

**THE CONCEPT OF *MANG-DJALA* WITH REFERENCE TO CHURCH  
UNITY IN A CONTEXT OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY: THE CASE OF THE  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CAMEROON (ELCC)**

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. Déouyo', is written over a horizontal line.

**Paul Déouyo**

## Abstract

This study examines the issue of ethnocentrism that has become so detrimental to Christian unity within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, as it is pulling apart Christians of different ethnic groups. The study puts forward the indigenous practice of *Mang-Djala* as a possible indigenous resource that can be used as an added value not only in enhancing the Christian understanding of unity, but also in advocating for peace, justice and reconciliation in ordinary social life. In this regard, the study investigates the possibility of *Mang-Djala* functioning in the secular sense as social contract and in a religious sense as covenant. The study argues that the rejection of African cultures by the colonisers and the first missionaries was a big mistake, and that the Gospel needs to be incarnated in every culture and context. Contextualization therefore needs to be used to integrate African cultures and the Gospel. Hence, the study posits that *Mang-Djala* is a preparation for the Gospel, which can be defined as anything within a culture that can become an entry point, facilitating the transmission, clarifying the understanding of the Gospel and allowing the openness of the local people to that Gospel.

The basic research question of the study is: in view of the challenges being presented to church and society by ethnic diversity in Cameroon is there a possibility that the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* may act as a reconciling or unifying agent?

The study suggests that the concept of *Mang-Djala* should be introduced into the church at different levels via its structures in order to popularise it and integrate it into the church's theology and practice. In this way, the ethnic groups that are not accustomed to the concept will come to understand and appropriate it, as a new paradigm of understanding and living the Gospel of unity. The problem of ethnicity and the possibility of using *Mang-Djala* as a possible antidote needs to be introduced as part of the training of the clergy. Other institutions in the church where it could be introduced are The Women for Christ Fellowship and the Christian youth organisation. It should also be introduced at synodical level. More importantly, the study suggests that the Church should create and insert in its constitution a clause that should declare ethnocentrism a sin against which every Christian should stand because it promotes discrimination which is against God's commandment of love. The study also acknowledges, however, that *Mang-Djala* should not be considered as an ultimate solution to the problems posed by ethnocentrism.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father Etienne Naïdoh who passed away during my studies while I was away from home, and to my wife Rachel Mainoudji and my children Tuhimi Deouyo Hippolyte, Séh Lari Deouyo Mireille, Wuy-Kanu Deouyo Clémence and Saw-Kanu Deouyo Constant who endured many challenges during my absence.

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## Table of contents

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Declaration       | ii  |
| Abstract          | iii |
| Dedication        | v   |
| Acknowledgements  | vi  |
| Table of contents | vii |
| Abbreviations     | xii |

### **Chapter One: Introduction and background of the study**

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 1.1 | Introduction.....  | 1  |
| 1.2 | Motivation for the study.....  | 1  |
| 1.3 | Background and setting of the study.....                               | 2  |
| 1.4 | Research problem, research question and objectives.....                | 4  |
|     | 1.4.1 Research question.....   | 5  |
|     | 1.4.2 Objectives.....  | 5  |
| 1.5 | Theoretical framework.....   | 6  |
|     | 1.5.1 <i>Mang-Djala</i> , the Gospel and the indigenous knowledge..... | 6  |
|     | 1.5.2 <i>Mang-Djala</i> and the contextualisation of the Gospel.....   | 7  |
|     | 1.5.3 <i>Mang-Djala</i> as metanarrative.....                          | 9  |
| 1.6 | Research design and methodology.....                                   | 9  |
|     | 1.6.1 Methodology.....   | 10 |
|     | 1.6.2 Methods of data collection.....                                  | 11 |
|     | 1.6.2.1 Focus group discussion.....                                    | 12 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 1.6.2.2 Interviews.....  | 13 |
| 1.6.2.3 Archives.....  | 13 |
| 1.6.2.4 Language of communication.....   | 14 |
| 1.7 Data analysis.....   | 15 |
| 1.7.1 Methods of data analysis.....  | 16 |
| 1.7.1.1 The social analysis approach.....                                      | 16 |
| 1.7.1.2 The functionalist analysis of culture.....                             | 17 |
| 1.7.1.3 Theological reflection approach ( <i>praeparatio evangelica</i> )..... | 17 |
| 1.7.2 Structure of the study.....  | 19 |

## **Chapter Two: The historical background of Cameroon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2.1 Introduction.....   | 20 |
| 2.2 History and the Cameroonian society.....                                  | 21 |
| 2.3 Theory of ethnicity.....  | 24 |
| 2.4 Ethnicity in the Cameroonian society.....                                 | 25 |
| 2.4.1 Ethnicity as an instrument of politics in Cameroon.....                 | 26 |
| 2.4.2 Ethnicity as a threat to the Economy.....                               | 28 |
| 2.4.3 Ethnicity as a threat to the Cameroonians' Christian unity.....         | 28 |
| 2.4.4 Ethnicity as a threat to the Cameroonian social cohesion.....           | 29 |
| 2.5 Historical background of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon..... | 31 |
| 2.5.1 The Sudan mission.....  | 31 |
| 2.5.2 The Norwegian missionary society.....                                   | 34 |

|         |  |    |
|---------|--|----|
| 2.5.3   | The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.....                               | 37 |
| 2.5.3.1 | Growth and development of the Church.....                                      | 39 |
| 2.5.3.2 | Education and training in the Church.....                                      | 40 |
| 2.5.3.3 | Administrative structure of the Church.....                                    | 41 |
| 2.6     | Ethnicity and its impact on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.....   | 42 |
| 2.6.1   | Ethnicity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.....                  | 43 |
| 2.6.2   | Manifestation of ethnicity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon...44 |    |
| 2.7     | Conclusion.....  | 50 |

### **Chapter Three: The concept of Mang-Djala**

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 3.1   | Introduction.....   | 52 |
| 3.2   | Different perspectives of the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....                          | 53 |
| 3.2.1 | The origin of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 57 |
| 3.2.2 | The operation of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 62 |
| 3.3   | The Objectives of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 64 |
| 3.4   | The manifestation of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 65 |
| 3.4.1 | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a way of living in a community.....                                  | 67 |
| 3.4.2 | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a means of reconciliation.....                                       | 68 |
| 3.4.3 | The criteria for having a <i>Mang-Djala</i> partner.....                                  | 70 |
| 3.5   | The efficacy of <i>Mang-Djala</i> in conflict resolution.....                             | 72 |
| 3.6   | The limitations of <i>Mang-Djala</i> in conflict resolution.....                          | 74 |
| 3.7   | The possible use of <i>Mang-Djala</i> in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon..... | 76 |



|     |                 |    |
|-----|-----------------|----|
| 3.8 | Conclusion..... | 77 |
|-----|-----------------|----|

#### **Chapter four: Presentation of collected data**

|       |  |    |
|-------|--|----|
| 4.1   | Introduction.....  | 80 |
| 4.2   | The leadership of the Church.....  | 81 |
| 4.2.1 | The Church leadership on ethnicity and tribalism in the Church.....  | 82 |
| 4.2.2 | The views of Church leadership on the consequences of tribalism within the Church.....   | 84 |
| 4.2.3 | The understanding by the Church leadership of the influence of the missionaries.....   | 85 |
| 4.2.4 | The Church leadership on solving the problem of ethnic conflict within the Church.....   | 85 |
| 4.2.5 | The Church leadership on the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 87 |
| 4.2.6 | The articulation of the importance of the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> by the Church leadership.....                             | 88 |
| 4.2.7 | The current role of <i>Mang-Djala</i> , according to the Church leadership.....  | 90 |
| 4.2.8 | The Church leadership's views on the weakness of the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 90 |
| 4.3   | The regional level of the Church: Regional Bishops, Presidents of regional councils and the clergy.....                          | 91 |
| 4.3.1 | Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional councils and clergy on ethnicity.....   | 91 |
| 4.3.2 | The role of the missionaries in tribalism according to the regional Bishops, Presidents of regional councils and the clergy..... | 93 |
| 4.3.3 | Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional councils and clergy on the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....                           | 95 |

|       |  |     |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.3.4 | Theological perspective on <i>Mang-Djala</i> from Regional Bishops, President of Regional councils and the clergy.....         | 96  |
| 4.3.5 | The views of Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and clergy on solving the ethnic problem within the Church..... | 98  |
| 4.4   | Chairpersons of local congregations and lay members.....   | 99  |
| 4.5   | Focus group discussions: a summary of the field work.....  | 101 |
| 4.6   | The traditional rulers and elderly people on the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 103 |
| 4.7   | Conclusion.....  | 104 |

## **Chapter five: Data analysis and interpretation**

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| 5.1   | Introduction.....   | 106 |
| 5.2   | The views of the Church member participants on tribalism.....           | 106 |
| 5.2.1 | The ubiquitous presence of ethnicity in Church and society.....         | 111 |
| 5.2.2 | Ethnicity and the fragmentation of the Christian community.....         | 111 |
| 5.2.3 | The ground of ethnic divisions in the Church.....                       | 112 |
| 5.2.4 | The complicity of the missionaries.....                                 | 119 |
| 5.2.5 | When ethnicity becomes an aberration.....                               | 124 |
| 5.3   | Summary of the views of all the participants on <i>Mang-Djala</i> ..... | 125 |
| 5.3.1 | The viability of <i>Mang-Djala</i> tradition in Cameroon .....          | 125 |
| 5.3.2 | <i>Mang-Djala</i> and equality.....                                     | 127 |
| 5.3.3 | The relevance of <i>Mang-Djala</i> : some parameters.....               | 128 |
| 5.3.4 | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a “social belt of life”.....                       | 130 |
| 5.3.5 | The role of <i>Mang-Djala</i> in grief and death.....                   | 132 |

|        |   |     |
|--------|---|-----|
| 5.3.6  | The function of <i>Mang-Djala</i> in deconstructing boundaries and recasting of identities..... | 134 |
| 5.3.7  | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a transcendent factor in religious differences.....                        | 136 |
| 5.3.8  | Honesty and the <i>Mang-Djala</i> partnership.....  | 136 |
| 5.3.9  | The use of humour in <i>Mang-Djala</i> relationships.....                                       | 138 |
| 5.3.10 | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as an agent of reconciliation.....  | 142 |
| 5.3.11 | The notion of covenant in <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 142 |
| 5.3.12 | Assessing <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 143 |
| 5.4    | Conclusion.....   | 145 |

**Chapter six: Mang-Djala as social contract and as covenant: Resonances with a secular and a religious theme**

|       |   |     |
|-------|---|-----|
| 6.1   | Introduction.....   | 147 |
| 6.2   | The philosophy of social contract and its resonance with <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....                  | 147 |
| 6.3   | Yearning for social life: the social contract theory and the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 148 |
| 6.4   | The social contract theory and the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a quest for human welfare..... | 150 |
| 6.5   | <i>Mang-Djala</i> as covenant.....  | 154 |
| 6.5.1 | The etymology, definition, and meaning of covenant and its resonance with <i>Mang-Djala</i> ..... | 155 |
| 6.5.2 | Different perspectives of the word <i>berith</i> .....  | 157 |
| 6.6   | Conclusion.....   | 167 |

**Chapter Seven: The Gospel and culture – a theological reflection on the concept of  
*Mang-Djala* and its implications**

|     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| 7.1 | Introduction.....  | 169 |
| 7.2 | The contextualisation of the Gospel in Africa – some general remarks.....  | 169 |
|     | 7.2.1 The centrality of the scripture in the dialogue between Gospel and culture...  | 173 |
|     | 7.2.2 <i>Mang-Djala</i> within the context of the dynamic relationship between the Gospel<br>and culture – some general remarks..... | 174 |
|     | 7.2.3 <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a <i>praeparatio evangelica</i> .....   | 175 |
| 7.3 | Theological reflection on the concept of <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....   | 183 |
|     | 7.3.1 Christian covenant as <i>Mang-Djala</i> .....  | 184 |
|     | 7.3.2 <i>Mang-Djala</i> as the Christian community.....  | 185 |
|     | 7.3.3 The Cross as the ‘universal <i>Mang-Djala</i> ’ and its theological implications.....  | 187 |
|     | 7.3.4 The implications of <i>Mang-Djala</i> as an agent of reconciliation.....   | 188 |
|     | 7.3.4.1 Definition of reconciliation.....  | 188 |
|     | 7.3.4.2 Christian mandate for reconciliation.....  | 190 |
|     | 7.3.4.3 Reconciliation and forgiveness.....  | 191 |
| 7.4 | Conclusion.....  | 193 |

**Chapter Eight: Concluding remarks and recommendations**

|     |                             |     |
|-----|-----------------------------|-----|
| 8.1 | Introduction.....           | 195 |
| 8.2 | The goals of the study..... | 195 |

|         |  |     |
|---------|--|-----|
| 8.3     | Map to fulfilling the goals of the study.....  | 193 |
| 8.3.1   | The archival research.....   | 196 |
| 8.3.2   | The empirical research.....  | 196 |
| 8.3.2.1 | The interviews.....  | 196 |
| 8.3.2.2 | The focus group discussion.....  | 197 |
| 8.4     | The problems of ethnocentrism in Cameroon.....   | 198 |
| 8.4.1   | The sources of the problems caused by the ethnic diversity in the Church.....  | 198 |
| 8.4.2   | The initiative undertaken by the Church to deal with the issue of disunity in the Church.....  | 198 |
| 8.4.3   | The appropriation of <i>Mang-Djala</i> as a possible solution to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon..... | 199 |
| 8.5     | Recommendations: Integrating <i>Mang-Djala</i> into the Church.....  | 204 |
| 8.5.1   | The bible schools and the theological seminary.....  | 204 |
| 8.5.2   | The Women for Christ Fellowship and the Christian Youth Organisation.....  | 205 |
| 8.5.3   | The constitution.....  | 207 |
| 8.6     | Conclusion.....  | 207 |
|         | <b>Bibliography</b> .....  | 209 |
|         | <b>Appendices</b>  |     |
|         | Appendix 1 Informed consent letter.....  | 229 |
|         | Appendix 2 Interviews: English version.....  | 231 |
|         | Appendix 3 Interviews: French version.....   | 262 |
|         | Appendix 4 Ethical clearance.....  | 295 |

## **Abbreviations**

AAATRS: All Africa Academy of Theological and Religious Study

EELC: Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ELCC: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon

NMS: Norwegian Missionary Societies

*Praeparatio evangelica* – Preparation for the Gospel.

## Chapter One

### Introduction and background of the study

#### 1.1 Introduction

This study seeks to analyse the particular problems caused by the ethnic diversity inherent among the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and to locate these problems in the context of Cameroonian society. The study seeks also to use an indigenous concept to mitigate the problems posed by ethnic diversity in the Church. The assumption of the study is that the concept of *Mang-Djala* can underpin the Christian understanding of reconciliation and forgiveness among Christians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

The study therefore, is an attempt to analyse the particular problems that are caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and to locate these problems in the context of Cameroonian society. It attempts an overview of possible solutions to the problems and more specifically, focuses on the concept of *Mang-Djala* as an aspect of the Cameroonian worldview that constitutes a meta-narrative for diverse ethnic groups, and that in turn can serve to unite the Church.

#### 1.2 Motivation for the study

For many years the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has been plagued with disquieting ethnic divisions. The motivation for this study is therefore twofold: Firstly, being Christian and a member of the clergy within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, one cannot simply let members to do what they want, particularly in a context where the Church is clearly floundering in its pursuit for unity. For this reason, the study attempts to relate the story of the Church from the missionary era to the present day, to identify and critique the stages of deficiencies that may have contributed to the development of the present condition of the Church.

Secondly, the study is an expression of concern with regard to the current division occurring within the Church. In this regard, the study, through the use of *Mang-Djala* as an indigenous value familiar to many of the members, hopes to bring to the quest for unity an added dimension which may broaden the scope of the transmission of the Gospel to the Christian community, so as to mitigate the impact of ethnic divisions within the Church. More

importantly, the study intends to stimulate pastors within the Church to become involved in the new approach of Gospel and culture in dialogue as an important paradigm of translating the Gospel efficiently to the contemporary context. In other words, the study seeks to contribute to the upholding of the dynamics of Gospel and culture in dialogue in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and act as the new driving force for the communication of the Gospel within the African Christian Church. Generally, the study expects to play a role in reconciling the different protagonists involved in the existing ethnic conflict that is a scandal in the Christian community. In other words, the study seeks to present forgiveness and reconciliation as the essential, pivotal and intrinsic values to Christianity, without which a community cannot stand, based on the saving work of Christ which seems to have lost its effectiveness in this on-going conflict.

### **1.3 Background and setting of the study**

The focus of the study is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. According to Kåre Lode (1990), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is the result of two missions: the first was the Sudan Mission that was the work of an American missionary, Gunderson, who, in the company of his wife Anna Maria and two other women, Olette Berntsen and Anne Olsen, arrived in Cameroon in 1923 and started their work among the Gbaya ethnic group. The second was the Norwegian Missionary Societies, constituted of four people and headed by Jens Nicolaissen, a former Malagasy missionary, who arrived in Cameroon in 1925 and started their work among the Mbum ethnic group. The two missions came together in 1960 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. From there, the Church, at the time mostly located within a specific number of ethnic groups in a specific area which covered only two regions over the ten currently in the country, considerably expanded to include the entire country. Naturally, the numbers of new ethnic groups and Christians that were integrated into the Church expanded along with the territorial expansion of the Church. Nevertheless, this territorial and ethnical growth of the Church's members has carried with it a kind of "plague" called ethnocentrism that has haunted the Church ever since. Ethnocentrism is therefore the corrupted and the abused form of ethnicity, which is defined as: the "absolutiz[ation of] one's culture, one's way of living with a strong sense of superiority" (Pierli, Prebitero and Muko 1999: 41).



After the mass departure of the missionaries to their home country in the 1990's, the first converted Christians from the first ethnic groups who had hosted the first missionaries in 1923 and 1925, at some point felt they should have complete control over the Church and wanted to exclude other people from the leadership of the Church, leading to divisions between the members. The underlying problems surfaced in 1999 when the Church was about to elect a new President. People were not confident about the impartiality of staff members who were exclusively constituted of Africans in the management of the Church. Thus each existing ethnic group within the Church demanded to have a member of its own ethnic group among the staff members, or to include and ally from another ethnic group on whom they could rely for their needs. This created much suspicion and mistrust among the Christians. Since then the Church has been struggling to stabilise its social situation due to continuous tensions. The source of these tensions, the impact that they are having on the Church and possible ways of resolving them, constitute the main concerns of this study.

In its configuration, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is divided into ten regions spread across the country. These are: the North, the North-east, the North-west, the Central, the Mbere, the East, the South-east, the South-west, the West and the South regions. In these regions there are dominant ethnic groups that constitute the members of the Church. They are presented as follows: the Mbere region dominated by the Gbaya ethnic group, the East region dominated by the Gbaya ethnic group, the South-west region dominated by the Gbaya ethnic group, the South-west region dominated by the Gbaya and the Vute ethnic groups, the West region dominated by the Tikar, the Kwandja and the Mambila ethnic groups, the Central region dominated by the Dii and the Mbum ethnic groups, the North-east dominated by the Mbum, the Dii, the Laka and the Lames ethnic groups, the North-west region dominated by the Dowayo and the Chamba ethnic groups and the north region dominated by the Guiziga ethnic group. Only the South region is heterogenic and it is difficult to determine the dominant ethnic group members of the Church. Each region is divided into district parishes and congregations, with the same ethnic configuration at each level. It is worth mentioning that the American missionaries (1923) settled among the Gbaya in the Mbere region where they started their work and then moved towards the east region, while the Norwegians settled among the Mbum and the Dii in the Centre region where they had started their work and moved to the South-west and the West regions.

Besides the dominant ethnic groups in each region, there are numerous committed members emanating from the 250 ethnic groups, since the Church covered the whole country. Due to

the lack of statistics, it is impossible to present a numerical percentage of the ethnic groups in each region. However, when one considers the ethnic configuration of the whole Church, one can easily understand why some could claim themselves as owners of the Church or as the majority and would seek to influence the leadership of the Church, while others see themselves as the minority and resign themselves as being powerless. Consequently, this led to the seal of alliances between the minorities with those supposedly in the majority, in a struggle for power or the control of the Church.

In the top leadership structure of the Church there is a national bishop elected for a term of four years while at the regional level, there are elected regional bishops. Meanwhile, district and parish pastors are appointed by the regional council under the leadership of the regional bishop.

The policy put into place thus far for the management of the clergy personnel has not resulted in much success in the ethnic integration of the clergies. Once theological students complete their studies, they are sent back to their own regions to serve and most of the time they are posted to their own ethnic groups. Therefore, the regions which do not send their own candidates for theological training have little chance to obtain a pastor, except the heterogenic regions such as the southern and sometimes the northern regions where pastors may be posted indiscriminately from the headquarter of the Church, given the recent creation of those regions, and the fewer trained pastors who are working there.

#### **1.4 Research problem, Research question and Objectives**

The issue of unity has been always problematic throughout the history of Christianity. It was also Christ's concern as documented in the sacerdotal prayer in John 17. Throughout Church history, the ideal unity as promoted by the Gospel has never been fully realised. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation may be regarded as the most spectacular and fatal blow which rent the Church into two parts, and which in turn also gave rise to a multiplicity of Churches.

Christian communities have always been fraught with problems, be these doctrinal, human relationships, and political, that have challenged or threatened its unity. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has not been spared from this evil inherent in all Christian communities. Nevertheless, sources of disunity vary from one Christian community to another. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, ethnocentrism is the evil that threatens the unity within a multi-ethnic community, which the Church finds so difficult to restore.

The problem of ethnocentrism, although serious within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, has not yet been considered as a serious subject of research. In this regard, it is hoped that increased interest will be generated through this study for further research in this field. The study therefore is an attempt to analyse the particular problems that are caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and to locate these problems in the context of Cameroonian society. It attempts an overview of possible solutions to the problem and, more specifically, focuses on the concept of *Mang-Djala* as an aspect of the Cameroonian worldview that constitutes a metanarrative for diverse ethnic groups that in turn can serve to unite the Church.

#### **1.4.1 Research questions**

The main research question is: In view of the challenges for the Church presented by the ethnic diversity of Cameroon society, is there a possibility that the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* can act as a unifying force?

Essential sub-questions to address are:

- a) What are the attendant problems of ethnicity in Cameroonian society?
- b) Does the historical fact that there were different missionary interventions into the society exacerbate the problem?
- c) How is this disunity manifested in the Church?
- d) What initiatives are being undertaken to deal with the issue of ethnic diversity in the Church?
- e) In what way, if any, could the concept of *Mang-Djala* be applied to the situation in order to mitigate or even resolve the problems posed by ethnic diversity?

#### **1.4.2 Objectives**

Following the research question and the sub-questions, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- a) To analyse the impact of ethnicity in Cameroonian society
- b) To locate the source of the problems caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.
- c) To evaluate the initiatives undertaken by the Church thus far to deal with the issue of ethnic disunity in the Church, in order to envisage new possibilities.

- d) To appropriate the concept of *Mang-Djala* in an attempt to suggest possible solutions to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

Theoretically this research is informed by three basic assumptions concerning the concept of *Mang-Djala*:

1. That Indigenous Knowledge must play a vital role in the intellectual life of African society.
2. That a contextualized gospel has power to transform deeply entrenched attitudes such as those expressed in ethnocentrism.
3. That *Mang-Djala* plays the role of a Meta-Narrative that can eclipse the ethnic divisions in Cameroonian society.

### 1.5.1 *Mang-Djala*, the Gospel, and Indigenous Knowledge

It is a fact that the period prior to the advent of the Christian mission in Africa was viewed by most missionaries as being “valueless” within that mission. The African mind was regarded as a “*tabula rasa*” (Bediako 1992:226), a blank slate on which they needed to impose a Euro-Christian template. In other words, Africans had to be separated from their cultures and traditions in order to receive the Gospel. This led to the loss of African values that could have played a crucial role in shaping the Christian mission. Ever since the advent of African theology – that is theology done by Africans – there has been an attempt to redeem this situation. For example, Mbiti in his book “New Testament Eschatology in an African Background” has taken the Akamba people of Kenya as a case study (1971), while Bediako states that: “African theology in the post-missionary era...is as much a response to missionary underestimation of the value of African pre-Christian religious tradition, as it is an African theological response to the specific and more enduring issues of how the Christian Gospel relates to African culture” (1999: xvii).<sup>1</sup>

Asonzeh Ukah supports Bediako by arguing that the missionaries “... demonised and discredited African Indigenous knowledge and medical traditions and systems” (2007: 5). Meanwhile, Tienou suggests that “the quest for African Theology is a reflection on the fact

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<sup>1</sup> Bediako argues that Christianity has become an African religion and that there are deep affinities between African Primal Religion and the Christian gospel. This was not understood by the Christian mission who attempted rather to make Africans conform to a westernized form of Christianity. It was only when Africans took up the gospel and began themselves to spread it that Christianity became successfully established on the continent. But it was usually a different form of faith that became part of African culture. (See *Christianity in Africa – the Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Orbis, 1995)

that Christianity came to the continent in the garments of western cultures” (1998: 45). However, Bediako also points out the positive side of the missionaries by advocating that:

The negative side of missionary history in Africa must not be exaggerated, for several reasons. Firstly, the validity of our Christian communities bears witness to the fact that the Gospel really was communicated, however inadequate we may now consider that communication to have been (1990: 5).

Nevertheless, he rejoices in the knowledge that African theological thinkers have come to share the inheritance of the Gospel as understood by the Apostle Paul – the Gospel that freed the early gentile Christians from Jewish Christian imposition. He believes in the universality of the Gospel and the contribution of African cultures to Christian life and thought and has argued that the limitations of the missionaries should not in any way hinder the growth of the church in Africa (1990: 6).

In accordance with the views of Mbiti, Bediako, and other scholars, this study recognises the validity and importance of indigenous culture and will attempt to appropriate an aspect of this culture as one possible answer to the questions posed by ethnocentrism in Cameroon. *Mang-Djala*, this research will argue, is a classic example of how indigenous knowledge can be harnessed to the good of church and society in Africa. This is in line with another pillar on which this study rests – contextualization.

### **1.5.2 *Mang-Djala* and the contextualisation of the Gospel.**

One cannot afford to underestimate the power of ethnic division in Cameroonian society. The question must be asked: why do ethnic conflicts occur? According to Niane (2005: 8), ethnic conflicts are due to frustrations brought about by human injustices. Ngwa believes that: “Ethnicity, ethnic rivalries and ethnic conflicts have become a post-modern world’s social and political problem, because ethnicity can easily be used as a manipulative tool by members of the ruling class to control the underclasses” (2004: Xi).

According to Nürnberger, ethnic conflict is due to “the phenomenon of ideology... [that] is the collective self-justification mechanism of a social group that pursues its interest at the expense of the interests of other groups” (2005: 144). He asserts that the Gospel is the cure for conflict situations by stating that: “the parties in conflict have to accept each other unconditionally...[although] accepting the unacceptable is painful. It is the way of the Cross. God too accepts us although we are not acceptable” (2005:145). For Aboagye-Mensah, ethnic conflict is the consequence of “the boundary lines, forming rigid barriers that separate us

from other ethnic groups, what scripture refers to as a “wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2: 4)” (1999: 18-21). As a solution, he proposes the destruction of ethnic boundaries by taking the Gospel seriously and to live by it – the solution for ethnic conflict lies in the Gospel. Brakemeier believes that conflict in the Church existed even during the time of the Apostles and that the issue of power plays no small role in the Church; even Jesus had to take on the conflicts of his time between the Jews, Samaritans and Romans and between the various groups within his own people (1990: 5-7). He sees only the Gospel as a solution, to create that much needed communion and the Christian efforts for unity, which are relevant for the whole society. Hence, these theories will assist in identifying the root cause of disunity in the Church in order to propose an eventual solution that can bring about forgiveness and reconciliation in order to restore unity and fellowship among Christians.

