "Madame Bohnhoff". The interview took place at her home in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon on December 28, 1999. Madame Bohnhoff was then, the only woman in the Lutheran church who occupied a position of a leader who had many male pastors working under her responsibility as she headed the department of Christian education. The interview was conducted in French, a language both of us use as working language in Cameroon.

Of her maiden name Heimstad Torbjorg, Madame Bohnhoff was born on April 1st, 1938 in Norway and arrived in Cameroon as a single woman missionary of the NMS in 1965. She married her husband, Dr. Lee Bohnhoff of the Sudan Mission on December 6, 1979 in Cameroon and from that time, she stopped working for the NMS and became a missionary of the Sudan Mission alongside her husband. This shift from one mission society to another did not disrupt her missionary engagement in Cameroon, for both the NMS and the SM were founding mission societies of the Lutheran church in Cameroon.

Taking into consideration her long experience as a single woman missionary as well as a spouse of a missionary pastor, I wrote a letter to Madame Bohnhoff from South Africa where I was trying to work on the proposal of this research, asking her whether she could assist me in telling me her story. Here is what she wrote in her letter dated May 31, 1999: "Ici, je n'ai pas le sujet exact que tu m'as donné: le rôle des femmes dans le développement de l'Eglise(?) Je n'ai pas eu le temps d'étudier ta question en profondeur. Parmi les premiers missionnaires, il y avait de nombreuses femmes, mariées ou célibataires qui enseignaient, traitaient les malades etc. C'était une infirmière norvégienne (en 1929?) qui créa la première école "moderne" dans l'Adamaoua – avec lecture, chant, calcul, écriture, Bible etc en Français et en Mbum.

Les Peuhls ont envoyé les enfants de *Koa Bira* (des esclaves des Peuhls) et le grand changement a commencé pour le bas-peuple, bien sûr pour les garçons d'abord.

Les femmes constituent plus de la moitié de l'humanité. Si on les considère comme des êtres humains, le service des femmes missionnaires

a ouvert pour elles un chemin pour sortir de l'esclavage, de l'oppression et apprendre qu'elles ont une valeur immense aux yeux de Dieu.

Beaucoup d'hommes s'opposèrent à ce nouveau point de vue et le font encore (des musulmans orthodoxes et quelques chrétiens qui interprètent la Bible d'une autre manière.)

Pierre affirme l'action de Dieu en Actes 2.18: "Oui, je répandrai de mon Esprit sur mes serviteurs et mes servantes en ce jour-là et ils prophétiseront."

Le Seigneur a répandu son Esprit sur les femmes dans l'EELC. Elles prient avec leurs enfants, leur montrent le bon chemin, les envoient à l'école, elles soutiennent les ouvriers de l'Eglise par leurs prières, leur travail et leurs offrandes. Elles rendent témoignage du Seigneur selon leurs capacités et selon l'ouverture qu'on leur donne.

C'est seulement des mouvements comme celui des Talibans qui peuvent pour un certain temps empêcher le développement des femmes et leur service dans la société et l'Eglise.

(Vous avez) tu as choisi un bon thème. J'espère que nous pourrons beaucoup profiter de tes recherches et voir combien le Seigneur bénit l'Eglise et la nation à travers les femmes.

SF: Comment êtes-vous devenue missionnaire Madame?

TB: A l'âge de trois ans, j'ai été appelée par le Seigneur pour Le servir. Ma mère et ma grand-mère m'avaient toujours amenée avec elles à la réunion des femmes de la mission. Je m'intéressais beaucoup à la lecture.

J'ai beaucoup lu les journaux de la mission depuis mon jeune âge. J'ai aussi appris plusieurs langues à l'école comme une partie de ma préparation pour la mission.

SF: Concrètement, comment s'est faite votre sélection pour que vous deveniez une missionnaire de la NMS au Cameroun?

TB: Au départ, nous étions une dizaine de femmes sélectionnées par la mission. Quatre parmi nous devaient être envoyées au Cameroun comme missionnaires et j'étais l'une des quatre choisies pour le Cameroun. Mais, j'avais particulièrement peur d'aller au Cameroun, je ne sais pour quelle raison. Je fus néanmoins envoyée au Cameroun à cause de mon fiancé qui était un dentiste travaillant lui aussi comme missionnaire au Cameroun.

SF: Saviez-vous à l'avance quel genre de travail vous devriez faire au Cameroun en tant que femme célibataire missionnaire?

TB: Quand nous arrivions au Cameroun pour la première fois, nous n'avions aucune idée de ce que nous devrions faire comme travail en tant que missionnaires. Personnellement, je me rappelle que j'ai eu entre autres responsabilités d'enseigner la Bible, l'Anglais et l'Allemand au Collège Protestant. J'ai été aussi directrice d'école à Bankim pour trois ans, à Mbé pour quatre ans, et j'ai aussi rempli les fonctions de secrétaire à l'Education par interim. J'ai aussi travaillé sur la confection du programme d'enseignement pour les écoles de l'Eglise pendant une période de trois ans à Meng. J'ai enfin été aumônière et j'occupe actuellement les fonctions de directrice de l'Education Chrétienne dans notre Eglise.

SF: Vous êtes-vous finalement mariée avec votre fiancé dentiste?

TB: Non. Cela n'a pas marché.

SF: Mais vous êtes aujourd'hui Madame Bohnhoff?

TB: Oui. Je me suis mariée avec Dr. Lee Bohnhoff ici au Cameroun. C'était le 6 décembre, 1979.