Since ethnic prejudices existed in the early church and that the New Testament affirms that the Gospel has power to change such prejudices should give us hope that this same Gospel can have a similar effect in contemporary Cameroonian society. But in order to communicate this Gospel it will have to be contextualized. In this regard, Hewitt maintains that, “the sociological method of studying a phenomenon necessitates the use of certain key concepts to give meaning to the social reality” (2012: 14). This assertion underpins the motive of contextualisation, which Hewitt defines as “a theological and pastoral method that studies the particular context in which events unfold” (2012: 15).

Many scholars in their multiple and different works have contributed insight from different perspectives that have made the terminology comprehensive and applicable to different contexts. According to Shorter, contextualisation is “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures” (1988: 11). That is why Mugambi argues that “...theology is always articulated in a particular cultural context, responding to questions which are always culturally conditioned” (1995: 20). This is to say that God in Jesus Christ encounters the believer and discloses himself through his culture. In that way culture becomes the way through which the Gospel can take root, grow and flourish within a Christian community. Mugambi maintains that “the converts and their descendants become free to appropriate the Gospel in their own way, without the tutelage of missionary instructors and masters” (2003: 174).<sup>2</sup>

Nicholls maintains that “contextuality... is the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one’s own situation. Contextualisation is not simply a fad or catchword, but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the word” (1979: 21).

### **1.5.3 *Mang-Djala* as metanarrative**

According to the Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism (2001: 165), “A grand narrative operates as a metanarrative, providing a framework in which all other cultural narratives find their ground and acquire their meaning and legitimacy”. Al-Sudairy states that a metanarrative is

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<sup>2</sup> This can be observed especially in some of the great indigenous leaders of Christianity in Africa, for example William Wade Harris in West African and Ntirikana in South Africa. But it is also manifest in the many forms of indigenized Christianity throughout the continent. It is this phenomenon that has caused Lamin Sanneh to argue that Christianity has not only impacted Africa numerically but culturally as well. See Kombo J. (2013) “The Past and Presence of Christian Theology in African Universities” in Phiri I. and Werner D. (eds) *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications.

“the method of narration [that] aims at conveying a major theme that is engulfed within other subordinated narratives; [and] is used when the author disappears from the text, and one of the characters replaces him”. Although postmodernism is sceptical toward metanarratives, there are always virtues such as “truth”, “knowledge”, “right” or “wrong” that cannot be denied, to carry an universal reality (2006: 9). Kolb’s perception is that:

The word metanarrative was invented to designate a framework of the narrator’s thinking and the skeleton for the construction of the stories being told. A metanarrative constitutes a fundamental view of reality; it lays down principles of interpretation; it forms the hermeneutic that guides the composition of new stories and the manner in which old stories are re-presented... It is a perception of ultimate truth that shapes the narrator’s selection of the stories to be recited, the emphases on various elements within them, and the significance assigned to the story and its parts (2012: 1).

One may speak of a metanarrative as a kind of an inclusive storage of a story’s meanings to new small stories that can emerge from it, while one considers Olivier’s definition that:

Metanarrative is an attempt to understand the world in terms of an overarching and comprehensive scheme of thought within a single scheme, that embraces a large part of human understanding within that single scheme”. [He believes that] metanarrative can be very attractive, since it appears to provide people with single, simple, explanatory vision of the social world (2010: 96).

Therefore, the concept of *Mang-Djala*, which bears a truth that was believed and lived by many people in the Cameroon society, has the connotation of a metanarrative. It constitutes an overarching theme in Cameroonian society that eclipses ethnic differences and diversities and makes demands of people under its influence to come together in many everyday aspects of life.

## **1.6 Research design and Methodology**

A research design attempts to elucidate the processes through which the data was collected, the participants involved and the methods used for the data analysis. In order to do this, the key words, “research design” and “methodology” are clarified. Hagedorn and Labovitz respectively define research design as “a set of logical procedures that if followed enables [one] to obtain the evidence to determine the degree to which [one is] right or wrong” (1981: 42), and “a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research” (2006: 34). See also Creswell (1998: 2-



3). Methodology, on the other hand, specifies how researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known” (Martin Terre Blanche & Durrheim 2006: 6). Therefore, the research design and methodology are meant to articulate the process by which data is collected and analysed. Nieuwenhuis adds his voice by arguing that a research design is a plan or strategy put into place to specify the selection of the participants, the data collection techniques to be used and the data analysis to be done (2010: 70).

Given the density and complexity of the concept *Mang-Djala* under study, and in line with the above understanding, this study uses qualitative research to resource the possibilities of engaging and interacting openly and confidently with the participants. Henning with Rensburg & Smit have made this clear by stating that: “in a qualitative study the ‘variables’ are usually not controlled because it is exactly this freedom and natural development of action and representation that we wish to capture” (2004: 3). In this way, the study allows the investigator to obtain more confidential and intimate information (McAshan 1963: 23).

### **1.6.1 Methodology**

The objectives of the study, as previously mentioned, are the analysis of the impact of ethnicity in Cameroonian society; the location of the sources of the problems caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon; the evaluation of the initiatives undertaken by the Church thus far to deal with the issue of ethnic disunity in the Church, in order to envisage new possibilities, and the appropriation of the concept of *Mang-Djala* in an attempt to suggest a possible solution to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. These objectives can be divided into two main areas: the problems caused by ethnic diversity in the Church and the appropriation of the concept of *Mang-Djala* as a possible solution.

In this regard, research was undertaken in three important areas: the role of ethnicity in Cameroonian society, the impact that ethnicity has had on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon and the potentialities that exist for the application of *Mang-Djala* to the problem of ethnicity in the Church. Two kinds of research, archival and empirical, were undertaken. Archival research has as its focus the accessing of documentary sources such as letters, minutes, memoranda, newspapers, journals, articles and books and identifying and gathering specific and relevant documents for a given research topic. “Empiricism is the word given to the idea that knowledge comes from experience. To know something empirically is to know it from experience” (Gary 2009: 88).

Both of these terms were investigated in the first area of research – ethnicity in Cameroon and its impact on the Church. The author was also interested in consulting other sources of information such as newspapers, these being the *Oeil du Sahel* and others which pay attention to events within the Church.

This study is a qualitative empirical research – that is research whereby the data is collected through the use of human senses (Olivier 2010: 31). It seeks to explore the motives of conflict and, by extension, the extent to which human frailty within a Christian community can sometimes challenge the ethics of Christian life – the fight for selfish interests and positions in the Church, while the Bible prescribes humility and service from everyone. On the other hand, it seeks to explore the extent to which some pre-Christian indigenous peoples in Cameroon have set up frameworks for overcoming conflicts in their midst and to bring about reconciliation by using their indigenous values. Thirdly, it seeks to introduce such values as a means of translating the Gospel so as to contribute to its ongoing dwelling amongst the local Christian community.

In the course of this research, very few written sources on the concept of *Mang-Djala* were found. Accordingly, the study relied mostly on the content of the empirical interviews on this matter. However, there are other African local concepts that are used to address the problem of reconciliation, for example, the use of the ‘joking relationship’ in western Africa, seen as an African traditional dynamic for solving, managing and preventing conflicts. Djibril (2005: 5-16), Babakar (2005: 17-22), Wilson-Fall (2000: 49-65). In Rwanda, “the traditional judicial system called *Gacaca* is an effective means for solving conflicts and reconciling people involved in litigation”, (Setako 2000:176) as well as the concept of *ubuntu* that has played a significant role in the development of the new South African society and elsewhere (Richardson 2008: 65-83), (Nicolson 2008 : 1-14).

### **1.6.2 Methods of data collection**

The qualitative method of data collection used in this study relies on in-depth, open-ended interviews. In this regard, Patton maintains that “the data from interviews consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (1990: 10). Furthermore, he observes that:

Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. [He argues that], approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detailed of qualitative inquiry (1990: 13)

### 1.6.2.1. Focus group discussion

As indicated earlier, one of the data collection methods has been the focus group discussion which has contributed meaningfully to the gathering of information on the concept of *Mang-Djala*. According to Nieuwenhuis,

The focus group interview strategy is based on the assumption that group interaction will be productive in widening the ranges of responses, activating forgotten details of experience and releasing inhibitions that may otherwise discourage participants from disclosing information (2007: 99).

Field research into the active use of the concept of *Mang-Djala* was undertaken through focus group discussions that comprised of men and women. The formation of the focus group discussions were as follows:

1. Three focus group discussions were undertaken. Each group consisted of between five and ten participants from three different ethnic groups, regardless of their region of origin. The main criterion used for selecting the participants in these groups was the fact that they were *Mang-Djala* partners and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.
2. The way in which these groups applied the concept of *Mang-Djala* to their daily lives was examined. An investigation into the possibilities of applying this concept in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was undertaken by canvassing the members of the Church, who are also members of the “tied” ethnic groups – that is, to suggest the practical application of *Mang-Djala* within the Church.

The questions asked in the focus group discussion were: What is *Mang-Djala*? Where did the concept originate? In what context is it used? How is the *Mang-Djala* understood by these particular groups? What are the circumstances/events/contexts where *Mang-Djala* is believed to be applicable? How strong or influential is the concept for these groups in those circumstances? Is there any possibility of expanding this concept further to other areas, such as the Church, where there is disunity amongst ethnic groups, as a project of reconciliation? If so, how can this be effected? What are the chances of success?

These questions were also expanded and used as part of an opened-ended questionnaire for the interviews. Each focus group session was conducted over a period of between forty-five minutes to one hour which was sufficient to elicit a wide spectrum of responses from the different ethnic groups involved.

### **1.6.2.2 Interviews**

The interviews were another important method of data collection. According to Kelly, interviews are “skilled performances practiced by a researcher to collect information about a specific subject under study”. (2006: 297) Gary emphasises this process more specifically as a discussion with someone to get multiform information. They can be facts, opinions, attitudes, and so on. (2009: 160)

Considering the above definition as a foundation, the fieldwork addressed the following questions used as part of an opened-ended questionnaire for the interviews: what do people think of ethnicity in Cameroon? What are the attendant problems of ethnicity in Cameroonian society? In what ways do these problems influence disunity in the Church?

This fieldwork research involved a series of interviews with the Church members and leadership. The interviews with the leadership in the Church at national level targeted the National Bishop, his Assistant, the National President of the Synod Council, the retired President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship and the National Director of the Christian Youth Organisation. The second tier of leadership at regional level was also interviewed. This included some regional Bishops and Clerics. A third tier of leadership was also interviewed, consisting of some chairpersons of local congregations and lay members. The interviews within the Church revolved around the issue of ethnicity, the impact that it has had on the Church, and the perceptions of the practice of *Mang-Djala*. Finally, three traditional rulers, regardless of their religious beliefs, were approached on the concept of *Mang-Djala*. All these interviews were recorded.

### **1.6.2.3 Archives**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has its own archives, although these are in an embryonic stage of development. However, these archives contain resources such as the minutes, memoranda and other correspondences of the Church that have thrown light on issues of ethnocentrism and its consequences within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. Therefore archives proved to be an important and useful tool for data collection in this research.

It is believed that “people who do research in archives often gather first-hand facts, data and evidence from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, audio and video recordings, and

other primary sources”<sup>3</sup> The archives in this study facilitated investigation into the effects of ethnocentrism (tribalism) in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. The archives in this regard were beneficial in the sense that it showed that the Church was aware of the effect of ethnocentrism and had attempted to address it. In this process, the archives contained a useful report of the committee “*un dans le monde*” [one in the world], memoranda, letters and newspapers (*Oeil du sahel*) with regard to ethnocentrism (tribalism) and these documents revealed the extent to which the Church was affected by ethnocentrism and its fruitless struggle to overcome it.<sup>4</sup>

#### **1.6.2.4 Language of communication**

Although Cameroon is a multi-lingual country, including the Church, it is worth mentioning that, apart from the mother tongues, two main languages, French and Fulfulde are predominantly used as the shared languages of communication and for Church services. French is the language of education and is the most spoken language in the country, and the

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<sup>3</sup> American Archives. 2007. What Is An Archive? <http://files.archivist.org/advocacy/AAM/WhatIsAnArchive> Accessed 23/05/2013

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning here that the Cameroonian society in general and the Church in particular commonly refer to ethnocentrism as tribalism – the two words are being used synonymously. This explains the use of the term “tribalism” in the questionnaires used for the data collection, as seen in the appendices of this study. Yet, tribalism as a terminology is believed to be a colonial invention with a negative connotation. It is used in the Evangelical Lutheran Church to describe discrimination between ethnic groups instead of ethnocentrism.

Historically, the term “tribalism” seems to be the legacy of the colonial policy that aimed at putting into place an administrative policy of “divide-and-rule”. This colonist policy used as a slogan: “let related ethnic ‘units’ band together and become tribes” (Davidson 1992:100), leading to the rise of new artificial units – “tribal unions and tribal associations” (1992: 101) that are opposed to one another and discriminate against each other. In this regard, Waruta is right in stating that: “tribalism is generally understood as thinking and acting in favour of one’s tribe at the expense of some other tribes. Tribalism therefore presupposes not merely belonging to a particular tribe but using that sense of belonging to promote one’s interest” (1999: 119-120) in the same sense as ethnocentrism that is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one’s own ethnic group or culture, and a tendency to view alien groups or cultures from the perspective of one’s own” (John 2007: 2). The existing relationship between the two concepts is that both are discriminative.

One can therefore agree with Davidson that the “nature of [those new artificial units] meant that they were destined to become divisive of national unities” (1992: 101), which can be seen as synonymous to competition, conflict and rivalry. Consequently, tribalism has become an extreme abuse of “tribe” or “tribal”, as ethnocentrism has become an abuse of ethnicity. This is what seems to have dominated the minds of those who use tribalism and singularly the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, to speak about ethnocentrism.

Fulfulde language is the language of trade and is the most spoken language in the entire northern part of the country, which comprises four regions<sup>5</sup> (previously called provinces). French was predominantly used in the interviews with the Church members, while a mixture of French and Fulfulde were used during the interviews with the traditional rulers and sometimes during the focus group discussion.

### **1.7 Data analysis**

This is an empirical qualitative study. The data generated during field work was analysed manually using themes that emerged from the data. The themes were grouped into two categories according to the two parts of the study, namely ethnocentrism and *Mang-Djala*. Under ethnicity the principal theme is the views of the Church member participants on tribalism. This includes: the manifestation of tribalism, ethnicity and the fragmentation of the Christian community, the grounds of ethnic divisions in the Church, the complicity of the missionaries and ethnocentrism as an aberration.

A summary of the views of all the participants resorted under *Mang-Djala*. This includes the viability of the *Mang-Djala* tradition in Cameroon, *Mang-Djala* and equality, the relevance of *Mang-Djala*: some parameters, *Mang-Djala* as a “social belt of life”, the role of *Mang-Djala* in grief and death, the function of *Mang-Djala* in deconstructing boundaries and recasting of identities, *Mang-Djala* as a transcending factor in religious differences, honesty and the *Mang-Djala* partnership, the use of humour in *Mang-Djala* relationships, *Mang-Djala* as an agent of reconciliation and the notion of covenant in *Mang-Djala*.

Data analysis, according to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, “is about the search for explanation and understanding, in the course of which concepts and theories will likely be advanced, considered and developed” (2006: 206). Two important features emerge from this view, these being explanation and understanding on the one hand, and theories that are considered and developed on the other hand. In other words, data analysis is to do with applying theories to make sense of the collected data. Subsequently, Patton posits that, “qualitative methods are first and foremost research methods. They are ways of finding out what people do, know, think and feel by observing and analysing documents” (1990: 95). Nieuwenhuis concurs, and maintains that qualitative data analysis “tries to establish how participants make meaning of

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<sup>5</sup> There is a risk of confusing the region that is the construction of the Church and the country’s construction of a region that was formerly termed ‘province’ and has become ‘region’ in the recent restructuration of the country. Nevertheless, the two regions differ from one another in the sense that they do not have the same geographical configuration. However, an effort will be made to specify whenever the word ‘region’ refers to the country’s configuration.

specific phenomena by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understandings, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomena” (2007: 99). In this regard, the study, in attempting to respond to the research question, seeks to address the two aspects of the study; notably the issue of ethnicity and the concept of *Mang-Djala*.

### **1.7.1 Methods of data analysis**

Two focus areas in this study constitute the core of the research on which the discourses were centred. These are the discourse on ethnicity that considered only the views of the Church members, and the discourse on *Mang-Djala* that took into account the views of all the participants, including the Muslims and the traditionalists. However, the study used three methods of data analysis, namely social analysis, functionalist analysis of culture and theological reflection around the concept of *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation for the gospel) to analyse the data generated.

#### **1.7.1.1 The social analysis approach**

Apart from the fact that a Christian community is a community that has an intrinsic identity with its own ethics, it is also a socially constructed community. Moreover, like any human community, it is a community that is made up of human beings. Consequently, it is exposed to all manner of social challenges from within and without, such as ethnocentrism, tribalism and other instances of discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the Church has to strive to apply the virtues of its ethics to build a better society. Hence, using the social analysis method, the responses of the participants were examined and analysed within the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, taking into consideration the prevailing conflict situation that may have influenced their responses with regard to the problem of ethnocentrism and discrimination within the Church. As Holland and Henriot clearly state:

Ultimately it is the local people who must offer specific approaches to social problems and concrete steps towards their resolution. These people are the only ones who have experienced the particular situation; their expertise in designing solutions should always be respected (Holland and Henriot, 1983: 16).

In this regard, the study attempts to analyse the impact of ethnicity in Cameroonian society, to locate the source of the problems caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and to evaluate the initiatives that have been

undertaken by the Church thus far to deal with the issue of ethnic disunity in the Church in order to envision new possibilities.

### **1.7.1.2 Theological reflection approach (the *praeparatio evangelica*)**

According to Graham, Walton and Ward:

Theological reflection is an activity that enables people of faith to give an account of the values and traditions that underpin their choices and convictions and deepens their understanding... At the heart of theological reflection, therefore, are questions about the relationship of theory to practice, and how to connect theological discourse about the nature of God to the exercise of faith (2005: 5-6).

In this regard, the main tasks of theological reflection are: “the induction and nurture of members...Building and sustaining the community of faith... Communicating the faith to a wider culture” (2005: 10-11) and integrating the Gospel and cultural elements as part of its components. Hence, the concept of *Mang-Djala* can be assimilated into this framework to constitute a foundation upon which one can reflect theologically on the need for a specific audience, that is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

Subsequently, in order to achieve this task, the concept of *Mang-Djala* should be used as a background or a preparation for the Gospel. This preparation for the Gospel views cultures, including indigenous knowledge and values, as important resources for developing theological reflections when applicable. This is to say, God has instilled into the minds of people certain cultural or religious values that can be seen as “Christianity in miniature” because of the way they approximate Christian ethics, although they do not relate to the Christian faith. That is why when Mbiti speaks about Africa in this regard, he maintains that “African peoples are disposed, almost by nature, to receive and accommodate Christianity” (1970: 21). The preparation for the Gospel idea uses the Christian lens to look at the predisposed elements in *Mang-Djala* that constitute a prepared ground to welcome the Gospel, from which theological reflection can emerge. This is what O’Hanlon terms an “ascending approach [in theological reflection] which begins from human experience and seeks to identify how and where God is present in it” (1995: 233).

All these methods are encapsulated in the content analysis which, according to Patton, “is the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns of the data. This means analysing the content of the interviews and observations” (1990: 381). As for Zhang and Wildemuth, qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to condense raw data



into categories or themes on valid inference and interpretation” (1966: 2)<sup>6</sup>. Elsewhere, it has been stated that: “In content analysis, researchers examine artefacts of social communication. Typically, these are written documents or transcriptions or recorded verbal communications”<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, it has been argued that content analysis presents enormous advantages. However, the underlying flaw of content analysis is that it is “limited to examining already recorded messages. [Nevertheless, it is also stated that] if researchers use content analysis to analyse interview data or responses to open-ended questions (on written questionnaires), this weakness is virtually non-existent” (p. 259)<sup>8</sup>.

The study therefore uses the social analysis approach to analyse the phenomenon of ethnocentrism within the Cameroonian society, the functional analysis of culture to describe the way the concept of *Mang-Djala* has shaped the life of those who were involved in that partnership, the contextualisation of the Gospel to explore the interrelationship between Gospel and culture and by implication, between the Gospel and the concept of *Mang-Djala*, and the preparation for the Gospel concept to affirm that cultures are ways in which God elects to come to his complete self-revelation to people in their different contexts through the Gospel, and that *Mang-Djala* is to be seen as such.

### **1.7.2 Structure of the study**

This study is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one is the general introduction that provides the overview of the study. It presents briefly the background of ethnicity in Cameroon as a country, the multiple ethnic groups of its population that appear to be ill-disposed to one another, intrusive ethnocentrism and tribalism that are lethal to the intrinsic value of ethnicity.

Furthermore, in the background and setting of the study, the chapter presents the situation of the Church, the structure and organisation of the Church and the management of the clergy. Subsequently, it presents the research question and objectives, the theoretical framework, the research design and methodology, and the data analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> Zhang and Wildemuth. Qualitative analysis content. [http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yang/content\\_analysis.pdf](http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yang/content_analysis.pdf)  
Accessed 22/05/2009

<sup>7</sup> An Introduction to Content Analysis. <http://depts.washington.edu/uwmcnair/chapt11.content.analysis.pdf>  
Accessed 23/05/2013.

<sup>8</sup> An Introduction to Content Analysis. <http://depts.washington.edu/uwmcnair/chapt11.content.analysis.pdf>  
Accessed 23/05/2013.

Chapter two focuses on the historical background of Cameroon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. It attempts to underline the existing multiple boundaries between the multiplicity of ethnic groups that in one way or another have been instrumental in the rising of ethnocentrism. Furthermore, it depicts the social environment in which the Church has been detrimentally affected in its life and conditions, leading to the rise of ethnic conflicts in its midst.

Chapter three presents the concept of *Mang-Djala* as it is perceived and practiced by the members.

Chapter four is the presentation of the collected data from the field work, where the views of the different categories of participants and the focus group discussions are reviewed.

Chapter five is exclusively concerned with data analysis and interpretation, where the participants' responses are analysed and interpreted in an attempt to make sense of the responses.

Chapter six deals with *Mang-Djala* as a social contract and as covenant as examples of a secular and a religious theme. It attempts to draw some similarities between the social contract theory and covenant.

Chapter seven presents an engagement with the Gospel and culture, and a theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala* and its implications.

Chapter eight is the concluding chapter, which on the one hand provides a general summary of the study, and on the other hand offers some recommendations that are likely to stimulate the implementation of the concept within the Church.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The historical background of Cameroon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Before dealing specifically with the context of this chapter which is the historical background of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, it is important briefly to engage in a Cameroonian background in terms of its history and the society in general. This chapter will explore the divisive boundaries that exist in this society on the one hand and on the other hand identify some of the major ethnic groups which make up this society, as it is not possible to list all two hundred and fifty groups. The question of ethnic coexistence in Cameroonian society, the relationship between the multiplicity of ethnic groups that constitute the members of the Church and how this ethnicity is affecting the Church will be scrutinised.

The question of how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon came into existence will lead to its background, the participants who contributed to its creation (the role of the first missionaries) and its development under the missionaries up to its independence to date. Therefore, one of the main focus areas of this chapter will be the controversial relationships between the members themselves and between the members and the leadership.

#### **2.2 History and the Cameroonian society.**

Geographically, Cameroon is a country located in central Africa, sharing the western border with Nigeria, the north-eastern border with the Republic of Chad, the south-eastern part with the Republic of Central Africa, the south with the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Gabon, and the Republic of Congo Brazzaville.

According to the historians, Cameroon is a product of European colonisation as they succeeded in their attempts to own and exploit the resources of the country. Despite the fact that the country was “discovered” by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Nkwain, 2008: 11), it was between the Germans, the British and the French that the great attempts to monopolise the territory lay. The outcome to this contestation was finally resolved by the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) during which “the boundaries of Cameroon were defined and the signing of treaties between the Germans and the British to the west, and with the French to

the south, east and north” (Nkwain, 2008:12). This conference succeeded in providing an equitable conclusion to many decades of struggle between colonial powers for the acquisition of the country. However, a final agreement was only reached during World War I in 1916 when the British and the French united to defeat the Germans. The country was divided into two parts, with the French owning eight of the ten regions which constitutes the country presently. The British owned the North-West and the South-West regions known as the ‘Anglophone zone’ in Cameroon. These two portions of the country remained under the control of the two colonial powers until Cameroon became independent in 1960.

As the French occupied the largest part of the country, it was inevitable that they would colonise the majority of the ethnic groups upon whom the French language was imposed as the official language of communication and education. English was imposed on those belonging to the ‘Anglophone zone’ as the main language for the same purpose as those on the French side. With the desire to create and consolidate peace and harmony, the policy of bilingualism was implemented although it had no effective results as such. Hence, to belong to the French or to the English side of the country became the first bone of contention although the two factions were united as a country on May 20, 1972. This indicates that the country itself is an artificial construct – an imposition upon peoples with their own integrity and identity.

Nkwain views this as one of the major threats to peace in the country, as Cameroonians from the Anglophone zone are frustrated due to unequal opportunities (Nkwain, 2008: 68) compared to those on the Francophone side. The former President of the Republic, His Excellency Ahidjo, developed a policy aimed at resolving this problem by adopting “a cultural policy and bilingualism in schools and training centres [and the call for a real bilingualism for every Cameroonian] to enhance unity and integration” (Nkwain, 2008: 68). This initiative was criticised by some as indicating a “style of governance [which] implied a combination of repression and obsession with the concepts of unity/integration and peace” (Vulbo 2003: 596), meaning that the policy put into place had not solved the problem as such. Vulbo maintains that “despite the persistence of the coercive ideology of national unity/integration and an anti-tribalistic discourse, attachment to ethnic groups is strong among the administrative and political elite” (Vulbo 2003: 596).

Apart from this initial crucial barrier created by the colonisers which divides the Cameroonian society, a second barrier has been created by the Cameroonians themselves in

developing a common term which can be attributed to the geographical location of north versus south. This geographical boundary between north and south is expressed in terms of ‘northerner’ or ‘southerner’ to refer to the inhabitants of the respective regions, and does not merely designate a geographical separation but rather a political and even cultural separation. Inherent in these terms is the sense of exclusion or rejection of one another.

Finally there are multiplicities of boundaries that can be presented as follows: Anglophone against north Francophone, Anglophone against south Francophone, south Francophone against north Francophone. In other words, all are mutual rivals, and each is opposed to the other, which makes unity difficult or even impossible.

Last but not least is the third boundary, which is the religious aspect of Christian-Muslim. The perception held is that all those who bear Christian names are Christians and all those who bear Muslim names are Muslims, with the tendency towards mutual rejection. President Paul Biya has attempted to avoid this in one of his speeches as cited by Nkwain:

Religious expression should ... contribute effectively to national salvation. Neither the clergy nor the local or national congregations of a given religious body should have a tribal or regional bias, as is often the case. The pulpits of our temples, churches and Mosques should serve as sacred places where appeal can be made for national solidarity (Nkwain 2008: 118).

Such a situation requires an acute awareness of the complexities and the challenges that those who have the responsibility to rule over a country such as Cameroon with more than 250 different ethnic groups must face.