SF: En tant que missionnaire norvégienne, comment étiez-vous considérée par les missionnaires d'autres sociétés de mission telle que la Sudan Mission ainsi que votre propre mission, c'est-à-dire la NMS?

TB: Très souvent j'ai eu l'occasion de m'adresser à mes collègues missionnaires lors de nos conférences des missionnaires. J'ai dirigé des séances d'études bibliques dans plusieurs réunions aussi bien de l'Eglise que des missions. On ne m'a jamais considérée comme une femme. J'ai le sentiment que tout le monde dans l'Eglise avait accepté favorablement mon travail.

SF: C'est peut-être dû au fait que vous êtes une missionnaire blanche. Que penseriez-vous des femmes africaines et leurs rôles dans l'Eglise, hier et aujourd'hui?

TB: Mais, je pense que les femmes de l'EELC ont été libérées par l'Evangelie. Aujourd'hui, on peut les voir lire et prêcher la Parole de Dieu en public. Ce qui ne se faisait pas dans les années passées.

Avant, on n'envoyait pas les filles à l'école. En 1965-66, il y avait seulement deux filles dans les classes que j'enseignais au Collège Protestant (une en classe de 4^e et une en 5^e).

SF: Cela vous a certainement choquée de voir que les filles n'étaient pas autorisées par leurs parents d'aller à l'école. Aujourd'hui, il y a plusieurs idées qui circulent dans le monde sur la libération de la femme en général et la libération de la femme africaine en particulier. Le mouvement féministe peut être considéré comme l'un des moteurs de la lutte pour la libération de la femme aujourd'hui. Avez-vous une pensée que vous pouvez me suggérer là-dessus?

TB: Je n'ai jamais été proche des idées féministes parce que je trouve qu'il y a trop de démagogie et d'attaques contre les hommes dans le féminisme. Si une femme se laisse trainer derrière par les hommes, on doit toujours dire que c'est la faute des hommes.

Selon mon expérience, je constate que si une femme est appelée par Dieu et si elle fait bien son travail, celui que Dieu lui a donné de faire, les hommes la respecteront, qu'elle soit noire ou blanche. C'est ce qui s'est passé avec Nenilava dans l'Eglise luthérienne de Madagascar.

SF: L'exemple de Nenilava est un bon exemple pour montrer que les femmes africaines aussi peuvent exercer une grande influence sur la vie spirituelle des populations aussi bien africaines qu'européennes. Mais selon mes informations que j'ai reçues sur la vie de Nenilava, elle n'a jamais été ordonnée pasteur. Que pensez-vous du ministère pastoral des femmes dans l'église en Afrique?

TB: Concernant l'ordination des femmes au ministère pastoral, tous les arguments qu'on avance contre sont tout simplement des prétextes pour refuser aux femmes cette fonction dans l'église. Mais ces arguments ne sont fondés ni bibliquement ni socialement. La question d'ordination des

femmes à mon avis ne relève pas des différences sur le plan sexuel, mais c'est une question de respect de vocation que Dieu suscite en une personne. Il faut qu'il y ait de la justice dans cette affaire, si l'on veut être obéissant à Dieu et respectueux des droits des autres.

SF: S'il n'y a plus d'autre chose sur le sujet dont vous jugez nécessaire que je connaisse, je voudrais sur ce, vous remercier de tout coeur pour votre disponibilité de m'accorder cette interview riche d'information.

Encore une fois de plus merci pour votre temps, Madame.

12. Interview with Ester and Ingebrigt Roen

This interview is with Ester and Ingebrigt Roen, former missionaries of the NMS in the Central African Republic and Cameroon. The interview took place in Trondheim, Norway on October 28, 2000 at their home. The interview was aimed at getting the experience of a wife of a missionary (Ester Roen). However, in the course of the interview, the husband (pastor Ingebrigt Roen) was also willing to share views about women in the church in Africa, and more importantly about the contribution of his wife to the success of his work as a missionary in Africa. For this reason, pastor Ingebrigt was also given the opportunity during the interview to share his views on the role of women in the church in Africa.

The interview was started in French, but later on Ester found herself more comfortable to speak in English than in French, so we continued in English. However, when it was time for her husband to speak, he preferred using French instead of English.

SF: Bonjour Madame.

ER: Bonjour pasteur.

SF: Madame, je suis ici en Norvège dans le cadre d'une visite d'échange et d'étude organisée par la NMS. Mais comme vous le savez, je viens de l'Afrique du Sud où je suis en train d'écrire une thèse de doctorat en théologie sur le rôle de la femme dans l'Eglise en Afrique. Sachant que vous avez été missionnaire en Afrique, je voudrais profiter de l'occasion qui m'est ainsi offerte pour vous faire une interview sur votre expérience de femme missionnaire qui a travaillé en Afrique.

Etes-vous allée en Afrique comme missionnaire avec un poste de travail bien déterminé par votre mission d'envoi ou bien êtes-vous allée plutôt comme femme mariée qui accompagne son mari dans le champ missionnaire? Combien de temps êtes-vous restée en Afrique comme missionnaire?

ER: Notre temps de mission en Afrique a duré de 1987 – 1993.

Jes suis allée en Afrique comme une femme mariée qui suit son mari. Du côté de la mission, je n'avais pas d'autre responsabilité que d'être une femme au foyer. Mais une fois arrivée en Afrique, j'ai eu la liberté de travailler avec les femmes et les enfants.

Comme mon mari avait beaucoup à faire avec l'évangélisation et la formation des catéchistes dans l'Eglise, moi je suis restée travailler avec les femmes et les enfants. Je me suis aussi occupée des malades comme je suis infirmière de formation.

SF: Ah, oui! Vous avez une formation d'infirmière? Dans ce cas vous n'auriez pas dû manquer de quoi vous occuper. Mais comment vous

organisiez-vous pour venir en aide aux malades? Y avait-il une infirmerie en place pour recevoir les malades?

ER: Non. Il n'y avait pas d'infirmerie dans le village. Comme chrétienne, mais aussi surtout comme infirmière, je n'arrivais pas à supporter de voir des gens souffrir de tant des maladies, particulièrement les enfants. J'ai donc décidé d'aider les mamans à avoir quelques notions très élémentaires d'hygiène et de salubrité pour éviter aux enfants de contracter des maladies causées par le manque d'hygiène corporelle.

En Centrafrique, les populations étaient tellement loin d'un centre de santé où elles pouvaient recevoir un traitement en cas de maladie, qu'on ne pouvait les aider qu'en ayant quelque chose sur place pour les soigner. J'étais ainsi à la longue amenée à disposer d'une boîte à médicaments à la maison pour pouvoir subvenir aux besoins de ceux qui venaient vers nous. Notre véranda s'était ainsi transformée en salle de consultation médicale. Il n'y avait pas que des femmes et des enfants qui venaient, mais aussi des hommes quand ils sentaient qu'ils étaient malades.

Au Cameroun, mon mari a enseigné au séminaire de théologie pour former les pasteurs. A côté du séminaire, l'Eglise a un dispensaire où j'ai pu de temps en temps aider. Mais j'avais surtout travaillé avec les femmes des étudiants.

SF: Vous avez travaillé non seulement avec les femmes des étudiants du séminaire à Meiganga, mais vous avez aussi travaillé avec les femmes en Centrafrique, pendant que votre mari était occupé à former les catéchistes et pasteurs pour l'Eglise. Quelle image gardez-vous aujourd'hui de la femme africaine?

Comme étrangère, j'avais toujours eu la tentation de comparer les femmes africaines avec les femmes missionnaires. Je ne sais pas si je suis arrivée à tirer une conclusion de cette comparaison. Mais une chose est certaine, c'est que, lorsqu'on parle du travail, il doit être clair que le travail des femmes, qu'elles soient blanches ou noires, est différent du travail de l'homme.

Dans l'Eglise par exemple, les femmes prennent beaucoup d'initiatives. Elles cōtisent l'argent pour soutenir le travail des catéchistes et d'évangélistes.

Les hommes dans l'Eglise savent très bien que les femmes jouent un rôle important, mais refusent de reconnaître publiquement aux femmes ce privilège.

Parmi les européens missionnaires qui sont allés en Afrique, on n'a trouvé par exemple que les femmes missionnaires avaient beaucoup plus de facilité de contacts avec les Africains que les hommes missionnaires.

Pour ce qui concerne le rôle des femmes africaines dans l'Eglise, je peux dire que les femmes africaines sont plus importantes que ne sont les femmes norvégiennes dans l'Eglise norvégienne.

SF: Quel rôle pensez-vous que les femmes africaines formées dans le domaine de la théologie peuvent jouer aujourd'hui au Cameroun?

ER: Les femmes théologiennes peuvent travailler parmi les jeunes, dans le mouvement des femmes et dans l'école de Dimanche. Si une femme devient pasteur et se comporte comme un homme, elle perdra beaucoup. Il faut que nous femmes, nous gardions notre image de femmes.

SF: Madame, pouvez-vous parler un peu plus de cette image de femme dont vous venez de faire mention. A quoi pensez-vous spécifiquement quand vous parlez de “notre image de femme”?

ER: Ahhh. I don't know. It is so difficult to explain it in French. If you allow, I will try to say it in English.

SF: Yes, yes. You are very much welcomed to express yourself in English. After all my work is being written in English. So, you will be quoted in English and not in French.

ER: I want African women to develop their own way of being Africans. I don't want them to copy the Western style. Here in Norway for instance, they think that to be a modern woman, one needs to do what a man does. Today, we have many female pastors in our Church in Norway.

In Europe, women fought for years to be equal to men in everything. They thought they were going to find happiness in this. But now that we have got what we fought for, that is to be able to occupy any job position in the society just as our male counterparts, I don't think we have reached the level in which we can say that we are more happier in our lives than our foremothers. If this were the case, then why are there so many madness caused by the spirit of individualism in our Western society today?

I have in mind the examples of African women who are very strong in caring for their families. When the husband is an alcoholic and is unable to provide for the needs of his family, the wife is very counscious, looks after her children and the husband as well. This is much more better not only

for African women but for the society as a whole, than what we see people doing here in Norway.

In Africa, women are very responsible; they live in solidarity and help each other to bear the difficulties of life. This is what I refer to as “notre image de femmes” which is still very much alive in African societies.

SF: What does it mean for a woman in Europe to be a modern woman today?

ER: For many of us in Europe, to be a modern woman is not something else than being individualistic and free to do whatever they want. For example, the choice to marry or not to marry, to have children or not to have children and so on. And this is the spirit I don't want African women to be contaminated with. I hope that African women will continue to have their sense of communal life and solidarity.