Although there is no constant open hostility between the two religious groups, this factor is to be considered as one of the important boundaries that divides the Cameroonian society. The clash between the Fulani and the Gbaya people in Meiganga town in 1991 and 1993, initially seen as an ethnic conflict, had religious undertones as there was conflict between the Christians and the Muslims. In the north, there is another boundary, the division between the Fulani-Kirdi which is impacting on Cameroonian society. Kirdi is the term for ‘pagan’, a word used by the Fulani to indicate those who are not Fulani. Some scholars such as Mbaku argue that “pagans” refer to those who escaped to the hills during the Fulani conquest rather than submitting to Islam (2005: 6). What Mbaku seems to ignore, and which must be emphasised here, is that most of those who submitted to Islam remained animists or converted for reasons other than religious or converted simply to save their lives from the

Islamic warriors, but ultimately do not practice Islam as such. These are the ones Domo classifies as: “*Le Musulman par pression social, le Musulman par souci d’élévation sociale, par intérêt ou façade*” [“a Muslim through social pressure, a Muslim through social elevation, interest or façade”] (Domo, 2010: 69). For those who are from the northern regions where Islam is being practised more than in any other part of the country the truth is that all those who are not Fulani, or who are not fully assimilated or committed to Islam, are viewed as pagans by the Muslims themselves.

An anecdote is told in my home village, that during the period of Islamic conquest, a man was caught and converted to Islam. He was asked to pray according to the Islam rule, and in his prayer, he prayed in Mbum Sapu as follows: *saw bah bi tuh bay-u ya, saw mah bi tuh bay-u ya, ngerma mi lab mi* [nor my mother’s ancestors, nor my father’s ancestors had done this; it is necessity that pushed me into it]. Then, kneeling down, he placed his forehead on the ground in simulation of prayer (translated from the Mbum language, my mother tongue). This illustrates that such a converted person will remain a “pagan” although in public he will behave as a Muslim.

As stated earlier, (see page 22-23) the Cameroonian society consists of many boundaries that are likely to divide the people and complicate life for everyone in terms of relationships and cohabitation. With regard to all these divisive factors in the Cameroonian society, in spite of the pretence by the government for national unity, Nkwain also acknowledges that:

[T]he road to [a real unity] is still long and rugged. Hurdles abound: Unequal treatment of English and French as the official languages ... ethnic nationalism; discrimination; corruption and impunity; tribalism and regionalism (Nkwain, 2008: 119).

Amongst these existing boundaries, the question of ethnicity seemingly appears as a kind of fissure that penetrates the whole society at its roots, like a plague that destroys any system that intends to keep people together. One wonders at the depth of this fissure and how it affects the Cameroonian society in terms of discrimination and disadvantage from one ethnic group to another. Oyono states that “ethnicity and conflicts are phenomena inherent to human societies, and in the last two decades have become a global problem as ethnic wars have erupted all around the world” (Oyono, Ngwa 2004: Xi). Does this mean that human societies have become helpless, hopeless and are condemned to permanent conflict and that nothing can be done to avoid or at least minimise their effects? Should we live in continual negativity

with regard to ethnicity or is there hope that the question of ethnicity can be solved? These are important questions that need to be addressed.

This chapter will now turn to an investigation of some of the characteristics of ethnicity and their manifestation in the Cameroonian society.

### **2.3 Theory of ethnicity**

Belonging to an ethnic group (ethnicity) is an integral part of human existence, and is inevitable. It has to do with how people live and interact amongst themselves in their daily lives. “[Ethnicity] signifies perceptions of common origin, historical memories, and ties of people... Here, ethnicity should not be interpreted as ethnocentrism which, like racism, is a psychological state of prejudicial relationship between an individual and members other ethnic groups” (Hameso 2001: 9). However it brought confusion with regard to its use which sometimes makes it an interchangeable term for tribalism. This is consistent with Peter Geschiere’s statement that “most of the problems in Africa are attributed to ethnicity or tribalism” (1999: 20), making ethnicity and tribalism synonymous and confused terms. Because of this complexity, the concept of ethnicity is difficult to define. With regard to this, Lentz and Nugent assert that:

In academia, the world of politics and the media, ‘ethnicity’ and ethnic groups are much-used terms that frequently absorb, overlap or replace other concepts such as ‘race’ or ‘tribe’ which have come to be seen as problematic for one reason or another. The concept of ‘ethnicity’ functions much like the joker in a game of cards. It can be introduced into various play sequences, taking on the characteristics of the ‘card’ (concept) it replaces (Lentz and Nugent, 2000: 2-3).

This means ethnicity can play a multifunctionary role depending on one’s perspective—besides its genuineness, ethnicity can also be easily corrupted to become what Geschiere terms the politicisation of ethnicity where “individuals [might successfully] advance in their political or economical lives by capitalising on ethnicity” (1999: 25) at the expense of other people. When exploited for one’s own selfish purpose (ethnocentrism) within a multi-ethnic environment, it becomes tribalism. Hence, theologically one could locate ethnicity in the category of the doctrine of creation, while relegating ethnocentrism to the doctrine of sin.

Has ethnicity become so corrupted, to the extent of losing its initial genuine and positive meaning, to bear a very negative one? How do we to understand Gichure’s use of ethnicity and tribalism as interchangeable? (1999: 20) See also Waruta (1992: 119), and Ngwa (2004:

xi). Is there any reason to demonise ethnicity? Otherwise, how does one define ethnicity? According to Hutchinson and Smith 1996 ethnicity consists of six main features that include:

A common proper name, to identify and express the “essence” of the community; a myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic a sense of fictive kinship; shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration; one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, and language; a link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnic, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and a sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnic’s population (1996: 6-7) .

According to one of the theories of ethnicity (primordialism), ethnicity is something inherited from one’s ancestor and is static. People belong to an ethnic group because members of that group all share common biological and cultural origins. Accordingly, ethnicity will never perish because kinship always exists (Yang 2000: 42-43). This gives credit to Getui’s assertion “even if we want to downplay or ignore [ethnicity] our roots are traced to an ethnic group... Belonging to an ethnic group factor gives an individual a sense of identity and a sense of belonging” (1999: 10-11). What could then be more natural than belonging to an ethnic group?

Given the above attempt at defining ethnicity, far from it being a demonic factor, it appears as a creation of God and as such is a blessing and should be differentiated from ethnocentrism that is the corrupted and the abused version of ethnicity, defined as: “to absolutize one’s culture, one’s way of living with a strong sense of superiority” (Pierli, Prebitero and Muko 1999: 41). It is not therefore a fact of chance that many ethnic groups are to live in a common country or a common land. However, African countries are victims of ethnocentrism in such a way that the multiplicity of ethnic groups has become a real burden to the whole society.

#### **2.4 Ethnicity in the Cameroonian society**

Because of the multiplicity of ethnic groups (250) in Cameroon, Sama goes even further by suggesting that there are in fact more than 289 “ethnic tribes” (Sama 2007: 194). According to Ngwa, one of the reasons for ethnocentrism in Cameroon can be traced back to the period of colonisation. For him, “the colonizers used ethnic diversity as a policy of ‘divide and rule’ which allowed not only their implantation but also their exploitation of the land ... ‘divide and rule’ became the precious policy of the Germans, the French and the British” (2004: iii). This is to say, the colonisers used ethnic differences to turn people against each other in their



quest for possession and exploitation of land and their voracious appetite for slavery. Beyond the divisions caused by the colonisation, one should not misperceive the precolonial ethnic reality that predisposed to situation to the coloniser's policy of 'divide and rule'. As Domo acknowledges, "*dans toute société humaine, il ne peut manquer de dissensions. Un problème de terre, de femme, de dette*". ["There are always dissensions in any human society. A problem of land, of woman,<sup>9</sup> of debt"] although he thought they were minor problems that could easily be resolved. In spite of the dissensions, he affirmed that: "*la multitude est une richesse en ce sens que chaque groupe apporte sa spécificité à l'ensemble* ["the multitude is a treasure in the sense that each group brings its specificity to the whole group"] (2010: 75). Sadly, those who were chosen to rule the country after the colonisers carried on the legacy of 'divide and rule' in order to perpetuate themselves in power for as long as possible in most African countries. By so doing the ethnic groups could not develop the spirit of mutual acceptance, coexistence and harmony; instead they viewed each other as enemies, which enabled the rulers to entrench their egocentric rule.

Ethnocentrism can therefore be seen as one of aspects of the colonial legacy which the Cameroonian society has further developed into a terrible burden that has perpetuated hatred, discrimination and conflict, because no real effort was made towards reform. With the event of the multiparties, one could expect some improvement with regard to ethnicity. Unfortunately, the "multiparty policy [once more] of the 1990s is built along ethnic lines and has rekindled ethnic tensions and rivalries to the point where the country seems condemned to ethnic explosion" (Oyono 2004: iii). With regard to this, Nyansako-Ni-Nku has reason to complain to the Cameroonian Government that:

The understanding that our cultural diversity will be used to add more beauty... today our differences are being exploited by some unscrupulous Cameroonians to deepen our division and create confusion. Hence, the most lethal enemies, with the greatest potential of destroying our fabric of national unity, are tribalism, sectionalism and nepotism (1993:21).

#### **2.4.1 Ethnicity as an instrument of politics in Cameroon**

Given the above, Cameroon's political parties are organised in such a way that they are identified as belonging to specific ethnic groups or tribes. For example, the ruling party -the Cameroonian People Democratic Movement is seen as the Beti's party, the National Union for Democracy and Progress is for the Fulani people, the Social Democratic Front for the

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<sup>9</sup> It is unfortunate that women are included as one of the problems that give rise to conflict. This is indicative of the deeply patriarchal nature of the context out of which such a statement arises.

Anglophones, the Union of the Cameroonian populations for the Bassa, and so forth. Behind every political party, there is an ethnic group that is known as the principal “owner”. Obviously, the other ethnic groups (the minorities) without their principal political parties would have to line up behind the others. By so doing they will always feel like strangers within the party and are sometimes called foreigners when it comes to contesting for positions. Hence they always act with caution, building their lives on permanent frustrations. There is no real policy of integration and unity; the political speeches that highlight their necessities are just to deceive or to manipulate the audience.

Mbonda points out that: *...des ideologies insidieuses de l'unité et de l'intégration nationales, sa manipulation clientéliste... On propose ici un plaidoyer en faveur d'une certaine institutionnalisation de l'ethnicité, qui viendrait à se substituer à sa redoutable manipulation coloniale et postcoloniale* (2003: 7). [.. Insidious ideologies of unity and integration, its mercantile manipulation. What is proposed here is an argument for a certain sort of institutionalisation of ethnicity, which would become a replacement for its dreadful colonial and post-colonial manipulation.]

Politically, therefore, Cameroon is still severely challenged with regard to solving the problem of ethnocentrism that is so crucial in preventing ethnic conflicts and which form the guarantees for real security and peace in the society. In such a context, politics has corrupted ethnicity in Cameroon with the creation of the so-called ‘development associations’ through which each ethnic group member must contribute to develop his own people and his area. In this sense, ethnic groups have become resources of political power. Nkwi addresses this issue by stating that:

In Cameroon in particular, the ruling government since 1990, under Biya has placed additional emphasis on ethnicity, making use of political and traditional elites... It became fashionable to use ethnic association to retain the Government in power. [He went further by stating that] the ethnic associations in Cameroon included the Southwest Elite Association (SWELA), the Northwest Elite Association (NOWELA), the Elite of the Grand North representing the interest of the three northern provinces [today's regions] of Adamaoua, North and Far North; Essigan, representing the Beti and Bulu heterogeneous group of the Central province; Sawa, representing the interests of the littoral people; and LAAKAM of the Bamileke of the West province (Nkwi 2006: 124).

In fact, those associations are said to be a factor of political, social and economic development of the under-privileged people and their localities, headed by their elites, and was aimed at improving their living standards and have attracted the adhesion of the people.

Unfortunately they were exploited by those elites for their own political interests bringing about ethnic rivalries and discrimination. Hence, the ruling party's policy being 'divide and rule' can only reinforce and sustain their existence. Consequently those associations have become a policy of 'deceive to rule' in which only those who are committed to the ruling party are thought to benefit from it, in order to achieve its development. Eventually they have contributed in reinforcing ethnocentrism with the collapse of the economy in the country.

#### **2.4.2 Ethnicity as a threat to the economy**

Roubaud points out that: "*l'effondrement de l'économie du pays en 1986 ... a progressivement ravivé le tribalisme*" (1994: 4). [The collapse of the economy of the country in 1986 ... has progressively rekindled tribalism]. In fact, it was the period during which many people lost their jobs, some companies were declared bankrupt, and the few which could run their business had to reduce the number of their employees. Hence many questions were raised about those who were to be retained, such as who the person is, where he or she is from and to which religion he or she belongs? As expressed in French:

*Tribalisation des métiers... La division du travail en société ne se ferait donc plus en fonction de la formation... mais en fonction de l'origine tribale. Tribalisme administratif, où le népotisme fait penser que pour tout poste, le cousin ou le frère de tribu est toujours le plus qualifié... Tribalisation de la science ou la recherche scientifique où des chercheurs et enseignants ne mènent des recherches sociales que dans leur tribu d'origine<sup>10</sup>*

[Job tribalism... The division of jobs in companies will no longer consider the factor of training...but according to tribal origin. Administrative tribalism, or nepotism, led to the thinking that for any job position, the cousin or brother of the tribe is always the most qualified... Science tribalism or scientific research or researchers and teachers do social research only on their tribe of origin].

#### **2.4.3 Ethnicity as a threat to the Cameroonians' Christian unity**

Even Christian churches that are thought to be the moral force of society could not escape to the abuse of ethnicity. In the city of Douala for example, fifty one catholic priests wrote a memorandum to contest the posting of the Bamileke (ethnic group) priests who were not the locals – accusing them of being self-centered and ethnocentric (Kougoum 2009: 4) by using the pejorative term of '*Bamilekisation*' – the invasion of the Bamileke's Bishops in Douala.

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<sup>10</sup> Construire l'ethnie, déconstruire l'Etat ou le syndrome du sablier en Afrique  
<http://www.afrology.com/soc/pdf/ethnie.pdf>. Accessed 30/06/2011

Meanwhile, Bishop Andre Wouking, from a Bamileke ethnic group was also contested in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon in July 1999<sup>11</sup>.

Within the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, parishes are built on the basis of ethnicity in the cities of Douala, Yaoundé and Bafoussam (Kougoum, 2004: 4) in the sense that each ethnic group tries to create its own parish. This in fact should have been considered as a good enterprise for the sake of using the mother tongue to worship God. Unfortunately, in the context of Cameroon, gathering exclusively as an ethnic group, even in the context of the Church, always carries an ethnocentric connotation. With this proportion of ethnic rivalries that has dragged Christian churches into it, one cannot expect anything otherwise than an ethnically fragmented society where each ethnic group is restricted to a kind of island life. The issues surrounding ethnic divisions also have implications for models of ecclesial leadership operating within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon which should be explored.

#### **2.4.4 Ethnicity as a threat to the Cameroonian social cohesion**

An open call for battle against the Bamileke ethnic group was undertaken by the Beti ethnic group as follow: “*Alors people Béti, nous les fiers guerriers de la forêt équatoriale, ensemble levons-nous pour anéantir l’avancée impérialiste des Bamiléké car il y va de notre survie culturelle*” (Mbonda 2003: 22). [Therefore, Beti people, we the proud warriors of the equatorial forest, let’s arise and wipe out the advance of the imperialist Bamileke because it is our cultural survival that is at stake]. Some may think of this as a sense of ethnic consciousness, but if put in the context of a popular saying in Karang language: *Ndo horo bil baw* [“to light a fire in a very dry forest”] it may lead to genocide.

At the same time students from the eastern province, today’s East region, sent a letter to the President to complain against the exclusion of their people. The Adamaoua’s elites did the same in 1991 followed by one of the autochthones of Douala in 1996. This means the evil was rooted and widespread and everyone was battling for their survival. There was no sense of common interest. The social cohesion was therefore threatened even if the ruling elites think the situation is under control. In this kind of uncertainty, those ruling elites’ strategies were to show a concern for each case as if each complainant were favoured and treated in a special way, compared to the others in order to gain people’s gratitude.

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<sup>11</sup> Bataille de l’archidiocèse de Douala. <http://www.politique-africaine.com/numeros/pdf/035077.pdf>. Accessed 30/06/2011

All these claims show how much the country seemingly exists in a context where everything has to be forcefully acquired from the Government by the ethnic groups. Under these conditions it becomes obvious, as Sama has mentioned, that “the absence of war in the country does not imply it is peaceful... [and] that there are many potential elements for conflicts in Cameroon” (2007: 193). Unfortunately, Cameroonian authorities deliberately adopt a “naive approach to the concept of peace and security – meaning the absence of internal and external war or conflict” (2007: 195).

In fact, people think of Cameroon as a peaceful country. But one wonders what the meaning of peace is? Is it the absence of an open or manifest conflict? Yet conflicts can be there even if they are not open or recorded which, in the case of the high level of ethnocentrism in Cameroon, it has proven to be. Moreover some of these are the Gbaya-Fulbe conflict in Meiganga in 1992; the Nyokon-Bamileke conflicts in January 1996, February 1997 and November 1998; the Banfaw autochthones of Kumba town against the non-indigenous people in 1997; the Bagam-Bamenyam conflicts in April 1997 and March 1998<sup>12</sup>; the Mbessa and Oku clash which resulted in 100 deaths in June 2007<sup>13</sup> and more recently, the Balikumbat-Mbabalang conflict on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> March 2011<sup>14</sup>.

These events indicate that the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon constitutes a ticking bomb which can detonate at any time if not correctly handled. Of course it is not altogether fatalistic, as Domo argues that: “*loin de moi l'idée selon laquelle le grand nombre d'ethnies serait facteur de désordre*” (2010: 75) [I don't think the higher number of ethnic groups would be a factor for disorder]. It is hoped that Cameroon be spared from the devastating ethnic conflict that many African countries, notably the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi have experienced, but it also demonstrates that the future is not so bright with regard to the multiplicity of ethnic groups and cultures. This also shows that the Cameroonian society has been affected by ethnicity and is in many ways suffering the consequences thereof. It is within this complex African multi-cultural and multi-lingual

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<sup>12</sup> Bangam and Bamenyam conflict. <http://www.ethnonet-africa.org/data/camer/reports.htm>. Accessed 30/06/2011

<sup>13</sup> Cameroon: Tribal Conflict Leaves more than 100 Elderly Dead or Homeless. <http://www.globalaying.org/armedconflict/countryreports/africa.cameroonprince.htm>. Accessed 22/07/2011

<sup>14</sup> Conflit ethnique-Nord-Ouest: Toute la vérité sur les affrontements entre Balikumbat et Babilang. [http://www.cameroon-info.net/stories/0,28474,@\\_conflit-ethnique-nord-ouest-toute-la-verite-sur-les-affrontements-entre-balikumb.html](http://www.cameroon-info.net/stories/0,28474,@_conflit-ethnique-nord-ouest-toute-la-verite-sur-les-affrontements-entre-balikumb.html). Accessed 30/06/2011.

environment that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was established and had to accomplish its mission faithfully despite the many challenges.

## **2.5 Historical background of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

Geographically, the region where the Evangelical Lutheran Church was originally established belongs to that part of Cameroon widely known as the north, which was the site of Islamic invasions during the 19th century, and was one of the last regions to be evangelised in the country. This is the current Adamaoua administrative region. Two missions were respectively engaged in the work of evangelisation: one from the United States, which was the Sudan Mission, initiated in 1923, and the Norwegian mission society in 1925. In the beginning, the Sudan mission targeted the Muslims in the Adamaoua region (Messina & Slageren 2005: 111).

The Norwegian Missionary Society was directed by the French colonial governor of the north whom they met in Garoua, with the Mbum as their target. According to the governor, the Mbum were “pagan”s. It is possible that the African religion to which the Mbum were committed was without much value to the Governor. The common target that the two missions shared was the evangelisation of the Adamaoua region. According to Kåre Lode, the two missions would have started their work together, aiming at having the same mission station with different fields of mission that could end up being the foundation of one church (1990: 11-12). Unfortunately, this vision did not materialise as was hoped at the time, but eventually, the Evangelical Lutheran Church finally emerged as the fruit of the two committed missions.

### **2.5.1 The Sudan Mission**

The Sudan mission was the initiative of Adolphus Eugene Gunderson, an American citizen of Norwegian origin, according to Lode, whereas according to Koulagna (1999: 3-4) who cites Granier’s correspondence, Gunderson was an American citizen of Swedish origin. According to Messina and Slageren (2005: 111) the team of the Sudan Mission was composed of four Scandinavian missionaries. Whether Norwegian or Swedish, it is clear that Gunderson was an American citizen from a Scandinavian background who initially worked for the Sudan Interior Mission from 1912-1916 in Nigeria. This background might have played a significant role during the first contact of Gunderson with the Norwegian Missionary Society, as Gunderson was led to the Norwegian Missionary Society by a missionary of that mission, Pastor Emil Birkeli. He met Birkeli in France, but also

consolidated the relationship between the two missions until the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon and to date.

According to Lode (1990: 11-12), it was during this visit to Nigeria that he became aware of his calling for the mission in Cameroon and specifically in the Adamaoua province. The soil on which Gunderson started his work was more or less known by him as Nigeria, which is one of the neighbouring countries of Cameroon. From living in Nigeria, Gunderson might have known that the *Jihad*, the Islamic war, had affected the Adamaoua region considerably; this may have been one of the reasons which motivated him to initially focus on evangelisation among the Muslims, as recorded by Messina and Slageren (2005:111). If this was the case, then Gunderson had initially wanted to preach the Gospel to the newly converted “pagan” people of the Adamaoua. From Douala he reached Ngaoundéré with his team between April and May 1923 and made contact with the traditional rulers and the French colonial authorities for their settlement. They were led by the French authorities towards Mboula, a small village near Meiganga to collect wood to build their house. Mboula was the final destination of Gunderson’s team; among the Gbaya people where they finally settled and started their evangelisation, never again returning to Ngaoundéré. According to the common agreement between the different authors, they found the Gbaya people very friendly. Dadi (1972: 13), emphasized that the Gbaya people was not yet influenced by Islam, and surrounded by some Mbum and Fulani people, was attentive to the Word of God.

It is then from the Mboula village that the flame of the Gospel would begin to set fire to first an important part of the northern Cameroon province, before a nationally known Church today. The beginning of Gunderson’s mission activity was essentially among the Gbaya people, despite further towards Betare-oya, they would encounter some mine workers who were Bulu and Douala, and professing the Presbyterian faith before the coming of the Lutherans. According to Messina and Slageren (2005: 113), the first Lutheran community at Betare-Oya was led by a Bassa and a Gbaya called Paul Darman. Importantly, although Betare-Oya is Gbaya land, the first Christian community was heterogenic and multi-ethnic.

Contrary to the Norwegians who opted for the usage of different languages in their work, the Americans emphasised the importance of the Gbaya language to the extent that “many of the conservative Sudan mission workers continued to oppose [even] mission involvement in the national French-language school system on the grounds that it would divert attention from the primary work of evangelism” (Burnham 1996: 86) as if the Gospel was exclusive to Gbaya.

This has indirectly created an ethnic identity which tends to support the belief that for the Gbaya, the word of God has to be heard in the Gbaya language, which somehow is exclusive and discriminatory, knowing that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon is a multi-ethnic Christian community. Koulagna may have had this in mind when he stated:

*Du coté de la mission américaine, [le paternalisme] se manifeste par l'adoption d' un peuple a la manière d'un fils unique: le peuple Gbaya au détriment d'autres parmi lesquels elle a travaillé (Dowayo, Samba, Dii etc. (1999:31).*

[From the American mission, paternalism is manifested by the adoption of one people in the manner of one son: the Gbaya people, to the detriment of other people among whom they have served (Dowayo, Samba, Dii etc...)]. He further added: “*les Gbaya, marqués par l'influence ethnologique des missionnaires américains, ont fondé un culte Gbaya à Ngaoundéré*” (1999: 38) [the Gbaya, marked by the ethnic influence of the American missionaries, have founded a Gbaya worship service in Ngaoundéré].

Such an attitude taints the ideal of the Christian community that was represented by the first heterogenic Lutheran Christian community which comprised one hundred Bulu and Douala ethnic groups and others who were working at the mine in Betare-Oya. That congregation was led by two catechists, one from the Bassa ethnic group, and the other from the Gbaya ethnic group (Lode 1990: 29) making it a sign of ethnic integration and multi-ethnic Christian community.

The question raised here is not so much the using of the Gbaya language as such, but how other ethnic groups would react against absorption and loss of identity because of their minority status. The work in the Gbaya territory did not take into account the presence of other ethnic groups in the vicinity of the Gbaya people, as mentioned earlier. This omission would constitute one of the major sources of conflict the Church would encounter in the future as will be seen in subsequent chapters of this study. Apart from the work in the Gbaya area, the Sudan Mission's work also extended towards the north, notably Poli and Tcholliré where there was an absence of antipathy regarding the use of a particular language within the Church. Although French and Fulfulde were viewed respectively as the language of the colonisers and Muslims, their usage as the main languages in Christian communities resolved the local language issues.



Meanwhile, language is a gift from God that needs to be used to praise and worship God. In this regard, every ethnic group has the right to use its own language to this end. Nevertheless, in the context of the ethnically diversified Cameroonian society, it is impossible to satisfy dozens of languages in conducting a service during worship. This has become not only a challenge to the Church, but to the whole Cameroonian society where the dominant languages are seen as the prevailing ones with regard to social power.

Hence, in Cameroon, the language issue is no small matter in the Christian communities. It might be even one of the greatest sources of conflict within a number of Churches. Eyezo'o (2010: 38-49) refers to a number of cases related to this matter, these being, inter alia, the choice of the Duala language by the Baptist missionaries which became an instrument of exclusion of other vernacular languages. Its introduction (Duala) by the Bâle Mission in Limbe to the detriment of English that was used by the population of that locality, created the first Christian linguistic conflict in Cameroon. In the eastern province, the Gbaya people preferred the Sudan Mission as it promoted their language in the Catholic Mission where Ewondo was the language of the sermons. All these were sources of frustration for some and the pride of hegemony for others as Eyezo'o states, hence resulting in ethnic division among Christians. (Summarised from the original French text).

In substance, the Sudan Mission's work since 1923 has indisputably been a sort of fortunate adventure in an almost unknown destination until the discovery of the people upon whom the light of the Gospel shone through the consecration of his messengers. However, their mission was not without difficulties, due to the multiplicity of ethnic groups that they encountered along their missionary route. Their penchant for favouring certain people to the detriment of others also created frustrations that contributed to the divisions within the Church and to date.

Given the fact that the Sudan Mission was not alone on the journey for the establishment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, this discussion will now turn to the work of the Norwegian Missionary Society.

### **2.5.2 The Norwegian Missionary Society**

Whilst the Sudan Mission was the initiative of one man, Adolphus Eugene Gunderson, with an identified destination, the Adamaoua region in Cameroon, the Norwegian Missionary Society was an organised missionary society from Norway founded on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1918 with the aim of evangelising the Sudan region. The team that departed on this expedition was composed of four people: Flatland, Thrana, Sverre Oseland and Jens

Nikolaisen. Departing from Stavanger, they finally reached Ngaoundéré on March the 6<sup>th</sup> 1925. That was after being refused by the French Colonial Governor to start their work in Garoua, and being directed to the Adamaoua province among the “pagan” Mbum people as mentioned previously.