SF: Madame, don't you think that our African women should be allowed to play greater role in the leadership of the church, like becoming pastors and so on?

ER: For me, women should be allowed to preach because when men preach, they mostly give examples from the male point of view and yet the church is sometimes full of women. Thus, for women to fill part of the community, their experiences should be taken into consideration.

For an African woman to become a pastor is a big challenge. There are many practical problems, which need to be dealt with. For instance traveling from one place to another in rural areas without any means of

transport can be a real obstacle for a woman pastor to perform her pastoral ministry.

SF: Thank you so much Madam for your input.

Now I would like to turn to my colleague and friend pastor Ingebrigt who may have something to share of his experience as a missionary about the situation of women in both the church and the mission society in Africa.

IR: Oui, ma femme et moi étions tous deux allés en Afrique comme missionnaires. Mais j'étais le seul à avoir un poste de travail fixe de la part de la mission.

Ma femme a aussi beaucoup travaillé comme infirmière. Elle a surtout eu un contact extraordinaire avec les femmes africaines. A travers elle, j'ai eu la chance d'apprendre beaucoup de la culture Gbaya.

SF: Pensez-vous que votre mission aurait été différente si vous étiez allé seul en Afrique?

IR: Certainement oui. Ma femme m'a aidé à voir les choses de la société africaine qu'on ne pouvait voir qu'avec les yeux d'une femme. Par exemple, la relation entre l'homme et la femme dans la société gbaya que nous avons connue n'est pas tout à fait la même chose qu'en Europe. Comme j'enseignais aussi la théologie pratique, il était très important pour moi de savoir comment fonctionne la famille africaine afin de ne pas me tromper de sujet quand il s'agit de donner des exemples pratiques. Et dans ce sens, ma femme était ma première source d'information à cause de ses relations avec les femmes africaines.

SF: Quelle image gardez-vous de la femme africaine dans la société et dans l'Eglise luthérienne où vous avez travaillé comme missionnaire?

IR: J'ai vu la femme africaine comme une personne très responsable dans son foyer et dans l'Eglise.

Dans l'Eglise, comme j'étais aussi trésorier du district, j'ai remarqué que les femmes étaient souvent les seules membres de l'Eglise sur qui reposait la collecte des fonds pour le soutien des ouvriers. Elles sont aussi plus fidèles que les hommes dans la gestion des fonds de l'Eglise. Mais malheureusement, elles sont très souvent laissées de côté quand il s'agit de décider de dépenser de l'argent qu'elles-mêmes ont cõtisé.

SF: Avez-vous une suggestion qui va dans le sens d'une intégration totale de la femme africaine dans la gestion de l'Eglise en Afrique aujourd'hui.

IR: Oui, je pense que l'Eglise doit laisser aux femmes de faire ce qu'elles sont capables de bien faire plus que les hommes, par exemple la gestion de l'argent. Il ne faut pas que l'Eglise limite les femmes dans leur travail.

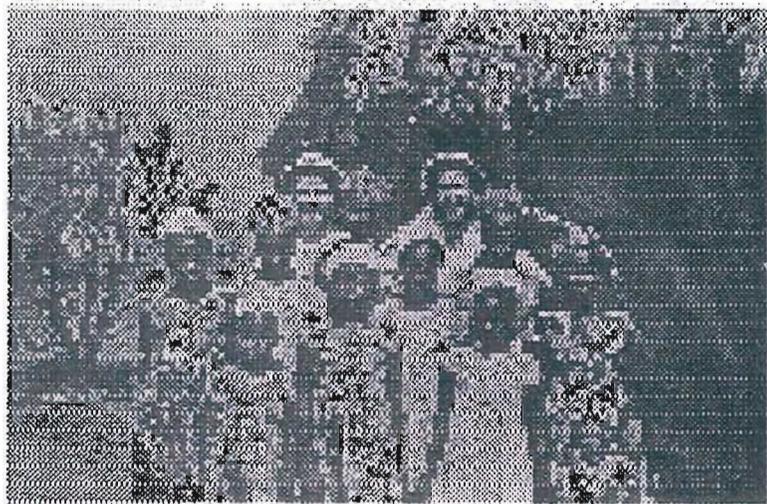
SF: Selon vous, doù vient cette habitude dans l'Eglise de ne pas permettre aux femmes de faire ce qu'elles sont capables de faire?

IR: Je pense que selon la tradition africaine, l'homme est au-dessus de la femme.

Il y a aussi une tradition missionnaire qui a été influencée par les anciennes tendances qui consistaient à minimiser le rôle de la femme dans la vie publique.

SF: Je voudrais vous remercier de tout coeur pour m'avoir accordé cette interview. Nous garderons le contact. Je vous tiendrai informés du progrès de la rédaction de cette thèse.

Appendix 2: Photos

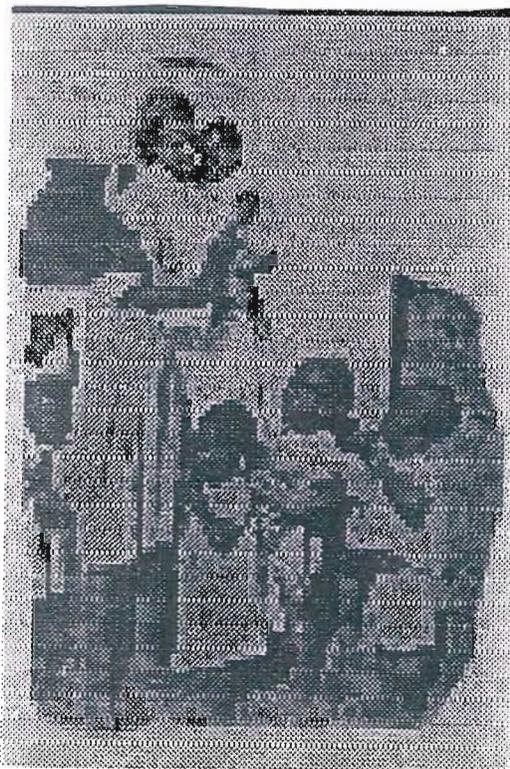


Picture 1

Two women missionaries with a group of African girls during the confirmation ceremony of Marie, one the girls on the picture

Picture taken in Ngaouyanga in 1950, by an unknown photographer

Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway

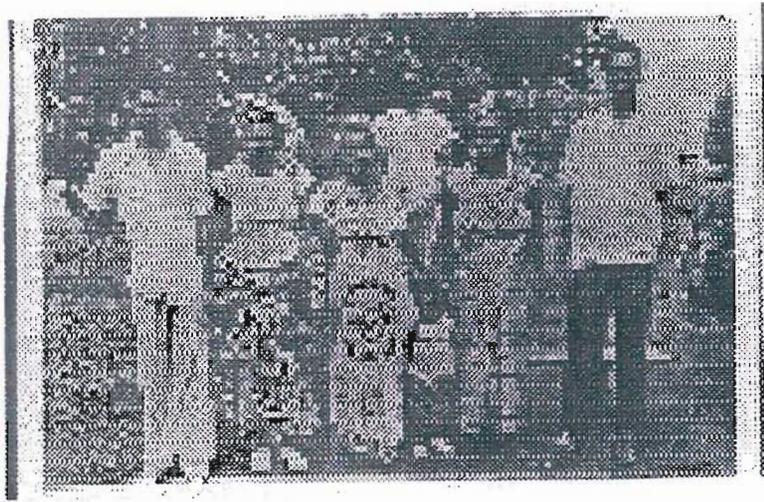


Picture 2

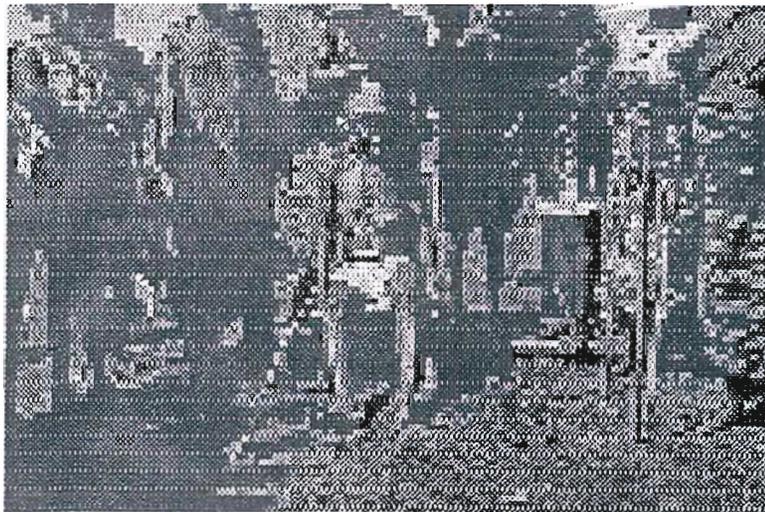
Missionary Mosand Ingeborg and the orphans at the Yoko orphanage.