From the beginning two mission stations were created, one in Ngaoundéré and one in Tibati. Despite the fact that the Mbum people were the dominant group, there were also other ethnic groups such as the Vute, the Tikar and the Mambila, among others. This was revealed by one of the missionaries on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1973 to the late Pastor Dadi as follows:

*Notre Eglise avait entendu qu'il y avait dans l'Adamaoua une tribu sans religion, asservie par les Foulbé. C'est pour leur annoncer l'Evangile que notre Eglise a envoyé des missionnaires. Maintenant nous avons découvert plusieurs autres tribus sans religion et qui sont également dominés par les Foulbé (Pierre, Dadi 1972: 13).*

[Our Church had heard that there was a tribe in the Adamaoua without any religion and enslaved by the Foulbe. It is for the purpose of announcing the Gospel to them that our Church has sent missionaries. Now we have found that there are many other tribes without religion and who are also enslaved by the Foulbe].

For the missionaries this would have been an unexpected discovery that led them to change their policy with regard to the language of communication if they were to reach those identified groups by extending their field of work. According to Lode, five languages were to be considered for this work, namely the Haoussa, Peul, Mbum, Baboute, and Pidgin languages (1990: 40). As it was not possible to use all these languages at once, it was suggested that one or two languages would be selected. Mbum, for which the mission was established was chosen, and Peul, which was already widely spoken in the north and thus could serve as a language for the future in the Church, was selected as the second language.

According to Lode, it was advised that, in Yoko, the erstwhile field of the American Presbyterian Mission, the Bulu and the Ewondo languages should be used as their literature already existed. Unfortunately, due to the direction of the mission, they opted for Peul as the mission's language, whereas the Mbum and other languages could help to teach catechism and used for basic preaching (1990: 41). Addressing the same issue, Messina and Van Slageren assert:

*Face aux problèmes posés par la diversité des langues, la Mission Luthérienne rejeta une ancienne proposition qui était de généraliser dans la région sud de son champ d'action l'usage du bulu, dont la mission catholique avait commencé à se servir à Yoko. Il en fut de même pour le douala et le bamoun, qui étaient utilisés par la mission de Paris (2005: 115).*

[In view of the problems posed by the diversity of languages it is said, the Lutheran Mission has rejected a former proposition that was to generalise in the south region of its fields of work the usage of Bulu, which the Catholics started to use in Yoko. It was the same for the Douala and the Bamoun that were used by the Mission of Paris].

It was this sincere interest shown by the missionaries to each group and their whole ethnic dimension they encountered, especially by valorising their own language, which was lacking in the Sudan Mission in the beginning. This strategy was a genuine strength that was able to control ethnic dissension and negated the pride of hegemony as seen earlier.

Besides this strategy in managing the multiplicity of languages for their work, the missionaries could not avoid or escape, rightly or wrongly, the accusation of being paternalistic, because of the strong preference they showed towards certain groups they had evangelised, even after the independence of the Church. This may have contributed to the increase of the existing multiple divisions between the ethnic groups. However, from the two mission stations (Ngaoundéré and Tibati) the development of the mission reached other people in many other places, such as the Pere and Nyemnyem in Gadjiwan and Tignere, the Dii in Mbe and the Kolbila in the north. It was noticed that other ethnic groups such as the Wawa, the Vute, the Bafeuk, the Tikar, the Bamoun, the Mambila and the Konja were targeted earlier by the Tibati station.

Apart from the task of evangelisation, the Norwegian Missionary Society contributed enormously to the improvement of the daily lives of the population. The major contribution was the fight against slavery and its abolition in Ngaoundéré and in Tibati. Other areas of improvement in community life included medical and school projects which were tackled with vigour. The school project in the long term partly solved the problem of the multiplicity of languages, as French, which is the most spoken language, was taught in the mission schools and used in the Church. The medical project improved sanitary and health aspects of the population. Unfortunately, these projects were transformed into areas of conflict by the beneficiaries due to their ethnicity. However, the work of the mission was undeniably a holistic work by the power of the risen Lord.

Broadly speaking, what can be considered as a failure of the missionaries on both sides is what Zadi laments on:

*les missionnaires occidentaux, ne vivant pas le problème de la division ethnique dans leur Eglise d'origine à cause du fait que leurs pays respectifs étaient des Nations, ne se rendirent pas toujours compte qu'il fallait commencer par insister sur l'unicité et l'unité du corps du Christ dans la nouvelle Eglise Africaine (2000: 15).*

[the western missionaries who did not face the problem of ethnic division in their Church of origin, due to the fact that their respective countries were Nations, did not realise always that they would have started by insisting on the uniqueness and the unity of Christ's body within the new Church in Africa].

This argument may also be applied to those two missions as it points to their missing point that has negatively impacted on the unity of the Church and its consolidation given the problem posed by ethnicity. But what has been the real outcome of the two missions? This section will now consider the establishment and development of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, the tangible outcome of the collective missionary efforts in Cameroon.

### **2.5.3 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.**

As discussed in the preceding sections, the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon would not have been anything less than the culmination of missionary activities brought about by the two missions. 1960 was a decisive year for Cameroon as a whole and for the Church in particular, as it heralded the independence of Cameroon, winds of change that even the Church could not escape. The fusion of the two missions to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was the result of a lengthy process of debates that began in 1956 by a committee of six people (three missionaries and three Africans). In 1959 this committee declared the wish of having a united Church had been approved. This decision was to be implemented during the General Assembly that took place from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1960 that brought together the Sudan missionaries, the Norwegian missionaries and the Africans from the two fields of mission which formed the foundation of the independent Church.

This successful outcome was precisely what Gunderson had envisioned from the beginning when he suggested that the two missions begin their work simultaneously, each in its own field, with the ultimate goal of building a united Lutheran Church. The erstwhile intention had not been possible due to the delay of the Norwegian Missionary Society that was not

ready to start at that time (Lode 1990: 12). Nevertheless, Gunderson's initial goal had been achieved and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon came into existence.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church was built on the basis of that consensus and the commitment of three parties - the Americans, the Norwegians and the Africans. At first, the relationship between the Africans and the missionaries was one of economic dependence, even if not openly stated. It was the kind of relationship that encouraged paternalism, whereby each mission felt indebted to the Christians in his field of mission and each congregation tied to a specific former mission. That is why to date one often hears the expression 'the American part' or 'the Norwegian part' of the Church.

The missionaries had a very strong hold on the Church, which could explain the fact that the very first president of the United Lutheran Church was a Norwegian Pastor named Halfdan Andersen. On the other hand, for many years, new missionaries who followed their predecessors were sent to their respective mission stations. The newly established United Lutheran Church could not, however, erase the boundaries that existed between the two missions. This factor developed a sense of belonging to one's mission rather than to the Church. Hence one finds groups such as the Mbum, the Vute, the Tikar and the Dii who are strongly aligned to the Norwegians whom they consider as their Christian background, whereas most of the Gbaya are aligned to the Americans, followed by the Dowayo, some Mbum and other smaller ethnic groups from the north that claim to have an American Christian background. The result of this demarcation has created an ethnic identity based on the respective Christian affiliations.

It is thus clear why one may from time to time observe a competitive edge between the two camps, especially at the leadership level of the Church. To a certain extent one can easily surmise that this background of having a Church built by two main missions had rendered the condition of the Church propitious to the development of ethnicity. At leadership level an assessment could show that to date the presidents of the Church that succeeded one another were alternatively positioned. From 1960 to 2013 the six Church presidents who succeeded each other have equally and alternatively shared this office in the two fields of mission: three on each side. This is significant, and to move away from this logic may cause many misfortunes to the Church. But for how long will this logic resist the enormity of the different ethnic groups and even from different Christian backgrounds that are entering the Church today? The Church is expanding because of the impetus that the department of evangelisation

is providing through its campaign of evangelisation. Accordingly, one can observe that the Church has shifted from its initial rural stage where it had remained for many years, to an urban platform and has today become even nationally known.

### **2.5.3.1 Growth and development of the Church**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was initially perceived as a rural Church that confined its activities to small villages. This had been a source of inspiration for the names given to social projects such as *Oeuvre de développement rural (ODR)*, [rural work of development] which became later *Projet d'appui au développement intégré (PADI)*, [project for support to the integrated development]. All these illustrate the rural characteristics of the Church (Lode 1990: 200-205).

Other social projects such as schools and health centres that were built by missionaries on both sides show that the nascent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon was a rural Church that was concerned with improving the lives of its members. On the other hand, the growth of the Church was dependent on the training of its leaders that could carry on the work of evangelisation. This led to the creation of Bible schools on both sides and the Theological seminary which is the product of a common financial effort provided by the two missions, as well as the Protestant hospital at Ngaoundéré (1990: 150-152, 128-135). It is important to point out that apart from these two common realisations, each mission worked mostly to provide the essential needs to its fields of mission, and was providing means for the sustenance of their own projects.

The Bible school at Meng, the hospital in Ngaoubela and the primary schools in that area, as well as other primary schools and health centres around Ngaoundéré and Tignere, were the work of the Norwegians. Meanwhile, the American side was doing the same in Meiganga, Garoua-Boulai, Poli and Tcholliré. Following Lode (1990) it can be argued that each mission was strongly attached to its fields of mission and these details prove that the United Evangelical Lutheran Church could not escape their mission boundaries.

On the organisational level, the Church was divided into four regions from inception: The Southwest Church region, the East Church region, the centre Church region and the north Church region. Among all these Church regions, only Ngaoundéré, which eventually became the Church headquarters, could fulfil the criteria of a town, due to the presence of the French colonial authorities. It was on this rural basis that the Church had to fulfil its mission. The main challenge at that point was the task of evangelisation. Gradually, with all the necessary

support from these two traditional partners, as they are commonly referred to, the Church was able to stand firmly and accomplish its task faithfully, which has to date borne visible fruits.

The growth of the Church began to reach urban areas such as Yaoundé, the capital city, Douala the economic city, Buea and Bafoussam, where the Finnish missionaries settled during the 1990s and spent many years working for the urban ministry before leaving in 2007. The Church is also established in the main cities in the north such as Garoua, and Maroua in the far north. From the four Church regions, the Church is divided into ten regions with 1500 congregations across the country. Since Cameroon is a multi-ethnic country, it is obvious that wherever an Evangelical Lutheran Church congregation is founded, many of the local people become its members. Hence it is not easy to provide an exact number for the many ethnic groups in the Church – almost all the ethnic groups are represented in the Church (Rev. Dieudonné Ousmanou: Ngaoundéré 06/05/2011), Koulagna (1999: 9). In this regard, any given figure in terms of statistics may be considered as speculation until an authentic statistical research is carried out. The problem with this issue of ethnicity is that it is widespread in the Cameroonian society and it is inevitably found in the Church which is part of that society. On the other hand, for optimal spiritual care and supervision of all the members, there is a need for well-trained leaders. This will be the next point of investigation, to determine to what extent training of the personnel of the Church is essential and whether this has indeed received the necessary attention by the missionaries.

### **2.5.3.2 Education and training of personnel in the Church**

To produce committed Christians and to increasingly become an urban Church involves the effectiveness of well-trained personnel on every level. The missionaries were aware of this challenge. This has manifested in the creation of many Bible schools and one theological seminary at Meiganga. Nationally, four Bible schools were created, three from the American side and one from the Norwegian side. Recently, in 2002 the fifth was created in Ngaoundéré through the support of the Norwegians aimed at training both catechists and those in search of personal Christian growth.

Apart from these Bible schools, the theological seminary which later became the Lutheran Theological Institute was founded in 1958 and is producing efficient leaders who are in service throughout the ten Church regions (Lode 1990: 137-152).

### **2.5.3.3 Administrative structure of the Church**

Formerly, the Church was led by a General President; at regional level there were regional Presidents. Under the regional President there were district Directors. However, during the general synod held in Garoua in 2007 the Church decided to change the title of the spiritual leader of the Church at national and regional level to that of Bishop instead of President. The delegates felt that the title of president was secular whereas the term bishop was scriptural and hence more applicable to a spiritual leader of the Church. However, the discussion on the choice of Bishop in the modern era could also be argued as a subliminal move to access more power and authority that the title president does not bequeath. It must be mentioned that this change is one of the arguments which sustains the current conflict facing the Church today.

The Church is organised as follows: At regional level there are regional bishops. The regional bishops and likewise, the National Bishop, are elected by the delegates during a regional or a general synod for a four-year term that may be renewed twice. A bishop may occupy this office for a total period of twelve years; depending on how his community appreciates his leadership (Constitution et Regelement interieur de l'EELC 2007: 15). The district Directors are appointed by the regional council under the auspices of the regional bishops. The district Directors in their turn, are responsible for the Catechists and Evangelists who are posted by the district council on the recommendations of the Director of the district (Constitution et Regelement interieur de l'EELC 2007: 25).

It is the responsibility of each district to determine its needs in terms of catechist, Evangelist or Pastor training. It is at this level that the process of selecting candidates for training begins. After the completion of their training the candidates are expected to return to their region unless the Church at national level has expressed a desire to employ some of them according to an identified need. In that case, the National Bishop has the right to make the proposal to the synod council to implement the decision (Constitution et Regelement interieur de l'EELC 2007: 33).

. It should be noted that the bishop cannot decide on any candidate in a unilateral manner without the sanction of the synod council. This holds for all personnel appointments in other Church structures. The exception is in the case of the Catechists and Evangelists, who at the end of their training must return to their regions or districts.

A closer look at this structure reveals a number of weaknesses which do not support the unity of this ethnically diversified Church:



Firstly, the lack of inter-regional or district integration that can mitigate the existing boundaries; secondly, the fact that each ethnic group fights to send its members for training, hence keeping members of the same community in continuous conflict; thirdly, the split created by the former two mission fields is firmly entrenched with no hope of a solution; fourthly, the leadership dissension at national and even at regional level will continue between those who view themselves as the legitimate members of the Church, and feel that they deserve to hold that office; finally, the minorities see themselves as foreigners in a Church which is meant to include all God's people.

Given that the administrative structure of the Church itself is fertile ground for all sorts of dissension, one wonders how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is to deal with the perennial problems surrounding ethnicity, which has become a particular issue for African Churches.

## **2.6 Ethnicity and its impact on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.**

The term 'ethnicity' as it is used is very complex with regards to its meaning. Scholars such as Hamaseso have tried to see the positive side and argue that the responsibility of the negative meaning of that concept to "those who would like to relate ethnicity with [the] unfortunate episodes in African history [are] those who prefer to view ethnicity in a negative light – as an evil plaguing Africa" (2001: 4).

He further argues that "ethnicity should not be interpreted as ethnocentrism which, like racism, is a psychological state, a prejudicial relationship between an individual and members of other ethnic groups" (2001: 9) which theoretically appears to be true. But beside this effort to do justice to what he may consider as the real meaning of ethnicity by proving its innocence in various socio-political disorders in Africa, he also acknowledges with Olden that

Both concepts (ethnocentrism and ethnicity) have some elements of exclusivity for it becomes incumbent upon the upholders as it is natural and practical to trust and give preference to people from one's home area ... or to people who speak the same language and on whom one ought to be able to depend with certainty over others (2001: 9).

Although ethnicity is a lifestyle that is inherent to every ethnic group, and which serves to identify any ethnic group with regard to others, in its exaggeration (ethnocentrism), ethnicity is a state of behaviour that advocates in many ways, discrimination against all those who are

outsiders, and who are in any case not eligible for any kind of favour. It is at this second level that the framework of this section is defined; that is how the different ethnic groups in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon perceive each other and interact with one another as an ecclesial community.

### **2.6.1 Ethnicity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to determine the exact number of ethnic groups that constitute the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, as the 250 ethnic groups are spread across the entire country. However, the major groups can be identified. These are the Gbaya, the Dii, the Tikar, the Vute, the Bafeuk, the Mambila, the Konja, the Pere, the Nyemyem, the Mbum, the Samba, the Dowayo, the Fali, the Mundang, the Guidjiga, the Toupuri, the Massa, the Bamoun, the Bassa, the Bamileke, the Douala, the Bulu, the Ewondo, the Maka, the Lame, the Laka, the Kepere, the Kolbila, the Koma, the Doupa, amongst others, which are spread throughout the 1,500 congregations of the Church<sup>15</sup>. Hence one should bear in mind that the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon more or less reflect the composition of the ethnic diversity of Cameroon. Koulagna has summed it up by stating: *“aussi retrouve-t-on dans l’Eglise pratiquement toutes les tribus originaires des dix provinces du Cameroun, ... Il devient donc impossible de déterminer avec exactitude la composition ethnique de l’EELC”* (1999: 9). [All the tribes who come from the ten provinces of Cameroon are found in the Church. Therefore it becomes impossible to determine exactly the ethnic composition of the Church].

Zadi shares this view by stating that: *“la plupart des Etats africains étant multiethniques, les Eglises qui se trouvent dans ces Etats sont, elles aussi, multiethniques”* (2000: 14) [Most African states being multi-ethnic, Churches in those countries are also multi-ethnic.]

Among the existing ethnic groups in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, there are those who believe they are the authentic products of the American or the Norwegian missions, and therefore consider themselves as the true members of the church. These are the Gbaya, the Mbum, the Dii, the Tikar, the Vute, the Mambila, the Kwanja, the Dowayo, the Samba, the Pere and the Nyemyem, all who are principally from the Adamaoua region, the east region and the north region of Cameroon where the two missions began their work in 1923 and 1925.

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<sup>15</sup> Report of the national Bishop. (January 2011) 1.

This has motivated the creation of an informal expression ‘*fils ou fille de l’Eglise*’ [children of the Church or son or daughter of the Church], which was initially used to identify those who were from the above- mentioned ethnic groups. In other words, there is an element of differentiation in relation to those who are called foreigners, meaning that they are not the natives of the Church. Hence the term ‘children of the Church’ is a pejorative term which contains a discriminatory undertone, although from time to time an effort is made to modify this term and give it an inclusive meaning. These are also projection of power and privileges.

### **2.6.2 Manifestations of ethnicity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

Houmchie, one of the members of the Church, in a letter addressed to the leadership of the Church in 1998, stated the following:

*... Chose très grave il y a une division entre ETHNIE Baya et le reste d’ethnie qui est beaucoup avancée dans l’enceinte de l’Eglise, ce qui est très dangereux. Une autre question à vous les dirigeants est-ce qu’il y a un passage biblique qui nous enseigne la pratique du tribalisme?*<sup>16</sup>

[...A serious matter is the advanced state of division between the Baya ethnic group and the rest of ethnic groups, which is very dangerous. A question to you the leaders is there a biblical passage that teaches us the practice of tribalism?]

Here it appears that tribalism and ethnocentrism are used interchangeable terms, but conceptually they are not the same. In any case, Houmchie was complaining about the division that existed between the Gbaya ethnic group and the others due to ethnocentrism, deeming it as being dangerous. Mbelewe Dotoua, who is from the Gbaya ethnic group, is a Catholic and hence an outsider with regard to the conflicts within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon observes as follows: “*l’ église Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun est en train de vivre ses moments sombre. Une tendance s’est créée sur fond de défense d’intérêts ethnocentrique*”. [The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is living its darkest moments. A tendency has been created on the basis of ethnocentric interests]<sup>17</sup>.

These statements summarise the problem of tribalism which is the manifestation of ethnocentrism that will be addressed in this section. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has been lamenting about this issue since 1997 (see the statement in the next

<sup>16</sup> Archive ELCC. Houmche Abraham. Le Tribalisme qui Mène Notre Eglise Vers La Chute (1998).

<sup>17</sup> Newspaper. *Transformons La Terre en Ciel: Terre Promise* No 003 (September-October 2009) 6.

paragraph). Tribalism has created many dissensions within the Christian communities. This is not to say that before 1997 there was no conflict within the Church, but it was from that year that the Church was subjected to such internal crises that these divided its members. The situation was so serious and has become so detrimental that the Church decided to create a committee called ‘*Projet un dans le monde*’ [‘Project one in the world’] in 2002, inspired by John 17: 21 “that they may be one”, which aimed to solve and prevent conflicts within the Church in particular and within the society in general. The problem was acknowledged as follows:

*L'EELC, l'une des Eglises établie au Cameroun depuis plusieurs décennies n'est pas épargnée des défis de la diversité et de l'intégration ethnique de ses fidèles. Disposant d'environ cent soixante-douze mille fideles (172.000) provenant de 42 groupes ethniques, elle a quelque fois vu une cohabitation difficile entre ses différents membres. L'accent étant mis sur le lien de sang par rapport au lien du Baptême, la paix et l'unité ont cédé la place à des exclusions, des querelles et des luttes d'intérêt, partant la scission de l'Eglise a failli être connue à cause des différents conflits enregistrés entre 1997-2000<sup>18</sup>.*

[The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon has not been spared from the challenge of diversity and the ethnic integration of its 172 000 members, coming from 42 different ethnic groups, because “tribalism [or ethnocentrism is] a moral problem in contemporary Africa” (Waruta 1992: 119) as a whole and for African Churches in particular. What concerns Christians from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is the stress that has always been placed on the blood bond to the detriment of Baptism. Peace and unity have given way to exclusions, quarrels and fights for interests, hence the division of the Church was about to occur because of the ethnic conflicts which occurred from 1997 to 2000].

The Prefect of the Vina division addressed correspondence to the President of the Church which constituted a confirmation of the intensity of the crisis that was threatening the peace in Ngaoundéré in general for that period. In correspondence dated 19/10/1999, the Prefect as local Administrator, on behalf of the Government, drew the attention of the Church's leadership to their responsibilities, to work towards the re-establishment of peace and harmony within the Church and the society. The Prefect became indignant, given that the situation had reached a worrying scale and reacted through this statement addressed to the President of the Church: “*Les nombreuses correspondances dont je suis ampliatrice relatives*

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<sup>18</sup> Archive ELCC. Projet Un Dans Le Monde UDM-EELC. Rapport Du Séminaire De Lancement. (Periode 8-11 Juillet 2002) 2.

*à l'Eglise que vous dirigez font ressortir un véritable malaise au sein de celle-ci ces derniers temps*"<sup>19</sup>. [Several correspondances that I copied with regard to the Church you are leading showed a real uneasiness these last days]. Even in the context of the Church, people still appealed to the administration authorities in an attempt to obtain a solution from them, proving the Church's inability to resolve its internal problems. The Apostle Paul would have addressed them as he had done with the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6: 1-7).

1999 was the year during which the Church was about to split and it was unfortunate that the Church waited until 2002 to initiate a project such as '*Un dans le monde*', which at that time may have been more beneficial. While the project was created three years later, the conflicts, although attenuated at that time with the help of the government, resulted in many consequences and remained latent because much suspicion had been generated towards one another.

The newly elected President at the time, Reverend Nyiwe Thomas, currently the Bishop of the Church, made a statement during his official induction in 2000 with regard to ethnic crises as reported by Rev. André Djédou. "*Le Président Thomas Nyiwé a déclaré hériter d'une Eglise déchirée, avec des blessures liées au problème d'ethnicité, au tribalisme dans les régions et aux conflits de gestion de leadership*" (2008: 55). ["President Thomas Nyiwé declared to have inherited a broken Church, with wounds linked to ethnic problem, tribalism within the regions and to conflicts of leadership management"]. Clearly, ethnic conflict in the ELCC is a long-standing issue which has not been afforded adequate attention and an effective response. Accordingly, it will last as long as they are not properly addressed. In 2001 Bishop Thomas Nyiwé, then President of the Church confirmed the statement that the Church is like belonging to tribal groups and that sharing between Christians from different ethnic groups in the Church is very difficult (2001: 166-167). Eleven years later he is unable to rid the Church of this chaos, and the Church is still in turmoil.

Earlier, it was argued that the divisions created by the former two missions is very real and that leadership dissension at national and even at regional level will continue between those who view themselves to be the real members of the Church, and that they deserve special consideration because of their Christian background. The incontrovertible proof of this

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<sup>19</sup> Archive ELCC. Le Préfet Du Département de La Vina. A Monsieur le Président National de l'»Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne Du Cameroun. (19/10/1999).

statement emanates from the Gbaya ethnic group who claim to be the owners of the church by stating in their memorandum addressed to the Bishop that:

*Si vous ne revoyez de fond en comble le problème des Gbaya au sein de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun dont nous réclavons fièrement la paternité...l'EELC risquerait de s'engouffrer dans le schism...*<sup>20</sup>

[If you don't totally go over the Gbaya's problem within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, which we proudly claim ownership of... The ELCC might risk sinking into schism]

In fact those who have signed the memorandum have claimed to be the majority of the Church's members (60%) and, given their Christian background, they effectively "owned" the Church and therefore they deserve to be substantially represented in the leadership of the Church and in its institutions.

Since 1997, among facts that have been recorded and that are related to ethnicity, the following can be mentioned: the conflict between the Samba-Dowayo in Poli in 1997<sup>21</sup>; the memoranda of the Mbum elites in 1999<sup>22</sup>; the petition of the responsible Mbum Christians in 1999<sup>23</sup>; the memoranda of the congregation of Bethel<sup>24</sup> in Ngaoundéré; and the memoranda of the Gbaya community of the congregation of Bamyanga<sup>25</sup> in Ngaoundéré, complaining about injustice and their exclusion by the Dii ethnic group. (It should be noted that there have been many other documents which were unavailable for this research). Other ethnic groups, although silent, are also unhappy because they are isolated from the Church because of the effects of ethnocentrism.

As Koulagna observes, "*ces groupes nourrissent secrètement les concurrences et les conflits*" (1999: 42), [these groups were secretly nurturing an inner competition and conflicts.] Definitely, the whole Cameroonian society has the habit of memoranda.

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<sup>20</sup> Newspaper. *L'œil Du Sahel*, Hebdomadaire Régional d'Information Du Nord Cameroun no 351 (19 Octobre 2009) 7.

<sup>21</sup> Newspaper. *Nouvelles de l'EELC*, Bulletin Bimestriel de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne Du Cameroun no 006 (Novembre 1997) 6.

<sup>22</sup> 68 Mémorandum de L'Elite Mbum Membres de l'EELC adresse au Conseil D'Administration de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun (EELC) (14 Juillet 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Pétition Des Responsables Mbum Chrétiens de Ngaoundéré (25 Novembre 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum, Congregation Bethel I Ngaoundere (22 Juillet 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Mémorandum, Difficultés rencontrées par les fideles Gbaya de la Région Centre Depuis La Dédicace de la Bible en leur Langue (24 Avril 2001).

Another example can be cited from an article entitled: '*les larmes de [l'Evêque] Thomas Nyiwé*' [the tears of Bishop Thomas Nyiwé], in which according to the newspaper '*l'Oeil du Sahel*'<sup>26</sup>, the Dii ethnic group from the Norwegian mission field is in consultation regarding their insufficient representation in the leadership of the Church.

These cases were known at the national level of the Church. Similar cases occurred at the regional and district levels but do not concern this study. The evil of ethnocentrism is solidly entrenched and signs of what has emerged today as an open conflict within the Church were neglected for a long time. For example, in 1997, during one of the interviews conducted by the Church's journalist, the following question was posed to the then President: "*Que dites-vous Monsieur le Président du tribalisme, cette gangrène qui ronge notre Eglise?*"<sup>27</sup> [What do you say Mr. President about tribalism, this cancer that is wearing down the Church down?]. The journalist was asking the President about the degeneration brought about by tribalism that was destroying the Church. His answer ignored the reality that the Church was going through.

It must surely be recognized that the best way of overcoming evil is not to ignore its presence otherwise it silently invades the whole system which in the end collapses. That is exactly what is being witnessed currently in the Evangelical Lutheran church in Cameroon. The leadership of the Church appeared to be aware of the situation and was attempting to confront it through the project '*un dans le monde*' which lasted only four years (2002-2006) This calm period led to the erroneous belief that peace had been restored. The 2005 and 2007 general synods testified that a certain lull was observed.