Picture taken in Yoko between 1950 and 1954, by Ulland Karen

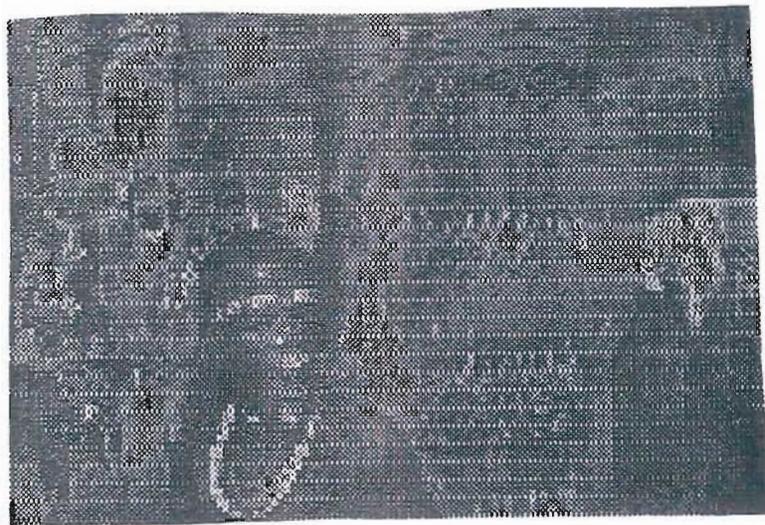
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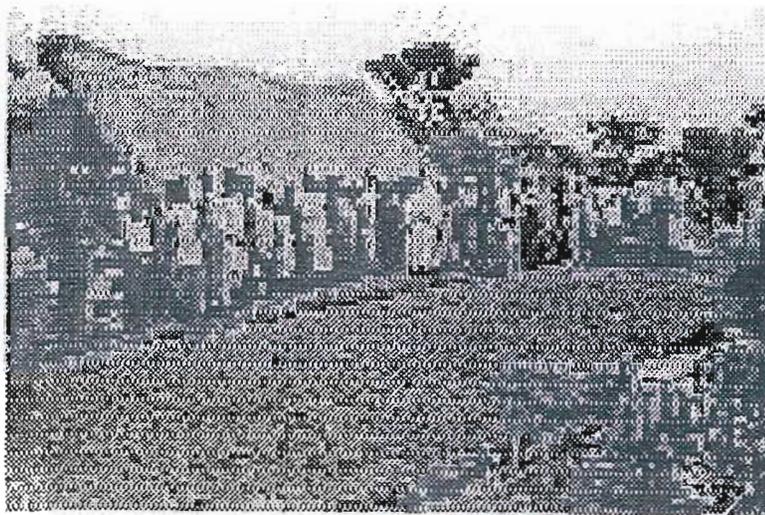
Picture 3
Numjal's family and friends
Picture taken in Tibati in 1953, by an unknown photographer
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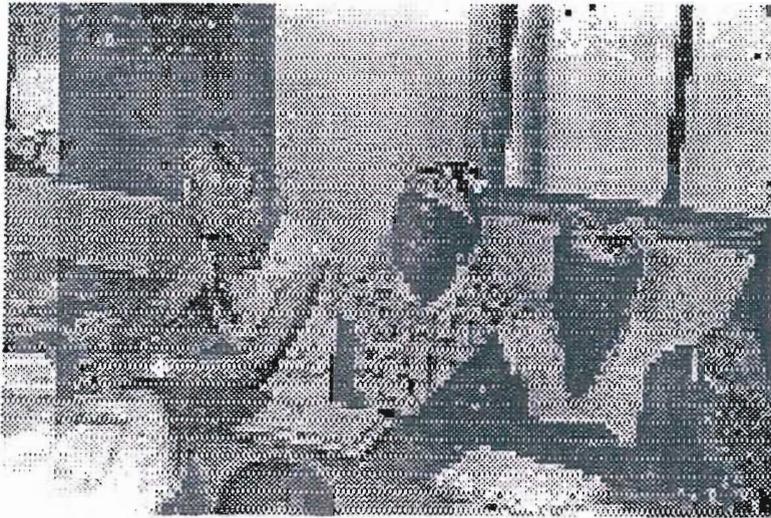
Picture 4
Funeral ceremony among the Gbaya. Widows are often ill-treated by the in-laws.
Picture taken in Meizamba in 1955, by Aase Per Arne
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



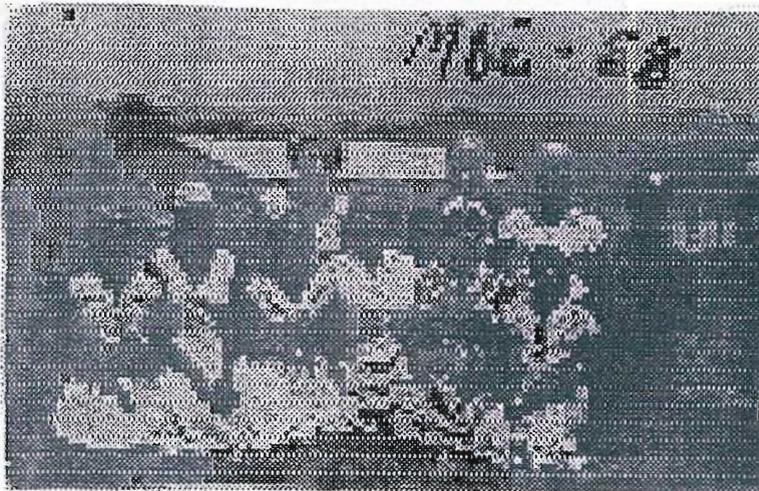
Picture 5
A woman wearing traditional jewellery
Picture taken in Bongor, Chad in 1957, by Knudsen Sigurd
Archives of the NMS, in Stavanger, Norway



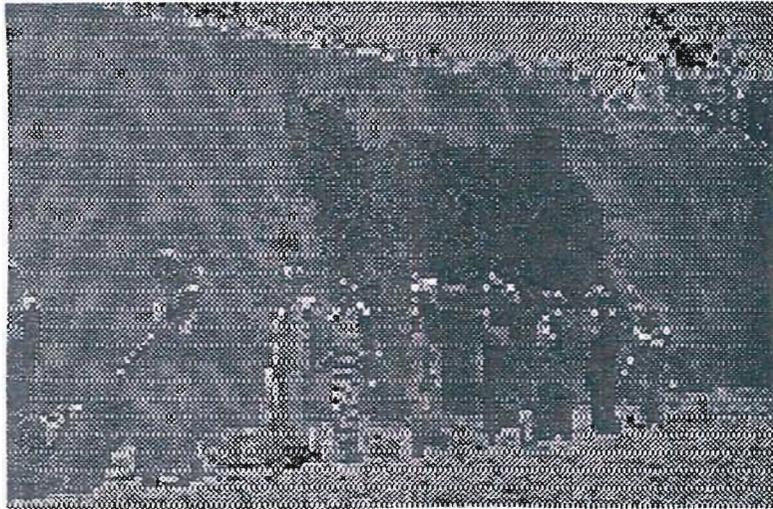
Picture 6
Inauguration of the Lazaretto of Foubarka (Mbé)
Picture taken in Foubarka in 1957, by an unknown photographer
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



Picture 7
The wives of the students at the Bible school and their teacher (a woman missionary) in the class
Picture taken in Meng (Tibati) in 1958, by Aasen Per Arne
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



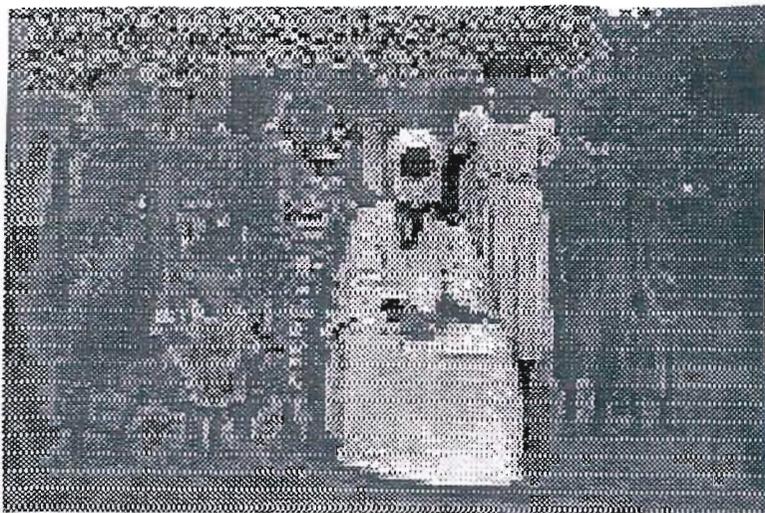
Picture 8
A woman missionary teacher and the school girls
Picture taken in Mbé in 1958, by an unknown photographer
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



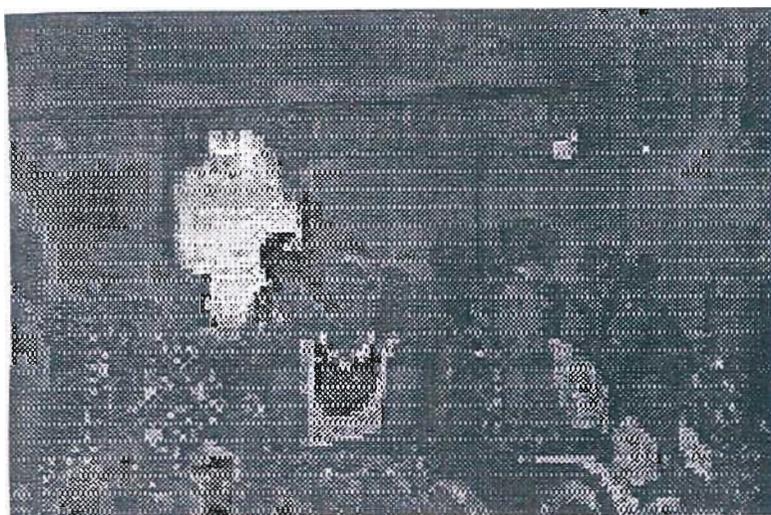
Picture 9
A group of women care takers working in the Lanido palace in Ngaoundéré
Picture taken in Ngaoundéré in 1960, by Ellingsen Olaf
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



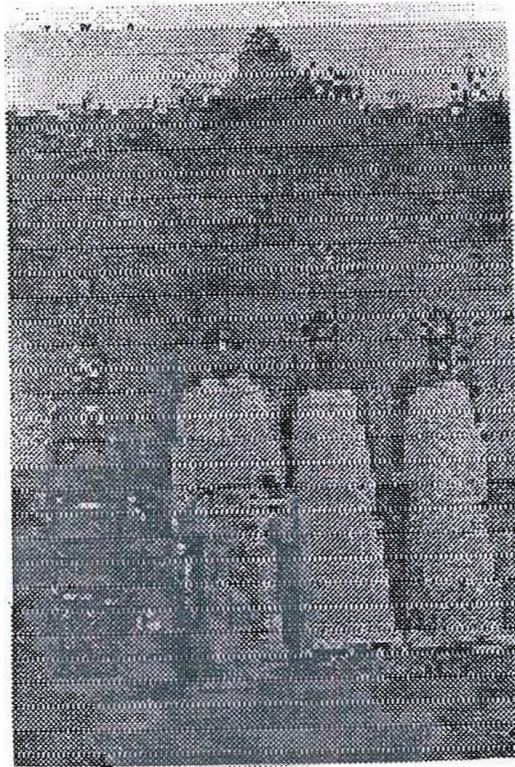
Picture 10
A missionary woman killing lice on the hair of an African woman using a disinfectant
Picture taken in Mbé between 191 and 1965, by Walle Jan H.
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



Picture 11
The chief of Bankim surrounded by his wives
Picture taken in Bankim in 1960, by Ellingsen Olaf
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