After the elective general synod in 2009 during which the current Bishop was re-elected, hostilities began to re-emerge. The conflict was so severe that the administrative authorities once again intervened in an attempt to restore peace, without any significant success. The Bishop was accused of many laxities, among others, failures vis-a-vis the Gbaya ethnic group and was summoned to resign by those who had signed the Gbaya's memorandum, in which they claimed ownership of the Church. According to them, Gbaya land is the cradle

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<sup>26</sup> Newspaper. *Oeil Du Sahel*. no 415 (31 Janvier 2011) 4

<sup>27</sup> Newspaper. *Nouvelles de l'EELC*, Bulletin Bimestriel de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne Du Cameroun no 006 (Novembre 1997) 5.

of the Church (ELCC); hence any manipulation of its community and ideology is detrimental to the Gbaya people's integrity<sup>28</sup>.

The conflict zones were located in three main areas: Ngaoundéré, the headquarter of the Church within the Gbaya's communities, the Meiganga region which is considered as one of the most important areas of the Gbaya land and Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon for the Gbaya Christian community, where the so-called '*Coordination Nationale de la transition De l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne Du Cameroun*' [the National coordination of transition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon] is located. This structure, according to the dissidents, is supposed to assist in the period of transition after the resignation of the current Bishop until the renewal of the Church's leadership during a general synod. So far none of the other ethnic groups have reacted to the claim of the Gbaya, especially those from the Norwegian side, but subsequent tensions are conceivable.

The general opinion within the Church is that the Gbaya ethnic group is the source of the dissension which the Church is undergoing although there are Gbaya people such as Mbelewe Dotoua referred to in the introductory part of this section, who proved the opposite. He presented himself as a Gbaya who has expressed the desire to dissociate himself from his people, considering their position as being non-Christian, perhaps because he is not a Lutheran.

Interviewed about the schism in the Church, the Bishop's statement was clear and referred to the Gbaya: "*Il ne faut pas que les Gbaya copient les exemples des Moundang et Massa du passé*"<sup>29</sup>. [The Gbaya should not copy the past examples of the Mundang and the Massa] (He was here referring to the ethnic group in the brethren Lutheran Church of Cameroon, that had split from the Church due to ethnicity in 2003<sup>30</sup> similar to the ELCC and has caused much harm within the Church.)

These unfortunate events have only confirmed Zadi's assertion that: "*l'Eglise africaine chancelle sous l'effet du tribalisme qui la dénature et ternit son message d'amour et d'unité*" (2000: 15-16). The remark made here is that the problem of ethnicity is inherent to all

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<sup>28</sup> News Paper. *L'œil Du Sahel*, Hebdomadaire Régional d'Information Du Nord Cameroun no 351 (19 Octobre 2009) 6.

<sup>29</sup> Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne Au Cameroun : 2000 Fidèles Menacent de s'en aller. [http://www.lejourquotidien.info/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=63](http://www.lejourquotidien.info/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=63). Accessed 14/08/2009

<sup>30</sup> 77Dissidence, La crise à l'Eglise Fraternelle Luthérienne Du Cameroun S'internationalise <http://www.cameroon-one.com/site/news/index.php?op=view&id=29166>. Accessed 07/07/2011



African Churches, because in this statement Zadi is affirming that the African Church is staggering under the effects of tribalism which distort its message of love and unity. With regard to these obvious challenges posed by ethnicity within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, one is left wondering whether there is any hope for unity and cohesion that could be explored.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Cameroon is a multi-ethnic country; therefore Christian communities in general and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular is a multi-ethnic Christian community. The policy of the rulers since independence based on the colonial heritage of ‘divide and rule’ has created many boundaries and has been the source of multiple dissensions between the ethnic groups. Therefore, the entire society becomes politically, economically and religiously affected by the phenomenon of ethnicity. Established in such a context, the Cameroonian churches, and not least the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, have found a fertile ground for tribalism. Consequently, the Cameroonian policy of managing the ethnic groups is one of the factors that has affected and contributed to the development of ethnicity within the Churches.

In the specific case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, having two main missions from two different countries, with two different mission policies has been one of the major factors in the development of ethnic conflict in the Church. The two clearly defined fields of mission have created a stark divide in the church. The missionaries on both sides have perhaps been indirectly responsible for what the Church is undergoing through their policy of keeping exclusive contact with their respective fields of mission, perpetuating the so-called ‘*paternalism*’ phenomenon. In other words, the missionaries’ legacies have not benefitted ethnic integration into the Church. As stated from the beginning, the missionaries failed to stress their message regarding the necessity of living the Gospel of Christ, by building a universal ethnic group called the Christian ethnic group where, as Hellerman rather graphically states, “Jesus is an ‘ethnic entrepreneur’ who has relativized the Abrahamic bloodline and reconstituted God’s people as a surrogate family (2007: 288, 305).

They would by then have engaged people into a kind of quest against selfishness that is inherent in human nature, if not to overcome ethnic conflict, at least to minimise its effects by sensitizing the first converted Christians about the meaning and the importance of Christian fellowship. This fellowship should transcend any divisions amongst all nations in order to

create the living people of God under the Cross of Christ. Unfortunately, paternalism has encouraged some to claim the Church as their property, to the detriment of others. The Church has become personal property to some who believe they have the right to dominate over others in the same Church. Therefore ethnic lines are constructed to serve political and soci-economic interest.

Which kind of fate is reserved for others? Will Cameroonian Churches and the Evangelical Lutheran Church be divided into multiple churches grouped along ethnic lines? If not, how could the unity of the Church be consolidated in the face of ethnic division?

The description given of the church's complicity in the ethnic problem in Cameroon obviously has bearing on this study. Instead of being a beacon of light and reconciliation for the rest of Cameroonian society the church has not only shown itself to be compromised in the situation but has in many ways exacerbated the problem. In the process the church has been unable to draw on its theological resources to bring about reconciliation in Cameroonian society. This does not mean that these resources are irrelevant but that it is time perhaps for some synergy to be found with local, indigenous resources in order to tackle the huge problem that the church faces in Cameroon. One should therefore explore the possibilities surrounding the custom, tradition, and practice of *Mang-Djala*.

## Chapter Three: The concept of *Mang-Djala*

### 3.1 Introduction

In spite of what has been said so far peaceful cohabitation and harmony are intrinsic values for African people, which is manifested in the quest for what Mbonda calls '*le vivre-ensemble*'<sup>31</sup> [*Living together*] (2003: 5). '*Le vivre-ensemble*' describes the way in which people transcend their natures and open themselves unconditionally to others by integrating them into their community, and by sharing their sorrows and joys, creating a structure that is propitious for every individual's existence, in spite of misunderstandings and differences. (Mbonda 2003:5). Based on this concept of coexistence, one could state that human beings are social beings which, consciously or subconsciously, link them together. It enables people to extend themselves beyond their tribal or ethnic group to create a new, wider community which fosters '*living together*'.

Based on the need to transcend separation and to inspire unity, the institution of *Mang-Djala* has been put into place by certain indigenous tribes in Cameroon in an effort to find ways and strategies that promote the concept of living together, upholding the value of human dignity at all levels and opposing any tendency towards segregation, dehumanisation or rejection. In other words, the aim was to find ways to reconcile those who, on the one hand, are in a conflict situation and, on the other hand, preventing such conflicts from occurring. In the Cameroonian context it was found that wherever '*le vivre ensemble*' was no longer practised, life itself became somewhat meaningless and even catastrophic. Today the African continent is partly immersed in wars because the values of '*living together*' are no longer adhered to. One theory of the loss of those values arose from boundaries that were created by colonisers, missionaries and politicians who used tribalism as a weapon to rule.

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<sup>31</sup> Dr Ernest-Marie Mbonda is a researcher at the centre of study for research on social justice and politics, at the Catholic university of Yaoundé, Cameroon. His concept of: "*le vivre-ensemble*" was developed during a conference held in 2003 on the theme: "*Crises politiques et refondation du lien social: quelques pistes philosophiques*" [Political crises and the overhaul of the social bond: some philosophical thoughts] was based on Francis Farrugia's concept of "*le lien social*" [the social bond]. In describing the function of social bond, Faruuga maintained what follows: "*Il convient de comprendre le lien social comme ce qui maintient, entretient une solidarité entre les membres d'une même communauté, comme ce qui permet une vie en commun, comme ce qui lutte en permanence contre les forces de dissolution toujours à l'oeuvre dans une communauté humaine*" [One ought to understand what follows: "*Il convient de comprendre le lien social comme ce qui maintient, keeps a solidarity between the members of the same community, as what allows a common life, as what fights permanently against the dissolution forces always at work within a human community*] (1997: 30). Mbonda's argument is: "*rendre possible le vivre-ensemble en entretenant la solidarité et en neutralisant les forces de disintégration de cette solidarité*" [the function of social bond is to render possible the '*living-together*' by maintaining solidarity and by neutralising disintegration forces of that solidarity].

It is for this reason that this chapter will investigate the socio-cultural context of *Mang-Djala* as an African value that was established to overcome ethnic divisions and to enhance the concept of ‘*living together*’ among different ethnic groups in northern Cameroon. The concept of *Mang-Djala* is also called *Mandjara*<sup>32</sup> by a number of those involved in its practice. Bah has identified the concept of *Mang-Djala* or *Mandjara* as one of the traditional practices for conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. He calls it the *alliance sacrificielle et prevention de conflit*<sup>33</sup> [sacrificial alliance and conflict prevention].

### 3.2 Different perspectives on the concept of *Mang-Djala*

*Mang-Djala* is an aspect of the worldview held by many ethnic groups in Cameroonian society, especially in the northern part of the country. *Mang-Djala* is originally an Mbum word which is a combination of two words: *mang* which means to gather or to assemble and *djala*, meaning locusts. The word *Mang-Djala* is understood to refer to ‘living together’ like locusts, in order to achieve a common goal. Hence the idea behind the concept of *Mang-Djala* is to highlight the notion of ‘living together’ as being primary to cohabitating peacefully as a community. This principle of ‘living together’ has in some ways become corrupted. Harvey Sindima’s lament in this regard has a profound meaning. He argues that “the meaning of living together as a people in Africa today [is] distorted” (1995:195). This is to say, Africa has been deprived of those values that arose in reaction to genocide and ethnic conflicts, which have built a strong African continent.

But the question not yet answered hinges on the meaning of the concept of *Mang-Djala*. What is that common goal that has to be achieved or what does ‘living together’ stand for?

Human beings are always struggling for a better life, whether in a spiritual or a material sense. From this perspective, achieving the common goal comes to be understood as living life in its entirety in the company of all those who, at any given time, are witnesses to the human story of their own epoch, whether good or bad. They participate in the living experience amongst and together with others in their surroundings through struggles and celebrations. Thus the quest for life should not be undertaken individually because life itself is made to be shared and is marked by moral constraint towards others. In this we find that the African principle of ‘I am because we are, and because we are, I am too’ as stated by

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<sup>32</sup> Thierno, Bah. Les Mécanismes Traditionnels De Prévention Et de Résolution Des Conflits En Afrique Noire. <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/publications/mecanismes/edbah.htm>. Accessed 11/07/2011

<sup>33</sup> Thierno, Bah. Les Mécanismes Traditionnels De Prévention Et de Résolution Des Conflits En Afrique Noire. <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/publications/mecanismes/edbah.htm>. Accessed 11/07/2011

Bujo (2001:5), “articulates the conviction that each one becomes a human being only in fellowship of life with others”, which is the intrinsic characteristic of the concept of ‘living together’ as exemplified by the principle of *Mang-Djala*.

In *Mang-Djala* the concept of ‘*living together*’ goes beyond the framework of family, tribe, or ethnic community to create a new and wider community from multiple existing ethnic groups. In this regard Bujo argues that “ethnic groups [in *Mang-Djala*] are ... [the] initial basis for further relations” (2001:5). In *Mang-Djala* there is a kind of breaking down of the formal understanding of community based on a blood bond or on a shared past history and its ethnic basis (which does not get dissolved but remains in existence) that had served to determine human relationships and differences. But through the principle of *Mang-Djala* each ethnic group becomes part of a wider community by agreement of all the involved parties (ethnic groups) in order to create the synergy necessary for the wellbeing of the whole community. Bujo qualified this as “a universalist perspective” since it tends to embrace the whole of humanity and involves “hospitality, daily friendship, and dialogue with the members of other ethnic groups”... (2001:5).

Given what is stated above, one could pose the question as to how could locusts provide the example for such a life when it is well known that they are destructive insects, creating calamities, and are even perceived as a symbol for a curse? What kind of wisdom is concealed behind the symbolism of gathering locusts? In an attempt to unravel such a complex metaphor, one may turn to the Bible. In several instances, locusts were the biblical symbols of God’s anger. That was the case for example, when God punished the Pharaoh in Egypt who refused to obey his order to free the Israelites. Locusts were sent as a plague covering the whole country of Egypt (Exodus 10) to devastate the entire harvest. Their presence anywhere is not a good sign, because it infers hostility and devastation.

To fight swarms of locusts that usually destroy food crops wherever they land, scientific pesticides have been developed to destroy them in order to prevent famine. Despite the undesirable effects of locusts terrorising people, an article entitled: *Locusts swarm & humans tweet: both are social networking*, based on a study of locusts, states that “swarming is

essential for the locusts' survival... Perhaps it's no surprise that, for many of us humans, social networks have come to seem essential"<sup>34</sup>.

Paradoxically, the Bible also presents locusts as a symbol of wisdom. It says: "Four things on earth are small, yet they are exceedingly wise: the ants are people without strength, yet they provide their food in the summer; the badgers are a people without power, yet they make their home in the rock; the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank..." (Proverbs 30:24-27 NRSV).

Again, *Mang-Djala* as a cultural way of living conveys a specific meaning for those who believe in it. No matter that others may understand the concept differently; the communal owners of the concept have appropriated and adopted it as part of their culture. In this regard, Bate argues that:

All cultural forms convey meaning to those who share a culture. They communicate within the culture. The people within the society sharing this culture know what the form means. .... The golden rule regarding cultural meaning is that those within the cultural framework will understand the cultural meaning immediately. [Whereas], those outside may have some understanding but more often than not will misinterpret the meaning (2002: 54-55).

In *Mang-Djala*, the locust symbolises the great wisdom of unity <sup>35</sup> and those involved in this practiced have been challenged to learn from them. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that, in line with the devastating potential of acting together as one, the swarming of locusts demonstrates the power of unified action also in the social life of human beings. Conversely if locusts did not act together or, even worse, acted against each other, they would never accomplish what they can when they act (and feed) in unison. Thus the locust metaphor in the concept of *Mang-Djala* is, in fact, a very powerful one that cuts to the heart of the problems associated with the disunifying tendencies in ethnic conflict. The metaphorical use of locusts to convey the significance of 'living together' is valuable also because it may reinforce the understanding in Christian communities of sharing unity as the participation in the togetherness of God's people who are all called to his purpose for human existence. That purpose, according to Christian faith, is salvation which every human being strives towards.

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<sup>34</sup> Locusts Swarm & Humans Tweet: Both are social networking. <http://www.care2.com/causes/locusts-swarm-humans-tweet-social-networking.html>. Accessed 21/07/2011

<sup>35</sup> Great Wisdom in Unity. <http://www.onlythebible.com/gem/great-wisdom-in-unity.html> . Accessed 10/08/2011.

The metaphor can be extended also into the realm of leadership. In addition to their gregarious way of living, locusts are capable of moving together in the same direction, without requiring a leader. As the Bible states: “The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank” (Proverbs 30:27 NRSV). The fact that “not having a king”, like the locusts, expresses the refutation of any idea of submission or domination that someone might want to impose on or promote within the community. This is evident in the interaction in the daily lives between *Mang-Djala* partners. Whenever they meet, each lays claim to the title of “chief or leader”, just to tease his or her partner. But they know that they do not exert dominance over each other and none of them should bow before the other in submission. In a *Mang-Djala* partnership, the prevailing ideology upholds complete equality and dignity of members. Needless to say, this contradicts once again the striving for power and dominance that characterize ethnocentrism.

The point is that locusts, when swarming is usually carried out in response to meeting common goals and objectives, are linked to one another, and therefore no one is abandoned, demonstrating the concept of ‘living together’ as a community without discrimination. Similarly, people who follow the *Mang-Djala* principle can be understood as being ‘stuck’ to one another so that they move together like locusts, whatever the circumstances and whatever the cost. Clearly, if such a style of living is applied to a human community, even the weakest member of the group will find that he or she is taken care of by the others. In this way, everyone is needy and each person is important to everyone else. Life becomes a harmonised relationship between those who are involved in the practice – in this specific case those to whom *Mang-Djala* is meaningful.

As we shall see later, there are various words such as “*manzala, manzara, manjara, mbanjara*” (Mohammadou, 1999: 81- 89) which are used to express the sense of ‘living together’. *Mandjara* is the word used by the Vouté which also adheres to *Mang-Djala*, as do the Mbum and others. All these words share a similar origin namely ‘mang’, which originates from the Mbum word mang meaning “to gather”. *Mbanjara* (1999: 81-89) seems to have its own root but with a similar connotation, because *mbanjara* in Mbum means “friend”. This may lead to the conclusion that all these words are variations of the word *Mang-Djala* and that they could be used interchangeably by all the parties involved.

### 3.2.1 The origin of *Mang-Djala*.

After many centuries and the passing of many generations, would it still be possible to recall with some precision the origin of the concept of *Mang-Djala* and trace what has motivated its practice? Are there still groups striving for *le vivre ensemble*, albeit no longer as it used to be? Could these retrieve the source of what André Dogo Badomo Beloko has called “les traces positives de nos ancêtres” meaning, the positive tracks of our ancestors. (André Dogo Badomo Beloko, Ngaoundéré 23/05/2011). In fact, for Badomo the concept of *Mang-Djala* is the ancestors’ legacy which is transmitted from generation to generation. These questions are of great importance and it remains an uphill task to provide adequate answers. However, an attempt will be made to explore how far back in time the origin might still be recalled, or to find out a possible similar source that could help rediscover the origin in order to better understand its importance for those who have applied the principle.

Many legends relating to *Mang-Djala* have been recorded. Bah describes it as

*Une alliance sacrificielle spectaculaire fut pratiquée autrefois dans le centre du Cameroun connue sous le nom de Mandjara, elle implique toute l'aire culturelle djukun qui intègre divers groupes ethniques (Vouté, Mbum, Tikar, Bamun, etc...) ...Le pacte fut scellé de la sorte: on égorga un Vute et un Tikar et on mélangea leur sang; en se prêtant à ce sacrifice rituel extrême, ces deux communautés auront enterré à jamais la hache de guerre<sup>36</sup>*

[A spectacular sacrificial alliance was practised in the centre of Cameroon named *Mandjara*, which involved the whole Djukun cultural sphere integrating various ethnic groups (Vouté, Mbum, Tikar, Bamun, etc...). The sealing of the pact happened in this way: a Tikar and a Vouté were killed and their blood mixed together. By participating in such a ritualistic sacrifice, the two communities buried the axe of war forever].

Mohamadou reported the same legend but with a difference. According to Mohamadou, there were two stages in the formation of the alliance and only two groups of people were involved in it. In the first stage a sheep was slaughtered by the principal notables of the two communities (Tikar and Vouté). Thereafter they collected all their spears into a bundle and destroyed them. By this act the two chiefs declared an oath not to fight each other ever. To seal the oath each chief made a cut in his arm, collected some blood, mixed it together and drank it. They called the ritual Kie in Tikar and Mandjara in Vouté.

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<sup>36</sup> Thierno, Bah. Les Mécanismes Traditionnels De Prévention Et de Résolution Des Conflits En Afrique Noire <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/publications/mecanismes/edbah.htm>. Accessed 11/07/2011.



In addition, a third version exists as follows. “[*Les Vouté*] *défirent les Bamoun et les Tikar, avec lesquels ils conclurent une alliance (le Mandjara) et conquièrent les tributs locales*”<sup>37</sup>. [The Vute defeated the Bamoun and the Tikar with whom they eventually formed an alliance (Mandjara) and conquered local tribes]. According to this version three groups of people were involved, the Vute, the Bamoun and the Tikar who to this day maintain this *Mang-Djala* partnership.

Of interest is the fact that various ethnic groups such as the Vute, the Tikar, the Bamoun, the Mbum and the Mundang are joined through the *Mang-Djala* bond, although the Mundang are not mentioned in any of the three reported versions of the legend. During the a conversation with the traditional ruler Vincent Mohamadou Mvouen on 27/03/2011 in Mbella Assom, an elderly prominent person from the Tikar chieftaincy gave a version of the origin of *Mang-Djala* that approximated the first two versions. None of these stories mentioned the etymological meaning of the concept. However, it appears that the concept was motivated by conditions of conflict that the groups had to deal with and a desire to overcome the situation, thereby building a peaceful environment of coexistence between the existing neighbouring ethnic groups.

A third source is the article entitled ‘*Le Poney Conquérant Des Savanes Du Cameroun (1750-185)*’ by Mohammadou. Here he presents interesting information that confirms the origin of the concept of *Mang-Djala* as presented earlier (see page 58). According to Mohammadou, the neighbouring peoples who were living in the Plateau de l’Adamaoua (that is the whole region of northern Cameroon which currently includes three administrative regions) had been subjected to many attacks from Baare-Tchamba invaders.

These attacks happened long before the conquest of the Fulbe (*Jihad*) during the 19th century and none of the isolated people could repel or defeat the invaders. The concept of *Mang-Djala* would have been motivated by the necessity of forming a common front against the enemy. Since the concept was intended to build a kind of web between the existing neighbouring inhabitants the spelling of the word, though originating from one of the languages, eventually changed from one society to another. But from the beginning, as Mohammadou states with reference to Fardon (1998:198): “*manzala dénotait au departs une*

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<sup>37</sup> La Société Voute (BABOUTE) Du Cameroun. <http://nkpages.over-blog.fr/article-la-societe-voute-baboute-du-cameroun-63066762.html>. Accessed 11/07/2011.

*relation de parenté a plaisanterie*”. [*Manzala* at the beginning denoted a joking relationship between different clans or tribes] (own translation). He continues, stating:

*Et le terme se retrouve a travers toute la zone d'expansion des Baare-Tchamba linguistiquement hétérogène: chez les Mbum, Vouté, Tikar, Mbonga, Tsinga, Bali et sous diverses variantes (manzara, manjara, mbanjara), toutefois avec un sens dérivé de: 'ceux qui marchent ensemble', 'compagnon de route', 'camarade de combat', 'alliés', ou 'alliance de guerre (1999 :81-89).*

[And the term is found all over the zone of expansion of the Baare-Tchamba which is linguistically heterogenic: among the Mbum, Vouté, Tikar, Mbonga, Tsinga, Bali and with diverse variants (*manzara, manjara, mbajara*), however, with the same meaning derived from ‘walking together’, ‘companion on the road’, ‘comrade at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’]

But what Mohammadou failed to come up with in his presentations is the fact that he could not make a connection between the sacrificial legend of ‘*mandjara*’ which he recorded and the history of the ‘*poney conquérant des savanes du Cameroun central (1750-1850)*’, [The conquering pony of the central Cameroon savannah] which could have enlightened our understanding. His approach is that of an historian whereas the approach of this study will be from a theological perspective which requires a critical analysis. In fact, the two stories, namely the sealing of an alliance for peaceful cohabitation between the Voute and the Tikar on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the building of a common front between the Mbum, the Vouté, the Tikar, the Mbonga, the Tsinga and the Bali against the common enemy invader of the Baare-Tchamba, provides and opportunity to establish a connection between the different origins of the term.

During a discussion with one of the focus groups yet another version emerged, this time bringing together the Dii, the Gbaya and the Laka. (Focus group discussion Dii, Gbaya and Laka, Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011). In this case there may also have been a sealed alliance but this was not clearly stated. However, it appears that the clear identification of different abilities characterising each of the three tribes had played an important role in their coming together as *Mang-Djala* partners to prevent possible attacks from enemies. The Dii to date are blacksmiths and forge arrows and spears, while the Gbaya are good hunters and excellent in the handling of arrows and spears, and the Laka have the ability to find escape routes. Hence the three were brought together for their symbiotic support and self-protection roles. One of

the participants stated that during the ethnic conflict between the Gbaya and the Fulani in 1991 and 1992, the Dii were preparing themselves to go to the rescue of the Gbaya, because of this pact. Fortunately, the conflict did not last. (The National Bishopon, Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011)

Against this background, it became possible to make sense of the etymological meaning of *Mang-Djala* in Mbum which recalls the lifestyle of the locusts, although none of the four sources referred to the word as originating from the Mbum language and none could give any other etymological meaning in another language. Using the Mbum etymology emphasised the meaning of the concept as the locusts are able to live and move together. There is a strong case for advocating that the origin of the word can be found in the Mbum language. According to the history of migrations, Mohammadou argues that:

*La clef de toutes [les] traditions d'origine est détenue en dernier lieu par les Mbum. C'est pourquoi toute lumière qui sera jetée sur leur tradition éclairera de même coup celles des autres peuples qui leur sont issus ou apparentés (1971: 219).*

[The key to all those traditions of origin (of the Mbum, Tikar, Bamoun, Bamenda, Bansa, Bamileké and Vouté) is held by the Mbum. Therefore any light that can be thrown on their tradition will also clarify those of other groups of people who originated from them or are related to them.]

Although this statement does not specifically address the concept of *Mang-Djala* but rather the traditions of all the groups as a whole, the detail is important as it can help remove some ambiguity related to the origin of the concept and affirm that *Mang-Djala* originates from the Mbum language and was later changed by others.

Although Mohammadou has to some degree rendered it possible to trace the origin of the concept, his arguments would have been more convincing if he were analytical and had attempted to connect his first statement in '*Tradition d'Origine Des Peuples Du Centre Et De l'Ouest Du Cameroun: Mbum, Tikar, Bamoun, Bamenda, Bansa, Bamiléké, Vouté*' (1971: 219) to the second statement in '*Le Poney Conquérant Des Savanes Du Cameroun Central (C.1750-1850)*' (1999: 81-89) and had come up with their correlation. Mohammadou should have attempted to show how the alliance impacted on the principles of 'walking together', 'companion on the road', 'comrade at arms' and 'allies' or 'alliance of war'. This would have helped to clarify how the concept was interpreted and practised by those who were involved

in it. In other words, how did the different ethnic groups in practice express these principles or interact in the new social environment created by *Mang-Djala*? On the other hand, a lack of concrete information from the participants with regard to the original meaning of the concept of *Mang-Djala* challenged the researcher to expand his research, until the discovery of the writings of Bah and Mohamadou through which he attained a better understanding of the implications of the concept of *Mang-Djala* for those who were involved in it.

Most importantly, the researcher found that the concept was widely known as it had been used as a strategy by the peoples of the whole southern savannah of Cameroon to stop the incursion of the Baare-Tchamba invaders. As all the participants have observed, after many centuries the origin has sunk into oblivion but among the Mbum, Tikar, Voute, and Bamun there still exists *Mang-Djala*. This is likely between the Dii, Laka, and Gbaya; between the Nyem-Nyem, Chamba, and Pere; between the Mambila, Kwanja and Tikar. The principle is still operating although not with the same intensity as before and this can be attributed to the failure of transmission. Despite this, perhaps something could still be done to retrieve some useful meaning for a desperate society in a quest for unity, especially in the context of the Church.