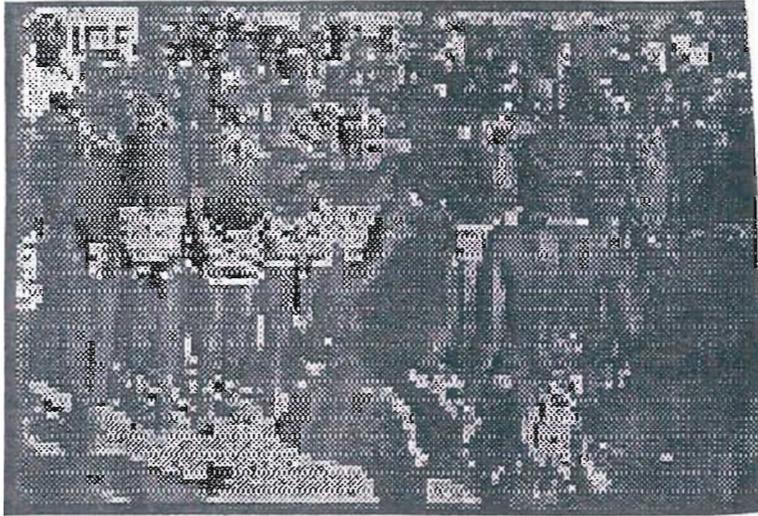
Picture 12
Worship service in a church nearby Tibati. Most of the attendance are women
Picture taken in a village nearby Tibati in 1960, by Aasen Per Arne
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



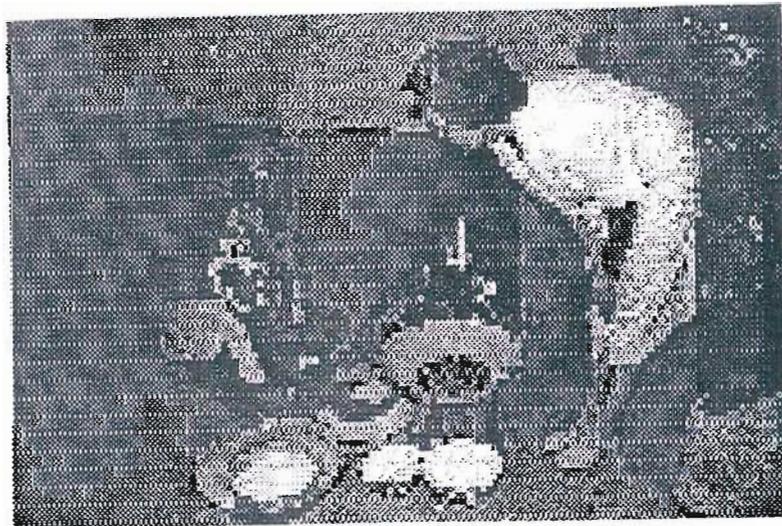
Picture 13
Wives of the *Lamido* (King) Mohammadou Abbo of Ngaoundéré
Picture taken in Ngaoundéré in 1960, by Flottum Sverre
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



Picture 14
A Gbaya woman dancing a ritual funeral dance
Picture taken in Makendaou (Tibati) in 1963, by Bue Bjorn
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



Picture 15.
A group of girls dancing traditional dance
Picture taken in Kapsiki in 1967, by John Fosse
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway



Picture 16
A missionary nurse chatting with a patient's keeper in the yard of the Protestant Hospital in Ngaoundéré
Picture taken in Ngaoundéré in 1967, by John Fosse
Archives of the NMS in Stavanger, Norway

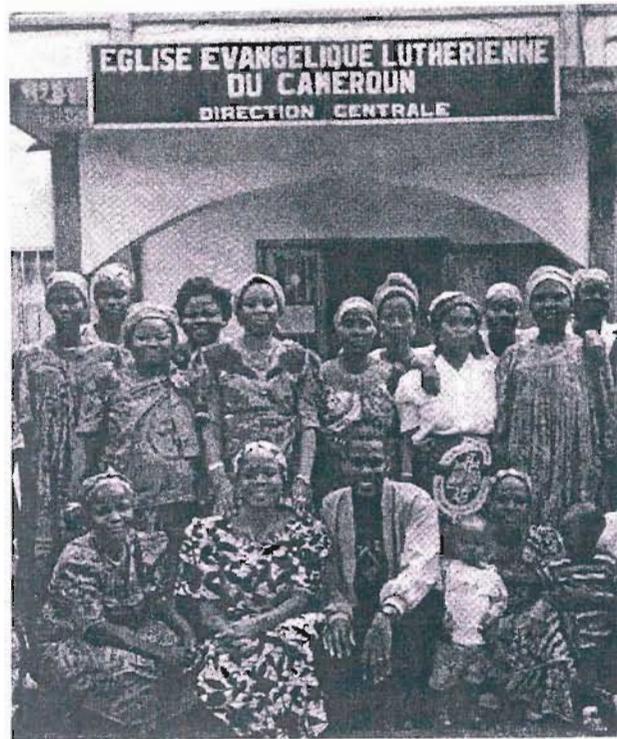


Picture 17
Missionary Verna Syverson with a group of leaders of the Women For Christ in Cameroon.
Place, year, and the photographer unknown
From Verna Syverson's personal archives

WOMEN for CHRIST in CAMEROON



Picture 18
Participants in a meeting of the Women For Christ in Cameroon
Exact place and year of the meeting, and photographer unknown
From Verna Syverson's personal archives



Picture 19
Leaders of the Women For Christ
Picture taken in Ngaoundéré in 1999, by one of the participants in the meeting
Picture kept by Samuel Frouisou, the author of this research



Picture 20
Missionary Helger Hetlesether
Picture taken in Olen in November 2000, by Samuel Frouisou



Picture 21
Ester Roen, wife of missionary Igebrigt Roen
Picture taken in Trondheim in October 2000, by Samuel Frouisou



Picture22
Missionary Else Strand in her office as head of the Church Education Department
Picture taken in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, date and photographer unknown
From Strand's personal photo album.