A careful study of the different meanings of the concept of *Mang-Djala* as given above conveys the idea of the value of community life where different ethnic groups can work together in order to live life to its fullness. Sindima maintains that: “The African struggle is for a community that will provide possibilities for Africans to realise their full potential” (1995:15). These possibilities as expressed by Sindima can also be strengthened by the concept of *Mang-Djala* and its corollary as evident in terms like ‘walking together’, ‘companion on the road’, ‘comrade at arms’ ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’, as stated earlier. The question that this raises is, if all these expressions find their meaning in the life style of the locust, why is it so important that the life of locusts should be considered as a new paradigm for human life? Without suggesting a study of locusts, perhaps the issue to be highlighted is the “concept of community [which] plays an important role in informing personal and collective identity, and [which] is a symbol of security” (1995:197). The symbolism perceived in the life of locusts is highly paradoxical in nature and it is difficult to reconcile their most visible effect on the world – destruction, calamity, disasters – with the positive qualities of their communal existence. Meanwhile, what requires accentuation is the question about the hidden tenets of *Mang-Djala* as it relates to the locusts’ symbolism, which

conveys a particular meaning for those who share that culture. This will be the next step in this investigation.

### **3.2.2 The operation of *Mang-Djala***

Practically, *Mang-Djala* is a kind of ‘*social belt of life*’ that integrates all aspects of the lives of its adherents. It is a social belt of life because it operates in a sort of web or network whereby two or three, or even more, ethnic groups share life in an interdependent manner. None of those who are bound together by *Mang-Djala* can live an isolated life because their ethnic groups are interconnected. The concept of *Mang-Djala* hence embodies an existence governed by the wisdom that life in isolation is death – a view that is characteristic of the thinking of people belonging to my ethnic group. Based on this, the ethics of *Mang-Djala* is applied irrespective of gender issues or class discrimination, meaning that the gender difference which in most of “the traditional African world view... is natural” (Shutte 2009: 97) is overcome or mitigated. In this regard, the traditional Ruler Mohamadou Mven maintains that: “in its day to day application, men, women and children are fully involved in *Mang-Djala* partnership without any kind of discrimination (Mbella Assom 27/03/2011). Each individual of a given ethnic group, as well as the ethnic group as a whole and the various ethnic groups involved with *Mang-Djala* are bound together in communal interaction; thus life is perceived in a symbiotic manner.

Therefore, *Mang-Djala* can be considered as part of African socialism<sup>38</sup> or African humanism respectively promoted by African thinkers such as Nyerere and Kaunda who developed the concept of African community. As Harvey rightly argues, “community in traditional culture exists to uphold the sanctity of life and maintains and sustains the value and respect of persons” (1995:94). He further comments on Nyerere’s view that, “to live, for Nyerere ... is to live as African communities lived prior to the destruction of their cultures and thoughts by western influence” (1995:100).

In this regard, Africans are faced with the challenge of retrieving the initial African condition where communal life has not undergone the dreadful fate of modernity and colonisation. Therefore it is not realistic to strive for an ideal such as *Mang-Djala* so as to regain some of its potentialities?

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<sup>38</sup> African socialism is the African way of life within which, as pointed out by Nyerere (1987), pride lies in maintaining the tradition of hospitality – peoples should live as a body, achieving the wellbeing of one another. Accordingly, one should put himself to the service of the community. Hence, according to this understanding, human community is the greatest treasure that one should look for.

According to Nyerere's understanding, life is wholly expressed in terms of both individual and community, because the existence of one involves the presence of the other. Ng'weshemi made this clear by quoting Nyerere himself when he affirmed that "In African traditional society, we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community and the community took care of us". To place this in the context of this study, one could say that we are a community within communities. We take care of the communities and the communities take care of us. This is to say that "life in its fullness derives from the community where the life of the one and the lives of the many interact" (Ng'weshemi 2002:26).

On the other hand there is Kaunda's approach to African humanism (which according to Ng'weshemi "could be correctly understood as one model of African socialism" 2002: 76) "The traditional African way of life [is designated] as humanism because it valued humanity, fostered human dignity, and was inclusive, and relationship-oriented" (2002:77). This is to say that the emphasis was on the fact that the "human being [is made to be] in relation with others in community" (2002: 77). Hence, it could be thought that before the attempt of westernisation through the colonisation of Africa, the continent had already designed its own way of living and of applying its ethics in which an important part was dedicated to life as a matter of community.

Nevertheless, in both Nyerere's and Kaunda's approach to African socialism and humanism, almost no attention was given to the community between communities; meaning that a community consists of communities, as *Mang-Djala*'s community is formed through ethnic group communities. If it is true that each person is important only within a specific framework of community which determines his human nature, it is also true that a single community cannot live in isolation whilst surrounded by other communities. It follows that each community becomes important only in relation to other communities on a larger scale. This creates a kind of network of communities wherein the individual is a member of several communities in which he interacts with other members from other communities. This is what is implied by the phrase 'a social belt of life' referred to earlier. The concept of *Mang-Djala* is all about communal life, and this is not clearly stated or not well expressed, even if the idea is contained in the concepts of African socialism or humanism. In the following section aspects of the concept of *Mang-Djala* will be discussed.

### 3.3 The objectives of *Mang-Djala*

The objective of *Mang-Djala* is to implement the concept of a life style of *living together* as defined by the principles of ‘walking together’, ‘companion on the road’, ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’. Considering these terms individually helps to provide a clear understanding of what the concept entails. The principles can be divided into two groups, namely ‘walking together’ and ‘companion on the road’, and ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’ and ‘alliance of war’ (See page 60, paragraph 4).

The expressions ‘walking together’ and ‘companion on the road’ have almost the same meaning and could refer to the perception of life as a sort of communal journey towards a certain destination whereby everyone is involved and looking forward to arriving. This implies that life is communal and not solitary. Life is made to be lived in a community characterised by solidarity and friendship; it is underpinned by “the idea [of] ‘we’ and ‘us’ [which] is entrenched in Africans from childhood, so that as they grow, they know what they belong to and [that they] must function within the community in which they are rooted” (Kunhiyop 2008: 20). In this way, one feels responsible towards others and at the same time fully integrated within the community. More importantly, as the concept of *Mang-Djala* is intended to transcend ethnic barriers, what matters is not how one identifies oneself as belonging to a specific ethnic group, but how one is a participant in the shared life that brings various ethnic groups into one’s community.

‘Comrades at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’ are the next expressions to consider. Given the legendary history, neighbouring peoples in the ‘*Plateau de l’Adamaoua*’ (the former appellation of northern Cameroon) would have been subjected to many attacks from the Baare-Tchamba invaders prior to the Islam invasion. This might have been one of the reasons for the formulation of *Mang-Djala*, revealed in the expressions ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’ or ‘alliance of war’. These terms are military jargon referring to a coalition of several countries forming one front to defeat or overcome a common enemy. Those involved in the battle combined their energy and strategies, not necessarily to defeat the enemy, but also to protect themselves and to undergo together the consequences of the enemies’ attack at whatever cost. This indicates that the concept is not only applicable when life is smooth, but also even when life becomes tough, leading even to death; that is why partners swore allegiances. They would not abandon each other but, more importantly, they were committed not to turn against and fight each other but to protect each other in case of an attack by an

outsider. The enemy of one group becomes the enemy of all the committed groups. This was the case in the ethnic conflict between the Gbaya and the Fulani in 1992.

As stated earlier, during this field work, the National Bishop revealed that during that conflict, the Dii people who are in *Mang-Djala* partnership with the Gbaya were preparing to support the Gbaya. Fortunately, the Dii live 160 km from Meiganga where the clash was taking place, and the conflict lasted only one day. This shows to what extent *Mang-Djala* could be seen as a ‘stronghold’ in defence of its adherents because a *Mang-Djala* partnership is for better or for worse. It also illustrates that *Mang-Djala* was not a casual agreement but intended to last from one generation to the next for as long as older generations are able to impress the concept onto following generations. *Mang-Djala* evokes a vision of a world where people are interdependent; a vision of a world which refutes and transcends ethnic divisions and differences that could lead to misunderstandings or conflicts among its members. *Mang-Djala* creates a social entity where all its components share a common vision of life in a quest for the well-being of the whole community. This well-being is expressed in terms of “goods [which] include... things [such] as generosity, honesty, faithfulness, truthfulness, compassion, hospitality, happiness, that which brings peace, justice, respect [mutual protection] and so on”<sup>39</sup>.

### 3.4 The manifestation of *Mang-Djala*

By manifestation, the intention here is to illustrate how *Mang-Djala* is practically implemented in the daily life of its members. Firstly, it is worth mentioning that in the *Mang-Djala* tradition, everything is organised in such a way that each ethnic group is aware of its partner ethnic groups. This implies that no one can refer to another as *Mang-Djala* without being convinced that he or she is indeed linked by the *Mang-Djala* principles. For example the Mbum, the Voute, and the Mundang are bound by *Mang-Djala* and only within that particular group can their partnership play its role. But one within that particular group can still be in partnership with another group. For example, the Mbum ethnic group, in spite of being linked with the Mundang, and the Voute, is also allied to the Pere and the Chamba, whereas the others are not. All the participants unanimously agreed on this point.

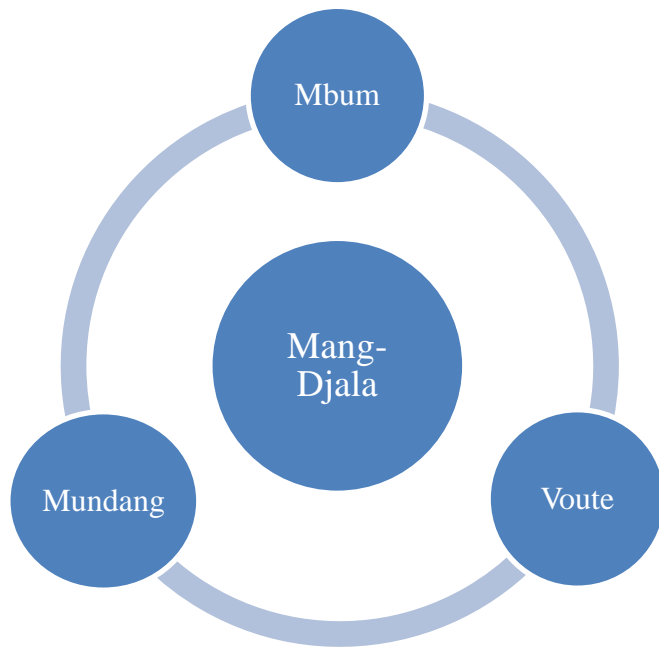
These relationships are demonstrated through the figures below.

#### Figure 1

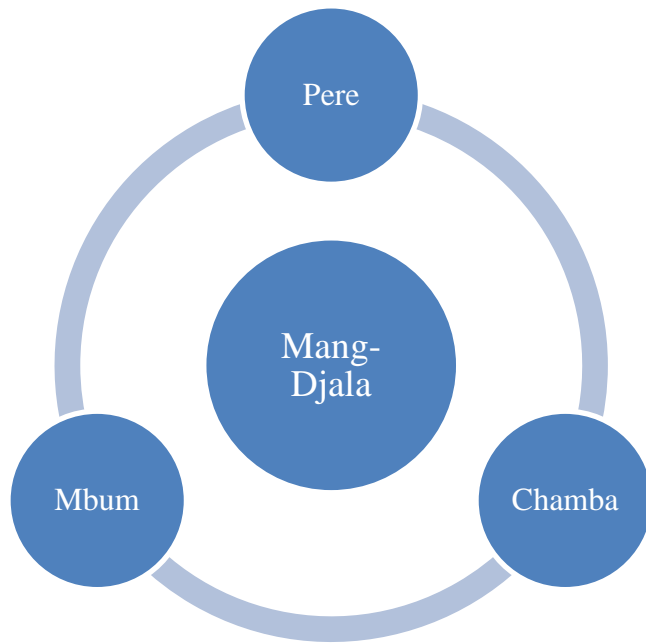
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<sup>39</sup> African Ethics. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-ethics/#SocNotIndEth>. Accessed 22/07/2011.





**Figure 2**



### 3.4.1 *Mang-Djala* as a way of living in a community

In its manifestation *Mang-Djala* becomes apparent in each aspect of its members' life. In their words, it plays a role in times of joy and sorrow, as the principles of 'walking together', 'companions on the road' 'and comrades at arms' express. For example, it has been a tradition that people prepare local beer to offer the teams that come to help on their farms. Whenever this is the case all *Mang-Djala* partners who are close by are duty-bound to mobilise as a *Mang-Djala* community to help their partner. Unless they are unavailable for some good reason, all partners are informed and gather on the farm concerned. The organiser should ensure that enough food and drink has been prepared because the *Mang-Djala* will ensure that the whole day is dedicated to work so as to give the individual farmer sufficient assistance to keep his farm productive. The greatest error an individual could commit would be to forget informing his or her *Mang-Djala* partners on time or to fail to inform one of them.

If this happens, the individual concerned is fined by preparing a special meal and buying a local beer to apologise to the partner. However, this is done in simplicity and friendship, confirming one's failure in not properly informing partners. By coming together (like the locusts swarm), partners are able to achieve good results on the farms. Providing mutual assistance in farming assures partners who are living in the same village of a rewarding agricultural season. In this way they are able to prevent their respective communities from hunger and famine.

In the case of death, a funeral cannot take place until the *Mang-Djala* partners living in the same area as the deceased, are gathered. According to tradition, the *Mang-Djala* partners are most affected by the death of one of their partners. Therefore, the family of the deceased person ensures that they have prepared all that is needed for the funeral. Once the *Mang-Djala* partners arrive they will summon them to pay (this is the expression usually employed), otherwise the burial will not take place. Once that which is required has been given, depending on the status of the dead person and the strength of his/her extended family, the *Mang-Djala* partners will mobilise to collect money and food for the funeral. In addition they will be active throughout the burial ceremony.

When the deceased is an elderly person they may imitate him/her: how he/she used to speak, joke, complain and walk, and so on, just to tease the family and create a joyful atmosphere so that people would laugh to mitigate their sorrow. Mourning thus becomes the concern of the

whole *Mang-Djala* community instead of the family alone who are comforted by being surrounded by their *Mang-Djala* fellows.

In the context of the *Mang-Djala* partnership, enthroning of a traditional ruler is unusual. The presence of the *Mang-Djala* partners renders the event particularly spectacular. Before the ceremony commences, one of the *Mang-Djala* partners might sit on the throne as if he was the one that is ruling. When the new legitimate ruler arrives for the official ceremony he must pay his dues as per tradition, to the *Mang-Djala* partners. Only then will they release the throne. As long as a *Mang-Djala* partner occupies the throne, he cannot be removed and this may then delay the ceremony for many hours without any unpleasant repercussions as no-one will object. The gesture implies that between the chieftaincy and other partners there is no submission or domination although the authority of the leader within his community is recognised. Prof Balcomb comments on this enthronement ceremony in the following way:

The entire enthronement ritual is re-enacted symbolically by one of the *Mang-Djala* partners and is imbued with a sense of satire and humour. It provides a subtle commentary on the notion of power, gently mocking the authority of the ruler and thus robbing him of any sense of absolute power, reinforcing the notion that power is something that is given by the people and can therefore be taken away by the same people, while at the same time acknowledging the necessity of the institutionalized office of power. This is a truly remarkable form of indigenous democracy at work in a context that is usually known for its absolutization of the power of the ultimate ruler – be it chief, king, president, or emperor – and whose person is usually surrounded by sycophantic admirers. (Personal conversation, Pietermaritzburg 14/08/2013)

It is worth mentioning that *Mang-Djala* is not involved in any religious practice, nor does it differentiate between its members on religious grounds. What matters is the ethnic group's affiliation to the same *Mang-Djala*. This implies that Christians, Muslims and believers in the traditional religion do not consider their faith as a barrier when it comes to the practice of *Mang-Djala*. The religious boundaries among the *Mang-Djala* partners have been overcome, which becomes apparent when all the partners are united during an important occasion. This is another example of how *Mang-Djala* relativizes a social force, this time religion that under normal circumstances could be used to legitimize an ethnic group.

### **3.4.2 *Mang-Djala* as a means of reconciliation**

Given that *Mang-Djala* is a community of human beings, there will obviously always be imperfections and limitations, since perfection is an exclusively divine competence.

Misunderstandings and conflict would still occur between the *Mang-Djala* partners irrespective of their commitment to the agreement that had been sealed between them. Viewed from this perspective, human associations involve the continuous mending and rebuilding of damaged relationships, an activity which *Mang-Djala* partners are actively engaged in.

Yet, the simple fact of having this agreement to strive for a peaceful life constitutes in itself an appropriate and solid foundation for reconciliation. The agreement, based as it is on the concept of living together (expressed in terms of ‘walking together’, etc.) is of such importance that it needs to be preserved at all costs in order to keep the partnership strong. This implies that all the partners are predisposed to transcend any kind of discord that could compromise their determination to achieve their goal. Any dissension arising between the *Mang-Djala* partners has to be resolved immediately. As observed below, sometimes this leads to a failure to take into consideration certain moral aspects that are necessary for personal responsibility.

Reverend Jean Baiguéle observes that the notion of reconciliation between the *Mang-Djala* partners sometimes leads to over-simplification, negating the core of the reconciliatory process. This, he feels, is one of the major weaknesses of the concept. His argument is that among *Mang-Djala* partners actual guilt is neglected for the sake of the partnership and this, according to him, benefits neither the guilty nor the offended party. This type of reconciliation could be compared with what Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace which he called “the deadly enemy of [the] Church” (1953: 37). And in this specific case, *Mang-Djala* could be seen as what is expressed in a popular saying among the Mbum: ‘covering poo with sand’ while sitting there; it will not help to get rid of the bad smell to which one is exposed. A person might cause great damage to another person, but because they are partners, he/she will not receive any punishment that might provide some form of reparation to his victim. In so doing, the elders who are responsible for reconciling those who are in conflict are not doing justice to the offended party. On the other hand, they are also not helping the guilty person to correct his/her behaviour in order to fit into a society which intention it is to create an ideal life where “all share successes and failure, abundance and scarcity” (Ng’weshemi 2002:72).

Usually when dissent lasts for some time, people in the surrounding areas who are not in a *Mang-Djala* partnership with those in conflict begin to laugh at them. According to the participants, conflicts between *Mang-Djala* partners are often kept hidden. The persons

concerned may, for example, be quickly reconciled so that nothing needs to be disclosed to others in the group. They unambiguously maintained that unresolved conflict between *Mang-Djala* partners is considered ridiculous. One is expected to try one's utmost to avoid conflict, but if this cannot be avoided, reconciliation is the only way of overcoming the risk of breaking the principles of living *Mang-Djala*. In confirmation of the resolution of the conflict, the opposed parties should share a common meal which, as Christensen observes, "serve[s] to confirm, re-create, and perpetuate life in a [*Mang-Djala*] community without which there is no life" (1990:17).

Furthermore, within the *Mang-Djala* partnership, it is forbidden to express one's anger violently. As Rev. Jean Baiguélé observed, in *Mang-Djala*, "that which can harm human life is banned" (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). In some ways the *Mang-Djala* partnership in a conflict situation takes on the appearance of a joking relationship; the partners are free to joke and to tease each other without fighting or causing harm to others. The difference, however, is that the significance of *Mang-Djala* is far removed from the simple fact of joking or teasing. Its deep concerns are for mutual preservation and protection of partners' lives for the sake of the community. That is why reconciliation occupies an important place within the community: any dissent arising within the group must be dealt with. The story told by Mrs. Atta Djoulde (Ngaoundéré 22/06/2011) well-sustained this argument. Although the concept has declined in strength and is now almost lost to those who appreciated its strong potential for implementing the concept of living together, there are still some traces of *Mang-Djala* between ethnic groups, although somewhat superficial and often more theoretical in nature. One might also find it is expressed mostly in light-hearted terms. Is this because of the lack of faithful oral transmission from one generation to the next, or is there any partnership criterion that has at some past moment in time not been properly applied? The next section describes how one becomes a *Mang-Djala* partner.

### **3.4.3 The criteria for having a *Mang-Djala* partner**

In relation to the process by which the concept of *Mang-Djala* has been kept alive over generations and how people were involved in it, it is important to emphasise that it is completely an indigenous tradition based on oral transmission. The only way of preserving *Mang-Djala* was through oral information, and once a generation fails to pass on this information, the risk of losing or weakening the tradition is obvious. This could explain the reason why this tradition is almost forgotten now, and even those who pretend to practice it are just toying with its more superficial potentialities.

The other objective of this section is to demonstrate how people have been integrated into partnership with others. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to various legends (see page 58 paragraph 2 and three and page 59 paragraph 1), the origin of *Mang-Djala* is found in alliances that were sealed between ethnic groups who had decided to come together into a fellowship community in order to face difficulties and challenges together. Hence the only way one could be a member of a specific *Mang-Djala*, is by inheriting membership from one's ethnic group. This means that in essence, a *Mang-Djala* partnership works in a closed circle and no outsider can join without consent. In other words, *Mang-Djala* has limitations in the sense that one has to belong to one of the ethnic groups that have originally sealed the alliance of togetherness with another ethnic group in order to be considered as a member or a partner. That is why the partnership exists between specific ethnic groups, from one generation to the next.

Also, one cannot leave one's own partnership group to join another group of *Mang-Djala*. Herein lies another weakness of the concept, which entails a degree of exclusivity. It is closed to outsiders, it allows no room for those who might like to join a group and follow *Mang-Djala* principles. If this should be applied in the context of the Church, the challenge would be, to what extent will it be possible to create a larger Christian *Mang-Djala* partnership to include the whole of the Christian church community? In other words, a new *Mang-Djala* partnership would have to be established and integrated into the Church's ministry whereby each individual and each ethnic group becomes a full member. This will constitute one of the main themes discussed in chapter seven, which will deal with theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala* and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation.

However, in order to perpetuate the practice, oral tradition has played an important role. Young people have been fully involved in its manifestation in various ways with the advantage that there was no gender discrimination (Bénoit Tindankir 20/04/2011 in Ngaoundéré). Adults had the duty of informing all young people about partner groups and about their responsibilities in this context. The above mentioned participant maintained that he was fortunate to acquire information from his late father who could at that time recall some aspects of the concept. Unfortunately, he himself could not transmit the information to his children because, according to him, in modern times children do not spend enough time with their parents. It has not been possible to communicate with them, because they had to go to school and when they came back, they were too busy with their books, their assignments and other concerns to spend time with their parents and listening to their stories.

Seemingly, as African oral traditions began to make place for modernism, there has not been enough time and space dedicated to the communication of customs and cultural legacies from the past. There has been no real transition between the two civilisations that allowed for the transmission of African wisdom and ethics to the younger generations. The consequence is that African countries, Cameroon included, have to struggle to rediscover their own culture in order to determine which traditional values are applicable in the global society. It is a difficult process, mainly as a result of the decline in oral transmission.

### 3.5 The efficacy of *Mang-Djala* in conflict resolution

This chapter now turns to the investigation of the efficiency of a *Mang-Djala* partnership in times of conflict. To what extent is it factual that *Mang-Djala* could play a conciliatory role? Is one to agree with Bah who has qualified the partnership's role as “[*l'un*] des mécanismes traditionnels de prévention et de résolution des conflits en Afrique noire” [one of the traditional mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts in black Africa’].

Mbonda, in his analysis of “*Crises politiques et refondation du lien social: quelques pistes philosophiques*” (2003:8), [Political crises and the overhaul of the social bond: some philosophical thoughts], has observed that in attempting to get out of a crisis, one would logically try to revive the lost agreement of partnership or set up new ones likely to prevent a crisis. Having said this, one is tempted to refer to some known African practices such as *inter alia*, the African palaver and joking relationships.

With regard to these assertions African indigenous practices and values are being rediscovered and implemented in the framework of conflict resolution. Various other African traditional social values are also being explored, to be integrated into an educational system. This is the case in Senegal<sup>40</sup> and elsewhere, where certain customs have been identified as traditional mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution. A compelling example is found in Rwanda where an indigenous concept called Gacaca, initially “used to resolve minor disputes, such as land/property disputes and petty thefts” (Sosnov 2008: 145). These were supported by UNESCO. Similarly, *Mang-Djala* could also be classified and valued as a traditional mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution.

With regard to the participants' views, *Mang-Djala* is purely an ingenious African invention aimed at helping people to achieve acceptable and peaceful cohabitation and to cope with

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<sup>40</sup> L'Intégration Des Valeurs Traditionnelles Dans L'Éducation.  
[http://www.ethiopiennes.refer.sn/spip.php?page=imprimer-article&id\\_article=897](http://www.ethiopiennes.refer.sn/spip.php?page=imprimer-article&id_article=897) Accessed 22/07/2011

tribal adversities believing that “life [is] a fascinating unity of dynamic diversity” (Malan 1997: 7). Subsequently it may be seen as a self-defense organization to resist and to challenge other external adversities that may arise. Such notions may have underpinned the principles of ‘walking together’, ‘companion on the road’, ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘war alliance’ that have been applied to the concept and that have provided a tangible framework for resolving conflicts.

Thus, the peace culture as established in the context of *Mang-Djala* has been a remarkable tool in preventing conflict and reconciling parties. During my field work I came across two remarkable stories of *Mang-Djala*, proving its relevance in managing conflict. The stories serve to illustrate the dynamism of the concept and the influence that it had on *Mang-Djala* partners. The first story came from an elderly woman who, during our conversation, affirmed that her generation could participate in manifestations of *Mang-Djala*, but that they were not curious enough to ask their parents about the origin and significance. What she remembered with clarity was the official *Mang-Djala* day which is celebrated once a year. During that day each *Mang-Djala* tries to catch his partner who then has to pay a form of a ‘tribute’. Although the payment itself was meaningless, the day was special because *Mang-Djala* partners were commemorating their common partnership bond. The day was called *haram*, but she could unfortunately not provide the etymological meaning of this word (Mrs. Atta Djoulde 22/06/2011 in Ngaoundéré).

During a focus group discussion with the partner groups of Dii, Gbaya and Laka, it turned out that in their view *haram* existed also in their partnership, but it is more organised in the sense that members in each ethnic group take turns in finding their *Mang-Djala* partner and are paid that ‘tribute’. The amount of money changing hands is not important; it depends on what one decides to offer. It may be a minimal amount, perhaps one cent, but the real satisfaction and joy lies in having met one’s *Mang-Djala* partner. Each group has a turn, which indicates that having to pay a tribute does not imply that one is inferior or subjected to others. On the contrary, all partners are equal. This indicates that, although the legend pertaining to the origin of *Mang-Djala* seems to differ from one ethnic group to another, there is the shared notion of *haram* which is common to the different groups (focus group discussion Dii, Gbaya, laka 19/06/2011 in Ngaoundéré).

With reference to the two stories of *Mang-Djala* successes, the first story was told by the elderly Atta Djoulde (Ngaoundéré 22/06/2011). When she was young, she had to accompany



her aunt to a village in the region of the Mberé people who were their *Mang-Djala* partners. Upon their arrival they met a man, also a visitor. They learnt that he was living in another village, neighbouring the one where his elder brother lived, and that he had a problem with his nephew, the brother's eldest son. "We were told that the problem was serious as the man was angry and would shorten his visit and go back". She said that her aunt advised her that they could not return home without addressing the problem because the Mberé people were their *Mang-Djala* partners. Therefore the on-going conflict was their immediate concern which they could not ignore. It had become their responsibility to follow the man to his village and mediate for his reconciliation with his nephew. They found the nephew and they then went together to meet his uncle.

"Upon our arrival we were welcomed and given a mat to sit on. After a while we raised the issue of our visit, telling him that the only reason of our presence was to take his nephew to him for reconciliation. Then he told us that, because of you, my *Mang-Djala* partners, I can not refuse your mediation, otherwise I will negate the reconciliation pact. He then agreed to forgive his nephew who was wrong. My aunt got up and bowed before him to plead for the nephew. The uncle also got up quickly and raised my aunt up.

Who has told you to bow before me to plead for forgiveness? [He said]. Among us this should never happen whatever the situation is. Now in doing this you have destroyed this village. You should never repeat this on any other occasion to your *Mang-Djala* people. For me, I know that the village is going to disperse, because the *Mang-Djala* has bowed down on its soil. We then returned back to the first village and continued to our own village. One year later, what the old man had predicted happened, because the village people had become dislocated, the villagers were scattered in other neighbouring villages and that one had become a ruin. If at that time I had known? [she added], I would have enquired to get a better understanding of *Mang-Djala*" (Atta Djoulde, Ngaoundéré 22/06/2011).

On the basis of this experience, the participant had come to the conclusion that *Mang-Djala* was a serious concept. This shows the effectiveness of the non-gender discrimination in *Mang-Djala* practice.

The second story was told during the first focus group discussion with the Mbum, Voute and Mundang (the Tikar did not attend) (Ngaoundéré 05/06/2011). The story was about a man who had laid a complaint against another man in court. On the day of the hearing, the accused man raised the issue of *Mang-Djala*, pleading to be allowed to resolve their dissent privately, because they were brothers bound by *Mang-Djala*, and it was through ignorance that the

problem had been taken to court. The request was granted, the conflict was resolved and the two men went home. One of the participants in the focus group added that, for those who know the importance of the practice, *Mang-Djala*, when correctly implemented, is the ultimate solution to conflict. Another participant suggested that since *Mang-Djala* can resolve this kind of conflict, it is worthy of being promoted.

These two stories illustrate the dynamics of *Mang-Djala* in the process of conflict resolution. Bah was correct in qualifying it as one of the traditional mechanisms of conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. It shows that people involved in *Mang-Djala* were caring, even if the concept of *Mang-Djala* possessed some weaknesses.

### **3.6 The limitations of *Mang-Djala* in conflict resolution**

As stated earlier, *Mang-Djala* operates as a kind of closed circle that does not provide room for other people who might want to join an existing partnership. The efficiency of *Mang-Djala* in resolving conflict is therefore restricted to those who already belong to that closed circle and for whom mediating in case of a conflict is a putative duty (see the first story, section 3.4). This implies that there can be mediation exclusively within that circle when there is a misunderstanding between *Mang-Djala* partners. Besides, none of the partners have the right to intervene or interfere in the name of his *Mang-Djala* partnership in any conflict situation outside the group. But he or she may act as an individual in the process of reconciling dissenting people outside the group, because the group as such is not concerned with any conflict resolution with regard to outsiders. In this regard matters may become somewhat unclear in a situation where a *Mang-Djala* partner is in conflict with an outsider – someone who does not belong to any *Mang-Djala* partnership. Apparently there is no alternative reconciliatory role which *Mang-Djala* could play in such case other than offering its partner protection against the outsider *Mang-Djala*. This attitude is likely to drive protected partners to worse moral behaviour, because, knowing that they are protected, it may encourage them to disrespect other people. As a human enterprise, *Mang-Djala*, despite its great ambition to create a propitious environment for a harmonious life, is limited and to some extent, weak.

Furthermore, the concept of *Mang-Djala* raises also the issues of xenophobia that the participants seemed to have overlooked. On page 73 paragraph 4, it has been argued that *Mang-Djala* may be seen as a self-defense organization to resist and to challenge other external adversities that may arise. However given that the concept is a closed circle that is

exclusively concerned with the ethnic groups that are in partnership, there is a permanent risk of misusing this self-defense organisation to discriminate, reject, dislike or mistrust those who belong to another circle or do not belong to any circle at all.

However, despite these limitations, *Mang-Djala* remains a powerful tool for peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution, mutual support and fellowship. It operates for the well-being of people who have agreed to build their lives based on the common good. How could the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon as a community of people, who theoretically are called to pursue the same goal, draw inspiration from this indigenous wisdom? How could the church find the necessary strength and strategy, to enhance unity among its congregants during their earthly pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God?

### **3.7 The possible use of *Mang-Djala* in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

Implementing *Mang-Djala* in the Church will not be an easy task, because the Church is a gathering of diverse people, to some of whom the concept of *Mang-Djala* is completely alien, especially those who are from the southern part of the country. On the other hand, many of the Church's members are aware of the practice and have one or two or even more ethnic groups as *Mang-Djala* partners.

Yet, during some events such as funerals, the enthronement of a traditional ruler and other important ceremonies, even within the ambits of the Church, *Mang-Djala* partners could apply their partnership. Two relevant and recent examples are provided in this respect:

The first is the funeral of the late Vice-President of the Church, Rev. Gabriel Mvodji, a Dii in Wack<sup>41</sup> in 1993. The late, then retired President of the Church, Reverend Paul Darman, a Gbaya, had to get into the tomb in the name of *Mang-Djala* partnership, and the Dii had to pay in yams – as they are known yam producers – in order for the funeral to take place. As usual in the *Mang-Djala* tradition, the Gbaya wanted to make sure that there would be enough yam food for everyone because the Dii are yam producers.

The second example occurred during the first election of the current Bishop in 2000, who is a Tikar, by the then President of the Church, whereby the Mbum group in Ngaoundéré, who is the Bishop's *Mang-Djala* partner, went to his place of residence and constructed a barrier of rope at the main entrance. He was detained at the barrier for almost thirty minutes, and the

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<sup>41</sup> A village situated about 50km from Ngaoundere on the road towards the north.

Tikar people had to pay in order to free the way for him so he could enter the house. This was on the one hand a remembrance of the solid solidarity of their common past history, and on the other hand to manifest their constant support to him during his leadership – the bond still exists, even in its fractured state, and has not been completely wiped out.

One of the participants, Mr Badomo, provided another and more recent example, that of the funeral of the Gbaya's King in Meiganga in 2006, where the Gbaya people had to pay a considerable amount of money and cassava flour (they are known as cassava producers), for the burial to take place (Ngaoundéré, 23/05/2011).

Given these examples, it is clear that although *Mang-Djala* is an indigenous and “secular” invention, it has in one way or another infiltrated the Church. However, the possibility of implementing *Mang-Djala* in the context of the Church remains questionable because of its complexity. When it comes to acting in the name of *Mang-Djala*, there is no religious difference. Anybody – whether Muslim, Christian, or of a traditional belief – is authorised to act in the name of *Mang-Djala*. The challenge would be how to contextualise the concept into the principle of the Christian fellowship of the Church and how to avoid confusion. It seems to be quite a complex task for a Christian Church to appropriate a concept which is secular and even “pagan”, and to make it relevant today. This challenge will require intense scrutiny.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter concludes with a discussion on the concept of *Mang-Djala*, its origins, growth, process and its possible implementation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. The focus was on the concept as a means of peaceful coexistence that has been established to overcome ethnic divisions and to enhance the concept of ‘living together’ among different ethnic groups. This ‘living together’ lifestyle is based on the existing network among ethnic groups and constitutes a ‘social belt of life’ for those who have agreed to be bound together as a team and to share their life in the community, based on the example of the locusts, so as to prevent incursions by enemies and to enjoy a peaceful coexistence.

According to the information gathered from the participants (e.g the retired President Rev. Pierre Amtse Songsare 19/09/2010 in Yaoundé, Mohamadou Mven 27/03/2011 in Mbella Assom), the origin of *Mang-Djala* dates back to the epoch of the ancestors, based on some legends of sealed blood alliances between some ethnic groups that were bound together. Those ethnic groups agreed to live together and, in this new environment, to interact on a wider scale and to share the principles of ‘walking together’, being ‘companions on the road’,

‘comrades at arms’, allies, or ‘alliance in case of war’ – this in the context of their quest for survival, while their initial community (family, tribe or ethnic group) is not dissolved. In this new togetherness, all the initial communities are more valued and transcend the boundaries of ethnicity.

Hence it is argued that in its execution the concept of *Mang-Djala* embodies a life governed by wisdoms such as “life in isolation is death” which is characteristic of the thinking of this ethnic group. Furthermore, the concept of *Mang-Djala* also fits into the framework of African socialism or African humanism, as respectively promoted by African thinkers such as Nyerere and Kaunda. In their approach to African ethics Nyerere and Kaunda have credited community as an important role in life. It is presumed that Malan, to whom reference was made earlier (see page 73 paragraph 4), might have considered the concept of *Mang-Djala* as an example of African wisdom, given its role in conflict resolution in spite of certain limitations. But the argument has gone further, by stating that *Mang-Djala* operates in a closed circle which does not allow those who do not belong to the same partnership to integrate into that community. There is, in other words, no space for outsiders to contribute their expertise, even in conflict situations. The reason for this is that members do not want to display their dissent outside their circle.

Before discussing the efficacy of *Mang-Djala* in conflict resolution, it was argued that *Mang-Djala* is such a powerful means of reconciliation that it sometimes becomes complicated and, for the sake of enhancing the principles of the *Mang-Djala* community, does not do justice to those who are offended. Such frustration of justice can only be prevented by avoiding conflicts occurring between the members in the partnerships. Furthermore, it is argued that, due to the lack of accurate transmission of the tradition by elders to later generations, the concept is declining, and there is an urgent need to reclaim it in order to perpetuate the legacy.

Finally, although it is possible to implement the concept of *Mang-Djala* in the Church, this will not be an easy task. It is possible because a number of ethnic groups within the Church are already linked in a *Mang-Djala* partnership and are familiar with the concept and thus could be spread throughout the Church. However, it may be a difficult process because other Christians within the Church are not aware of the *Mang-Djala* practice and may not be receptive to it. It must also be noted that in its original cultural context, the concept is practiced by non-Christians whose perceptions may not concur with those of Church

members. The challenge would lie in the manner in which the Church could implement or introduce the concept without creating confusion – and this is often a challenge associated with re-contextualisation.

The objective of this research is to explicate the cultural concept of *Mang-Djala* so that it may underpin the Christian Doctrine of reconciliation in order to bring fellowship, mutual understanding and forgiveness among Christians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. There could be no better way of doing this than by discussing ways in which to understand the Christian Doctrine of reconciliation, which will be dealt with in chapter seven of this study.

## Chapter Four: Presentation of collected data

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected in the course of the fieldwork. The research has been undertaken in three main areas – the role of ethnicity in Cameroonian society, the impact that ethnicity has had on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and the potentialities that exist for the application of *Mang-Djala* to the problem of ethnicity in the Church. Two kinds of research were undertaken – archival and empirical. Both of these were undertaken for investigation in the first two areas of research – ethnicity in Cameroon and its impact on the Church. Other sources of information are newspapers such as *Oeil du Sahel* and others, which do comment on events within the Church.

Yet, the method of data collection of this study has been qualitative based on in-depth, open-ended interviews, and focus group discussion. This process contributed meaningfully to gather information on tribalism in the Church and on the concept of *Mang-Djala* as stated earlier on the research methodology in section 1.6.2

In this regard, recorded interviews and three focus group discussions were conducted during the fieldwork with the leadership of the Church, the Church members and the traditional rulers. The interviews with the leadership which included the national Bishop, his Assistant, the national President of the Synod council, the retired national President<sup>42</sup> of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, the national Director of the Women for Christ Organisation and the National Director of the Youth Organisation. The second tier of leadership at regional level included five of the ten regional Bishops and some presidents of their regional council, nine clerics, fifteen lay members and two traditional rulers, regardless of their religious affiliation. All were questioned about the concept of *Mang-Djala*. Three main reasons motivated the choice of these groups. Firstly, the concept under investigation is intended to be implemented in the Church, therefore it is necessary to elicit the views of Christians and clergy. Secondly, it was important to meet with some *Mang-Djala* partners through three sessions of focus group discussions so as to assess the viability and the validity of the concept and the impact the concept had had on the people in the past. Thirdly, the traditional rulers' views were canvassed as the guardians of tradition to investigate the origin, the motive and the role that the concept had played in the past.

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<sup>42</sup> President was the former name of the national leader of the Church before changing to bishop.

Questions have addressed the three main areas of research mentioned earlier; notably the role of ethnicity in Cameroonian society, the impact that ethnicity has had on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, and the potentialities that exist for the application of *Mang-Djala* to the problem of ethnicity in the Church. These three areas have been subdivided into two categories: 1) the issue of ethnicity and 2) the issue of *Mang-Djala*. It is worth underlining before preceding that, in the context of this study, the word “tribalism” was used, being the familiar term used to speak about ethnocentrism.

The following questions were asked regarding ethnicity: How does tribalism affect the Church? What is your opinion on the multiple memoranda about tribalism in the Church? What actions have been undertaken to address the issue of tribalism in the Church? How do you think you can reconcile those who think they are victims of tribalism? What is your opinion on the responsibility of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) on the issue of tribalism in the Church?

During the interviews, the following questions were asked on the concept of *Mang-Djala*: What is the origin of the concept of *Mang-Djala* according to your understanding? What is your understanding of the concept of *Mang-Djala* in your ethnic group? What ethnic groups are joined by *Mang-Djala* in the Church? What are the ways in which ethnic disunity affects the *Mang-Djala* partners within the Church? What are the circumstances/events/contexts where *Mang-Djala* is believed to be applicable? How can that concept be expanded to other areas where there is disunity among ethnic groups? How Can *Mang-Djala* be used as a unifying factor in the Church? What is the negative aspect of *Mang-Djala*? How can Christians continue to uphold this practice?

#### **4.2 The Leadership of the Church**

This section will essentially survey the data collected from the leadership of the Church, these being the National Bishop, the Assistant to the National Bishop, the President of the Synod Council, the National Director of the Women’s for Christ Fellowship and the Director of the Christian Youth Movement. The main concerns in this section include firstly the issue of ethnicity in the Church, its consequences and the potential solutions to it, and secondly, the concept of *Mang-Djala*, its origin, significance, its operation and impact and its possible benefit to the Church.



#### 4.2.1 The Church leadership on ethnicity and tribalism in the Church

From the interviews conducted throughout the field work it has emerged that within the social environment where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is accomplishing its mission, there exists a multiplicity of ethnic groups. This has been unanimously confirmed by all the clergy participants. With regard to the number of existing ethnic groups within the Church, while some of the participants provided approximate figures, others did not attempt to do so because of the huge diversity of ethnic groups in Cameroon. The National Bishop critically described the context of the Church with regard to the multiplicity of ethnic groups as one of both richness and poverty.

Expanding on the above statement, he argued that diverse ethnicity represents richness because “when one considers all the ethnic diversity which comes together as a Christian community to pray and to praise God, one can view this as a revelation of God’s grace and magnitude” (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011). Ultimately this unity reveals the image of the universal Church. In this he joined Domo (cited earlier) who stated that, “*la multitude est une richesse en ce sens que chaque groupe apporte sa spécificité à l’ensemble*” [the multitude is a treasure in the sense that each group brings its specificity to the whole group]. (See page 27 paragraph 1)

However, the National Bishop referred to this situation as “poverty-stricken” (Ngaoundéré, 28/05/2011) where multiple ethnicities were characterised by a lack of unity and the promotion of exclusive ethnic boundaries and interests. This illustrates the extent to which the National Bishop is both aware of and concerned about the prevailing context of conflict in which the Church that he is overseeing is embroiled in.

Although he tried to reduce the seriousness of the situation elsewhere, the National Bishop mentioned an event which occurred during the 2007 General Synod when he was misconstrued during his opening speech, in which he complained against and denounced a number of deviations from correct practice due to tribalism in the Church. In particular, he criticised the notion of ethnic clashes occurring within the Church during elections. He considered this to be elitist and unbiblical, and made reference to the third article of the Church’s constitution, which stipulates:

*Est membre de L’EELC tout enfant, tout homme ou toute femme, baptise(e) au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit, qui accepte de se conformer aux Saintes Ecritures, aux dispositions*

*de la présente Constitution et a son règlement intérieur et qui participe a la vie d'une congrégation au sein de l'EELC (2007: 6).*

[Every child, every man and every woman who is baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and who accepts conform to the Holy Scriptures, the dispositions of the present constitution and to its rules and regulations and participate in the life of a congregation within the ELCC are recognised as members of the ELCC.]

Referring to the past missionary era, he demonstrated how the first missionaries had used people other than those among whom they had settled to preach the Gospel, because those people (the Bulu, the Bafia, the Bamileke and the Bamoun), were literate and could read the Bible whereas the indigenous ethnic groups were illiterate. This shows the extent to which literacy could efficiently contribute to the development of the society and singularly to that of the Church. The National Bishop also acknowledged the legitimacy of some of the multiple complaints regarding ethnicity through memoranda which raised pertinent issues to be addressed by the leadership of the Church in its work plan (Ngaoundéré 28/06/2011).

What is questioned in this situation is why – in spite of the awareness and even apparent criticism of such a prevailing environment of tension and suspicion between Christians of different ethnicities – the leadership fails to address it adequately. For example, the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship observed that there has never been a permanent agenda in place aimed at resolving or preventing this kind of situation which profoundly affects the Church. The National Bishop's Assistant, for his part, admitted that the various memoranda will only be seriously considered and appreciated when the signatories adopt an objective and unbiased attitude towards their analysis of the injustices to which they have been subjected (Ngaoundéré 18/06/2011). The question to be asked is: should the Church wait until the situation has become problematic before seeking solutions? Cameroon is ethnically a highly diversified country, a reality which definitely impacts on the Church members, and this fact should have alerted the Church leaders to consider the recurrent manifestations of tribalism in the Cameroonian society and the results thereof, as inevitably these manifestations will have similar repercussions on the Church.

The retired former President located the period of manifested tribalism within his successor's term, by claiming to have foreseen its emergence soon after he left office (Yaoundé 19/09/2010). He also claimed to have warned the incoming Church President at that time about the influence of "his" people who represent a force to be reckoned with in the Church

because of their large numbers, cautioning that this may lead to the rise of tribalism if not attended to. Subsequently, he mentioned his concern about the Gbaya people who have broken away from the Church, stating that if they are going to separate themselves along ethnic lines, he fears that their new Church may become an extension of their cultural association called MOINAM, aimed at working for the standard life of their people (Yaoundé 19/09/2010). This shows clearly that the former Church President too was aware of the fragility of the Church's unity due to the ethnic diversity of its members, but that he had not addressed this issue during his term. In fact, some have identified his twelve year term as having been marred by tribalism, although no open ethnic conflict occurred. As will become evident, he has been strongly criticised by one of the participants for giving most of the available scholarship opportunities to those who hail from his region, enabling these individuals to go for further theological training, which led him to boast that most of the pastors in his region are presidentially eligible.

#### **4.2.2 The views of the Church leadership on the consequences of tribalism within the Church**

It appears that the leadership of the Church has agreed that tribalism poses a serious threat to the Church as its leaders have identified certain events that have marred the honour of the Church. For example, in 1999 during the General Secretary's election there was a clear manifestation of tribalism between two major ethnic groups. The Synod had to temporarily suspend its deliberations in order to reduce the tensions before resuming the meeting. The current National Bishop who led that Synod observed that "throughout that period, one can see the attachment of the then President of the Church to his own ethnic group" (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011). He went further by stating that:

[T]wo years earlier, during the Church President's election in 1997 at Touboro, one of the favoured candidates lost the election for making a tough, although pertinent, statement that went against the interests of the ethnic group who was in support of him and who viewed the declaration as an attack against them. [Subsequently, he observed that] the perpetual ethnic conflict between the Dwayo and the Chamba in the north west region of the Church, and between the Gbaya and the Voute in the south west region of the Church, always make their coexistence difficult from within as well as from without the Church (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011).

This reveals the magnitude and the gravity of the conflict situation which the Church is currently undergoing.

Reacting along the same lines as those of the national leadership of the Church, the Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship pointed out that an ethnic group deliberately withdrew itself from a number of congregations to organise its own Sunday services. She believes that this happened not because those people do not understand French or Fulfulde or the other local languages that are being used for worship, but simply because they do not do not want to join other people for worship (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011).

She furthermore observed that members of particular tribes react strongly when they are not fully incorporated within the Church's responsibilities, even at the expense of other ethnic groups. "Given all these examples, it is clear that tribalism exists within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon", she concluded (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011)

However, since it is impossible for all the ethnic groups to have a member of their group holding a responsibility within the Church as their representatives, given the multiplicity of ethnic groups, at least worshipping in one's own language should constitute a real expression of one's membership in the Church, which may not forcibly mean ethnocentrism, but rather a sign of thanksgiving – the expression of gratitude of being part of God's creation and partaker of Christ's new creation. Unfortunately, the intensity of the conflict seems to have obscured this point.

#### **4.2.3 The understanding by the Church leadership of the influence of the missionaries**

It has been argued in chapter two that the missionaries' influence contributed significantly to the development of tribalism within the Church. This research supports this view despite some divergence of opinion. According to the National Bishop's analysis, the Sudan Mission encouraged the principle of 'tribalité', in which a tribe or an ethnic group has the right to be proud of its ethnic identity which is viewed as a gift from God. However, what has not been fully acknowledged is that the Sudan Mission seemed to imply that there are no important ethnic groups besides those they have evangelised. In this regard, he states that "The mission behaved as if the Christian faith was only intended for those people that the mission promoted" (Ngaoundéré 28/06/2011)

The Norwegian Missionary Societies (NMS), on the other hand, stressed the cohabitation of the different ethnic groups. That is why it selected neither the Dii, nor the Pere, nor the Tikar languages as those to be promoted in their work. When they failed to evangelise the Mbum, they opted for the widely spoken Fulfulde language for their work. The first NMS missionaries had learnt Mbum, but those who followed learnt Fulfulde. Thus, the NMS did

not show overt favouritism or exclusionism toward any tribe. As the result of this, the problem of tribalism was less acute in their field of mission than in the regions where the Sudan Mission served.

#### **4.2.4 The Church leadership on solving the problem of ethnic conflict within the Church**

Reconciling ethnic differences constitutes a serious challenge for the Church. As the Director of the Women's Fellowship Movement, *Femmes pour Christ* [Women for Christ<sup>43</sup>] observed thus far that the Church had had no real policy in place to deal with ethnicity. Consequently, the minorities tend to group together to oppose the majorities which brings about severe enmity (discussed in chapter two). That is why, as part of their strategy to mitigate tribalism among the women, *Femmes pour Christ* [Women for Christ Fellowship] has decided to use only French or Fulfulde during their ethnic heterogeneous Bible study and meetings (the Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship 14/04/2011). This does not mean however, that the Church is against the members' use of their own mother tongue, since the Bible is being translated into different languages through the Church's literacy and Bible translation programme.

All the participants acknowledged that the only tangible attempt the Church made to address the issue of ethnic conflict was through the project *Un dans le Monde* [One in the World] As discussed in chapter two, this project had been occasionally employed to address the ethnic conflicts of the 1990's and had for a short time been very effective.

Unfortunately it did not last long because it lacked financial support, but during the period when it was operational, there was a marked lull in hostilities. As is often the case, people are sometimes unaware that they have valid tools such as *Mang-Djala* that could be explored for dealing with such crises. Hence the argument of this dissertation, that the concept of *Mang-Djala* is one such tool that could be employed with regard to the crisis of tribalism and ethnic conflict.

#### **4.2.5 The Church leadership on the concept of *Mang-Djala***

To what extent is the leadership of the Church aware of the *Mang-Djala* concept? While the retired President of the Church gave his version of the origins of *Mang-Djala*, which links to those mentioned in chapter three, no clear explanation was forthcoming from the other participants. However, The National Bishop hinted at the concept by saying that he is in a

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<sup>43</sup> 'Women for Christ' is the literal translation of the French '*Femmes pour Christ*', to which I refer sometimes as women fellowship organisation. The two expressions are sometimes used interchangeably

*Mang-Djala* partnership with the Voute and that the starting point of this partnership was an alliance between the Voute and the Tikar with certain fixed conditions. These conditions were not documented because the oral tradition still prevails in the region (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011). With regard to the practice of this partnership, the same views were raised as those that are discussed at length in chapter three.

A point worth mentioning was raised by the retired President, who narrated an event that took place in Ngaoundéré to show that the concept links people beyond the borders of countries (and hence beyond internal ethnic borders). The event entailed a group of Mbum people from the Republic of Central Africa residing in Ngaoundéré who were collecting money to contribute to a Cameroonian Voute's funeral. In his concluding remarks the former President stated that the main purpose of the concept is to progress together in everyday life. He then linked it to Christian life as a metaphor by saying that Christians are joined in pilgrimage in the world and are called to come together and to sustain one another while moving towards their ultimate goal, which is the Kingdom of God. Significantly, he mentioned that those people tied by *Mang-Djala* were "pagan", because the first missionary, Alfred Saker, only arrived in Douala in 1845 (Yaoundé 19/09/2011).

This event has been repeatedly mentioned by many of the participants, although in slightly different versions. What is interesting in the retired President's version is his reiteration of the words of the treaty that were pronounced during the sealing of the covenant. The words are clearly threatening in the event of a betrayal of the treaty by any of the parties involved in the covenant: Curses, sickness and death were invoked against the one who sheds his partner's blood or betrays this alliance. As a result, whenever one of the partners has to make use of his knife, he has to inform his fellow members, saying: "I am using my knife not to harm anyone, but for a safe and necessary purpose". The former Church President added that *Mang-Djala* partners always have to obtain permission from one another before taking up a harmful object (Yaoundé 19/09/2011).

By way of an analogy, the former President of the Church illustrated the concept of *Mang-Djala* by comparing it with reeds whose roots are so strongly intertwined that these cannot be uprooted by wind, and which are able to grow again even if they are damaged by fire, because their roots preserve the reeds, keeping them alive and together (Yaoundé 19/09/2011). In other words, he continued, joining people together strengthens the bond between them and they are able to resist any calamity or misfortune. This emphasises the

characteristic of togetherness at all costs, which is fundamental to the *Mang-Djala* concept. Accordingly, the contribution of the National Director of Women for Christ Fellowship is also noteworthy. For her, *Mang-Djala* is a concept which binds ethnic groups together and promotes love and enthusiasm for a collective goal between them (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011).

#### **4.2.6 The articulation of the importance of the concept of *Mang-Djala* by the Church leadership**

The way these participants discoursed on the importance of the *Mang-Djala* concept deserves particular attention. In this regard, the National Bishop stated: “if the concept is theologically sound it can facilitate the unity of the Church which we are seeking”. For him, *Mang-Djala* is a social concept whereas the unity we are seeking is a God-given unity. Subsequently, he stated that: “Something which is below could move to encounter that which is above, to allow consolidating the unity in such a way as we want.” Furthermore, he declared that if the ideas within the concept of *Mang-Djala* are theologically well-utilised, they will be able to enlighten the concept of Christian unity and reinforce that unity. He also argued that if the Dii, the Gbaya, the Mbum, the Tikar, the Voute, the Bamoun, the Mambila... in fact, all the members of the Church come together around this concept, this will constitute a pillar of unity and any attempt to create division will be easily overcome (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011). The following “pagan” narrative by the Bishop was used to elucidate the extent to which the concept has brought people to mutual protection, as he felt that this would serve to illustrate the issue under discussion.

There was a great Tikar trader living among the Voute who worked so much for the development of the community in Yoko. It happened that the man fell ill. According to the sorcerer, it was the Etong people who had come from the south to take the soul of the Tikar. The Voute then decided to follow the route along which the Etong were taking the soul of the Tikar. They eventually intercepted the cortege of the Etong on the peak of a mountain situated between Yoko and Ntui. There, the Voute fought a battle with the Etong, aiming at liberating the soul of the Tikar who was their *Mang-Djala* partner. Eventually, the Voute defeated the Etong and brought back the soul of the Tikar, who was healed. It has to be mentioned that all of this had taken place in the spiritual world (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011).

Those who are involved in the practice of *Mang-Djala* have the responsibility to protect one another. In his concluding remarks the National Bishop suggested that a study of *Mang-Djala* should be pursued in the interest of the communities.

This narrative reveals the extent to which *Mang-Djala* partners are committed to sustain and protect each other, even within the spiritual world. *Mang-Djala* is not only concerned with the physical aspect of its members' lives or their well-being, but there is also a spiritual constraint that is part of the alliance's disposition. This spiritual realm is also the context of the work of the Church in Christian life, which is not only about physical concerns, but is more concerned with spiritual battles. As stated by the Apostle Paul: "For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic power of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). From the Church's perspective, mutual spiritual care is thus vital to keep people of a given community moving forward in unison towards God, same it is with *Mang-Djala* in its traditional "pagan" context.

Reflecting on this same line of thought, the National Bishop's Assistant acknowledged that *Mang-Djala* is very interesting in the sense that it facilitates people to work together to find solutions to problems that seem very complex and its emphasis on mutual support. He found it amazing to see two groups of people bound by a pact that had been sealed in the distant past by their ancestors, which is still able to empower people to live together in harmony and mutual benefit. He subsequently mentioned the joking aspect, which according to him is a continual process of rebuilding and reinforcing human relationship in this specific context (Ngaoundéré 18/06/2011). In short, humour is the symbol and consolidating factor of friendship and harmony because people who cannot converse or joke together are likely to be suspicious of one another, hesitant in accepting each other, or in opening themselves up to each other.

Both the Bishop's Assistant and the National Director of Women for Christ Fellowship are of the view that *Mang-Djala* is capable of changing a negative atmosphere and disposition, and transforming the ambiance of anger and sorrow into that of joy and serenity.

Approaching the issue of the on-going conflict within the Church, the National Director of Women for Christ Fellowship believed that if the Dii and the Laka had addressed the Gbaya people using the *Mang-Djala* language which is profound and meaningful to all of them, the Church would have already achieved a peaceful solution to the conflict (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011). Hence, *Mang-Djala* would have represented an easy progression towards complete reconciliation.



#### **4.2.7 The current role of *Mang-Djala*, according to the Church leadership**

The fact that no-one has thought of using *Mang-Djala* in a systematic way in the current situation of ethnic conflict indicates that the practice is becoming increasingly obsolete. The National Bishop's Assistant, was correct in his observation that, "Sometimes when solving problems, the process could last a long time until someone remembers that the parties in conflict are *Mang-Djala* partners and suddenly, the conflict would come to an end. In the case of conflict in the Church, the parties could consider the concept as the starting point for reconciliation; that alone would have been half of the solution" (Ngaoundéré 18/06/2011). The National Director of Women for Christ Fellowship also observed that: "If the Dii and Laka had approached their *Mang-Djala*, in the *Mang-Djala* language that is very deep, we would already have reached a peaceful solution to the conflict. What is in culture is not always bad. We can take what is in the culture, such as this concept and put it in favour of the Church, because the concept of *Mang-Djala* transmits love, peace, joy and everything that can strengthen hospitality and friendship (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011). Meanwhile, the National Bishop, Reverend Thomas Nyiwe states: "If the Mbum, the Tikar, the Voute and the Bamoun get together, the Tikar and Mambila come together around this concept, this would be to our great benefit" (Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011).

#### **4.2.8 The Church leadership's views on the weakness of the concept of *Mang-Djala***

Whilst *Mang-Djala* functioned successfully while people were living in their traditional religious context, the context of the Church is more complex and includes ethnic groups for whom the concept is not familiar, a situation which may not make the Church environment favourable to its implementation. This renders the *Mang-Djala* concept weak in the sense that there are many ethnic groups within the Church for whom the concept has no significance, although it is more readily applicable to those who are already bound together in a partnership. In this regard the National Bishop Assistant argues that "there are many ethnic groups in the Church and, when just a couple of groups are involved in *Mang-Djala* alliances, those who are not will feel left out" (Ngaoundéré 18/06/2011). Therefore to introduce it into the Church without a clear explanation may bring about confusion or prejudice. However, if one considers an assumption according to which all that is beneficial to a community may easily attract the sympathy of large number of people, one can also assume that *Mang-Djala* may receive the favourable attention of the community among which are those who are not familiar with, in view of its implementation within the Church.

The challenge of this thesis lies in its attempt to address the research question: In view of the challenges presented by the ethnic diversity of Cameroonian society, could the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* act as a reconciling or unifying factor for the Church? It is at this level that this study must propose a tangible response as the challenge of contextualising this concept for the Church rests on this core question. This question will be addressed in chapter seven where the relevance and the applicability of the concept in the Church will be discussed and its theological reflection and the Christian doctrine of reconciliation will be presented.

### **4.3 The regional level of the Church: Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and the clergy.**

After analysing and presenting the responses of the first groups of participants, the responses of the second group, which is situated at regional level, will now be analysed. This includes five regional Bishops, the Presidents of their Councils and nine members of the clergy.

#### **4.3.1 Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and the clergy on ethnicity**

At regional level, the common view held on ethnicity is that, given the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon (more than 250 different ethnic groups), it is difficult to provide a precise figure on the ethnic groups represented in the Church or even to estimate what that figure might be. Reverend Adolphe Tellessam, the Bishop of the northern region and Reverend Mathieu Djiedere stated that in view of the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Cameroon, the church's membership includes all ethnic groups (Garoua 07/05/2011 and Douala 25/06/2011).

On the grounds of this ethnic diversity one of the regional Bishops, Reverend Jean Baigule, argued that tribalism is "lived" within the structure of the country. This is experienced in the Cameroonian society in general, where people are jostling for position in public services and promoting their ethnic group to the detriment of others. He states that the system itself has favoured tribalism in the sense that each ministry is allocated to a specific administrative region of the country, which in turn belongs to a specific ethnic population. High-ranking appointments are therefore seen as a reward to an ethnic group by the President of the country. The various administrative services are thus shared between the existing influential ethnic groups for a political purpose, in the knowledge that these groups can produce a great number of voters. Hence, for this regional Bishop, it is the ethnic group's interest which is upheld to the detriment of the national interest (Yaoundé 24/06/2011).

The observation made is that the Church, being part of Cameroonian society, is undergoing the same consequences of this ethnic favouritism, which, however, should not be an excuse for the Church to justify its failure in dealing with ethnic injustice. Reverend Jean Baiguele also added that this failure has caused much confusion in terms of Christian identity and its role within the society, in the sense that this identity is supposedly characterised by love, healing, compassion and forgiveness, an observation his colleagues concurred with (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). Building on this argument, Reverend Hamidou Hayatou, Bishop of the north-west Church region deplored the prevailing ethnic conflict between the Chamba and the Dowayo which had caused the death of the then National Vice-President of the Church in 1993 when he attempted to reconcile the two conflicting ethnic groups in the Church in Poli (Mbé 06/11/2011).

All the participants agreed that tribalism is a form of discrimination which systematically rejects others. In the context of the Church, it constitutes the rejection of the non-indigenous by the autochthones who think that those who have just joined the Church's community (i.e. new members from other ethnic groups) are benefiting to the detriment of the established Church members, hence the term 'foreigners' or 'minorities' (as discussed in chapter two). Reverend Mathieu Djidere lamented the use of this terminology and labelled it as being evil because it relegates some of the Christians to pseudo members of the Christian community (Douala 25/06/2011).

Tribalism is also linked to power and its abuse, something the retired President Reverend Pierre Songsare Amsé was accused of, as noted above, in view of his tribal policy of training pastors from his region and boasting that these pastors were potential future Presidents of the Church. Another view is that tribalism in the Church constitutes a problem by creating boundaries, as it is manifested in the posting of pastors in their home regions only. For many, the terms 'foreigners', 'minorities' and 'majorities' are at the root of this ongoing conflict because people are fighting for power and domination and are viewed as being eager to usurp everything in order to dominate others. As Reverend Dieudonné Ousmanou put it, there are people who think they are the Levites of the Church (Ngaoundéré 06/05/2011). Such an assertion is possibly based on memoranda in which the signatories claimed ownership of the Church, as discussed in chapter two.

Reverend Adolphe Telessam observed that tribalism in the church is a longstanding issue. He recalled an event which took place in 1977 in a village called Lokoti where, during a general

synod, an ethnic group threatened to leave the meeting if its candidate were not elected. Furthermore, between 1997 and 2000, he mentioned that there were many agitations from different ethnic groups, almost leading to a division in the Church in 1999, and that a similar strife characterises the present situation too (Garoua 07/05/2011). It seems thus that this on-going conflict is the outcome of a lengthy process of mounting enmity.

In general, the shared point of view of most of the participants is that, as is the situation within the political system, it is this struggle for power that has led to the rise of tribalism within the Church and given rise to the notions ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ ethnic groups and especially ‘foreigners’ to qualify those ethnic groups that are said not to have been among the first missionaries’ initial targets.

#### **4.3.2 The role of the missionaries in tribalism according to the regional Bishops, Presidents of regional Councils and the clergy**

Although the above-mentioned terms are linked to the first missionary settlements, and were employed to state whether one is to be a legitimised member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church or not, the views of the regional Bishops, Councils and clergy regarding their influence on the development of tribalism within the Church, were divergent. Some of the participants believe that the missionaries have profoundly influenced the development of tribalism. They pointed to the fact that the American missionaries led the Gbaya ethnic group to believe that they are the Church. The Norwegian missionaries, although they have worked with a number of ethnic groups, have a penchant for favouring the Dii people to the detriment of other ethnic groups. This forms part of the paternalism discussed in chapter two. The various views of the participants reflect what has been discussed in chapter two.

The Regional Bishop Hamidou Hayatou, Reverend Joseph Bue and Reverend Dieudonné Ousmanou argue that, the missionaries are falsely accused of contributing to the development of tribalism in the Church. They maintain that the two missions had at heart the aim to create a united Church. They accused the indigenous ethnic groups of failing to perceive the missionaries’ strategies of unifying the church and whom they feel were in fact ultimately responsible for the tribalist policy of exclusion (Mbe 06/11/2010, Ngaoubela 07/05/2011 and Ngaoundéré 06/05/2011).

Viewed from this perspective, despite tribalism which is clearly evident in the Church today, the presence of the two missions was a blessing because the fundamental reason for their existence was to evangelise, but the local people were not capable of carrying this legacy

forward. Reverend Jean Jules Djingue of Ntui, Reverend Paul Tshell of Songkolong and two of the Presidents of the Regional Council members (Andre Hohi and Luc Adamou) were in support of the above point of view and argued that the missionaries had not foreseen the possibility of such conflicts and therefore were unable to address an issue which had not yet materialised; Christian teaching, with regard to the ethnic problem, was therefore not their priority and was not an issue at that time (06/05/2011, 23/04/2011, 26/01/2012).

However, viewed from this perspective, it would appear that the missionaries were guilty of contributing to the problem of tribalism. Regional Bishop Samuel Nygandji Ndi from the west region of the church viewed matters in the same way as his colleagues. According to him, it has always been difficult for an American missionary to be posted to the Norwegian field of mission and vice versa. For example, he mentioned that in 1991 an American medical doctor refused to be posted to Ngaoubela hospital which falls within the Norwegian field of mission. His refusal may have had a different motive, but due to the apprehension that people were having vis-a-vis the two missions, this refusal was seen as a mission's field of work issue. Bishop Samuel Nygandji believed that one should not advocate for the innocence of the missionaries with regard to sustaining tribalism in the Church, because each mission is always only concerned with people from its field of mission. This possessive attitude towards their own field of mission has contributed enormously to divisions within the Church (Mbe 06/11/2010).

While the missionaries may have contributed to the development of tribalism within the Church, the other participants feel that it is mainly the Cameroonian context itself that has favoured the development of this social problem, because the political leaders have manipulated tribalism in order to maintain their rule and to control the delivery of services and resources, and thus the whole of the Cameroonian society is contaminated, Christian communities included.

#### **4.3.3 Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and clergy on the concept of *Mang-Djala***

The understanding of *Mang-Djala* by the regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and clergy does not differ much from that of the national leadership level. However, it is necessary to provide more details so as to further elucidate how it was understood. With reference to the use of sharp objects while the partners are together, one of the participants, the retired President, states that an individual should keep his *Mang-Djala* partner informed whenever he intends to make use of such an object (Yaoundé 19/09/2010). The regional

Bishop, Reverend Jean Baiguele asserted that, given the strong level of confidence in the *Mang-Djala* partnership, one can chat, joke, or play whilst holding a sharp object such as a spear or a knife, without this eliciting fear (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). Are these two contrasting views? Otherwise, what do they mean? The operative word here is trust, which is understood as an extreme sense of reliability between the partners. The way it is used can be qualified as a blind trust because it is believed that one never expects a malevolent attitude from one's partner. To ensure that one's partner is kept informed about the use of any harmful object is to continuously reiterate the non-violent status which underlies the partnership relationship through the concept of *Mang-Djala* to which all the participants refer. According to them, this has become a formal process of behaving with restraint towards one another with regard to the use of harmful objects. It is also believed that a *Mang-Djala* partner should never shed his partner's blood. Therefore there is no need for one to be afraid of a partner who has a sharp object in his hands (the retired President Yaoundé 19/09/2010). However, there is a popular saying in Cameroon that confidence does not exclude the need for caution; mistakes can and do happen, and it cannot be excluded that someone may intentionally decide to harm the partner due to the naïve trust of the latter. The very fact that the issue is raised about the existence of sharp objects when people are communicating with each other may indicate that there is very little trust and the mutual agreement between them is very superficial. Otherwise it would not even be an issue. The excessive concern for sharp objects when partners are around each other and the need for demonstrating that you do not intend to use them to harm someone also suggests that one cannot take for granted the *Mang-Djala* partnership, that underlying enmities do exist, but that because of the partnership you have to be extra sensitive to demonstrate a peaceful attitude.

The issue of cheap reconciliation was discussed in chapter three and in this regard, one partner could be unhappy with the process of such a reconciliation, which has perhaps not achieved justice, and he may then decide to take revenge on his partner for this, or to use this as a pretext to achieve his own goals. One could also argue that if the concept has provided for a reconciliation process of any kind, it means there is no longer absolute trust between the partners, as reconciliation presupposes the existence of conflict.

Although *Mang-Djala* is viewed as the pillar of unity, encounters and reconciliation between people (Dieudonné Debah: Ngaoundéré 24/01/2012), the confidence mentioned by the regional leaders is likely to undermine that goal. *Mang-Djala* is intended to eradicate all unease from the intertwined roots of the partners in the relationship, that is, to banish that

which is prejudicial to human life, such as ethnic conflict, by promoting friendship and harmony. However, the absolute trust on which this depends is perhaps overly simplistic, but the majority of the regional participants have a deep faith in the concept, to the extent that they see it as the outcome of divine inspiration. Mr David Aoudi, the President of the Church council summarised this by stating that: “Culturally, *Mang-Djala* allowed having the same culture that cemented different ethnic groups that were living together. *Mang-Djala* is the fact of becoming as many as the locusts” (Yaoundé 30/01/2012).

#### **4.3.4 Theological perspective on *Mang-Djala* from Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and the clergy**

In contemplating the *Mang-Djala* concept, Bishop Jean Baiguele argued that because Christ died for all people, He should be understood as the manifestation of *Mang-Djala*, uniting people within the Church. In this way ethnic divisions that cause rivalries and conflicts may be overcome (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). According to Reverend Dieudonné Ousmanou, *Mang-Djala* is a God-given revelation (Ngaoundéré 05/06/2011). However, as noted previously, the applicability of the concept in a multi-ethnic Church could be problematic, an issue which will be re-examined in chapters six and seven. Reverend Adolphe Tellessam, regional Bishop of the northern region and Reverend Joseph Bue agreed that, if the concept is studied properly and appropriated in the Church, it will constitute a powerful means of restoring unity and peace (Garoua 24/06/2011 and Ngaoubela 07/05/2011). Reverend Jean Jules Djingue also remarked that, as the concept of *Mang-Djala* advocates mutual support, it reflects Galatians 6 which says: “Bear one another’s burden” (Ntui 06/05/2011). A far more powerful text is to be found in Galatians which asserts that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3: 28 NRSV). These texts resonate with the theme of *Mang-Djala* and Rev. Jean Jules Djingue (Ntui 06/05/2011), with all the other informants, agrees that in *Mang-Djala* there is no distinction based on gender, class, or religion. He suggested that as the *Mang-Djala* concept is familiar to many, it is likely to bring all into fellowship and can prevent a spirit of division. In this regard, Reverend Paul Tshell lamented the fact that although the concept is known to many Christians, it has thus far been implemented only outside the context of the Church (Songkolong 06/05/2011).

Reverend Pierre Ngnitchefe mentioned that in earlier times, in practice, the concept of *Mang-Djala* represented a moment of celebration between the partners after a successful harvest or hunt. The partners of those doing the harvesting or hunting were specially invited to attend

the celebration and were treated as honoured guests. Even during ordinary meals, the partner always received the best part of the meat, for example the gizzard of a chicken. This indicates that the *Mang-Djala* partner should always be honoured and treated with respect when he is in the company of his peers (Yaoundé 24/06/2011).

Reverend Pierre Ngnitchefe stated that since Christians have a good understanding of the notion of alliance, it should not be difficult for the Church to appropriate the concept of *Mang-Djala* within its framework (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). However, he seems to ignore the fact that many ethnic groups within the Church are not aware of *Mang-Djala*. Therefore, to simply apply the concept will constitute another form of exclusion because those people who are not familiar with the concept will feel excluded from the community of the Church.

For some participants, one being Reverend Mathieu Djidere, *Mang-Djala* falls outside the context of Christian ethics, because to his knowledge it only operates during funerals. This remark displayed the non-transference of the concept to new generations (Douala 25/06/2011). Reverend Mathieu Djidéré himself is from the Dii ethnic group, which is in *Mang-Djala* partnership with the Gbaya and the Laka. These groups are among those who continue to preserve this relationship, though more in theory than in practice. Had the foundations of the concept been properly communicated, Reverend Mathieu Djidéré would have better understood its relevance.

Contrary to Reverend Mathieu Djidéré, Reverend Adolphe Telessam (Garoua 24/06/2011) revealed a sound knowledge of the concept as he was able to observe its negative aspect, which to him constitutes its weakness. He pointed out that, when a serious contention arises between two *Mang-Djala* partners, instead of managing the problem appropriately, it is trivialised by treating the concept too simplistically (Garoua 24/06/2011), which was qualified in chapter three as cheap reconciliation. This cheap reconciliation cannot achieve the goal of a *Mang-Djala* community, namely the well-being of the individuals for the benefit of the whole community.

Furthermore, Reverend Adolphe Telessam observed that, though the concept is an important tool in unifying people, its shortcoming is that two *Mang-Djala* partners should not contradict each other. Whatever the view of one partner, the other must adhere to it in the name of *Mang-Djala* (Garoua 24/06/2011). Reverend Adolphe Telessam is concerned about the use of *Mang-Djala* in the Church, an observation which should be taken into thoughtful consideration.



#### **4.3.5 The views of Regional Bishops, Presidents of Regional Councils and clergy on solving the ethnic problem within the Church**

*Mang-Djala* was unanimously accepted by my informants as a tool that can be positively utilised by the Church to resolve ethnic tensions, but many participants suggested that the first step in this regard is to pray with fervour and allow God to act freely to re-establish peace and unity in His time. Secondly, participants emphasised the need to banish the use of expressions such as ‘majority’, ‘minority’ or ‘foreigner’ and to rather consider everyone as Christians, without focussing on ethnicity or the background of individuals.

Regarding the issue of power, the Church should adopt a new way of electing its leadership in a rotatory manner, so as to allow each region to participate in the leadership of the Church in turn (Reverend Adolphe Telessam 07/05/2011). In addition, the Church should commence with a new policy of inter-regional posting of its pastors. (Reverend Samuel Nygandji and Reverend Paul Tshell: 06/11/2010 and 06/05/2011). The Church should also insist on the word of the Gospel which declares that there is no difference in Christ and that all are one, and should stress the principle of Christian unity which is the core of the Gospel. After all, the solution to the ethnic problem cannot go beyond the faith Christians are confessing; the faith which states that the blood of Christ, which unites Christians, is far stronger than ethnic bonds.

#### **4.4 Chairpersons of local congregations and lay members**

The chairpersons of local congregations and lay members did not discuss ethnic issues. Therefore the focus of this section concerns the concept of *Mang-Djala* and its relevance for the benefit of the Church. This will consist of presenting their understanding of the concept whilst avoiding a repetition of what has been stated above as far as possible.

One of the participants, Bénédict Tindankir, admitted to being taught about the origins of *Mang-Djala* by his late father (Ngaoundéré 20/04/2011). For him also, the practice originated in partners signing a blood alliance, which is an indissoluble bond for the purpose of making peace. Henceforth, instead of being enemies, they are friends, and they have the duty to convey this pact to the generations to come, so that it should not be forgotten. One of the clauses of this pact stipulates that none should cross his partner’s blood, in other words, that no fighting should occur between the partners; whoever breaks this agreement would face misfortune. Another participant described *Mang-Djala* as a pact of “non-treason” in the sense that, if required, the partners in the pact must face the consequences of being unfaithful to the pact, for the sake of the community (the retired President: Yaoundé 19/09/2010).

If one considers that the transmission of this tradition forms part of the agreement to which the parties are assigned, why is it that the understanding and implementation of this practice has declined, to the extent that for many of the current generation, it has lost its meaning. Is this due to the colonial and early missionary policy of *tabula rasa* [wiping the slate clean] to which all African customs and traditions had been subjected? Has this actively contributed to the non-transmission of this wisdom? Or, have the people themselves somehow been careless in fulfilling their duty, leading to the proliferation of conflicts?

Among the aspects mentioned by the chairpersons of local congregations and lay persons were those of meeting one another, spending time with each other, and sharing life together, which happens in the course of daily life. These times are termed “joking times” because during these periods the partners have fun together, and they may not become angry with one another (Jean Paul Mgbatoussong: Ngambé Tikar 03/12/2011, André Guiondong: Ngambé Tikar 03/12/2011 André Hohi: Ngaoundéré 26/01/2012). However, special events such as the enthroning of a traditional ruler or the burial ceremony of an individual may cause people to behave inappropriately. It is at this level of interaction where the joking aspect of the concept lies. These aspects were heavily stressed by all the participants because these keep the *Mang-Djala* concept alive, as addressed in chapter three. By way of illustration, two narratives concerning funerals were mentioned by the participants.

The first narrative, was related Mr Luc Adamou in 1992 The second Vice-President of the Church, who was a Dii, passed away. During his burial, the late retired President of the Church Reverend Paul Darman (a Gbaya), old as he was, went down into the grave and lay in it because the Dii people had not given any provisions or money to organise the burial. He was implying that he preferred to hand himself over as a member of the Dii’s *Mang-Djala* partner (a Gbaya) to be buried with their deceased partner, if the Dii failed to raise funds and provisions to organise his funeral. The Dii had to collect 200.000 Fcfa for him to climb out of the grave (Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011).

The second narrative is told by Mr André Dogo Badomo Béloko and concerns the funeral of the Lamido of Meiganga. During his burial, the same scenario as that described above took place, but this time the Dii and the Laka members both entered the grave. The Gbaya had to collect up to 720.000 Fcfa for their *Mang-Djala* partners to release the grave. The entire occasion then becomes so entertaining that people sometimes forget the context of sorrow and distress in which they find themselves at a funeral. This creates an atmosphere which

makes people laugh (Ngaoundéré 23/05/2011). Reverend Baiguele called it “the moral healing or therapeutic function of the concept” because it liberates people from their pain and brings consolation to the grief-stricken heart (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). But mostly, the funeral becomes a kind of entertainment whereby the burden of pain is transcended and makes way for joy and celebrations. This particular function of *Mang-Djala* will be further discussed in the next chapter.

As mentioned earlier, the money collected is not retained by the *Mang-Djala* partners. Rather, they have to mobilise themselves and sometimes they collect double that which has been collected by the relatives or the ethnic group as a whole. If the money is not all spent during the mourning, the remaining amount is handed over to the widow or the orphans to support them. As one of the focus group discussion observed, “those who do not have *Mang-Djala* partners cannot have a good life” (Chamba, Mbum, Pere: Ngaoundéré 21/01/2012).

Apart from funerals and the enthroning of traditional rulers, *Mang-Djala* also operates during marriages. All are important events in community life. In the case of marriage, the head of the slaughtered cow is automatically presented to the *Mang-Djala* partner (focus group discussion Gbaya, Dii, Laka Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011).

The general observation is that the Gbaya, the Dii and the Laka co-exist peacefully within the Church due to their shared *Mang-Djala* background. “Whenever one of us feels angry”, said one of the participants, “others come with jokes to mock his silly attitude in order to calm him down”. Mr Adamou believes, as do the other participants, that it is God who established the practice because it provides for universal well-being, since it extends to people of other ethnic groups for the happiness of all. In addition, the concept is inclusive as it also fully integrates women and children (focus group discussion Gbaya, Dii, Laka Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011).

Concerning the issue of applying the concept within the context of the Church, many participants replied that the concept as initially practiced in the secular world was motivated by the common will of *living together* as a community, and was a powerful tool to bring people together for accomplishing shared goals. They argued that its implementation within the Church would bring extensive blessings to the Christian community. Mr Benoit Tindankir encouraged me “from the deepest part of his heart” (verbatim) to pursue this project, to inspire the revitalisation of *Mang-Djala* which is sadly dying (Ngaoundéré 20/04/2011). This quest for revitalisation was described by Mr Béloko as: “*poursuivre les traces positives de*

*nos ancêtres*” [pursuing the positive tracks of our ancestors] (Ngaoundéré 23/05/2011). Therefore, through this concept, the Church can consolidate its unity because God has allowed its existence and because many ethnic groups are already involved in its practice. “*Mang-Djala* is really a pillar of unity because it consolidates the living between a number of ethnic groups”, he concluded (Mr Benoit Tindankir Ngaoundéré 20/04/2011).

Mrs Atta Djoulde, an elderly female participant, finds it difficult to clearly explicate the details of *Mang-Djala* practices. Being born into it, she has always accepted it as a natural part of her life, as it is for most of those of her age group. It has been a legacy which she did not interrogate; she was simply the recipient of what was already an accepted part of life. She added that daily life between *Mang-Djala* partners is joyful and to celebrate this partnership there is an annual day called *haram* which is dedicated to *Mang-Djala* partners, as described in chapter three (Ngaoundéré 22/06/2011).

This commemoration indicates that the concept was of great value to those who initiated it and those partners who continued to follow it, and the day is set to recall and thus immortalise their common history. Mrs Atta Djoulde also lamented that nowadays the practice has declined enormously and that it is only during funerals that one can sometimes see the *Mang-Djala* partnership in action, whereas initially it addressed every aspect of life. She echoed Reverend Djidere’s statement that funerals have become the only occasions during which *Mang-Djala* operates.

#### **4.5 Focus group discussions: a summary of the field work**

After all that has been already said, presenting the focus group discussion will be the summary of the previous participants’ responses due to the similarities of the responses. However, some important points that have emerged will need particular attention. From the first focus group discussion that brought together the Mbum, the Voute the Mundang, it appears that in *Mang-Djala* partnership there is no hierarchical ranking between the members, only their commitment to live a peaceful life. They were bound together as a unit through their *Mang-Djala* partnership long before the advent of colonialism (Ngaoundéré 05/06/2011). This serves as a hypothesis to respond to the question raised earlier, whether the concept’s decline was due to the early missionary and colonial policy of *tabula rasa*. It seems possible that in one way or another, directly or indirectly, the early missionaries and the colonists may have contributed to the decline of *Mang-Djala*, but this is contentious at best

and it must also be reiterated that the people involved failed to communicate this wisdom to the new generations.

According to some of the participants in the first focus group (the Mundang and the Mbum), the origin of the concept cannot be stated with certainty, because they inherited the practice from their ancestors. For the Voute, however, only snippets of information about the origins of the concept remain. It has to do with a conflict in which they were opposed to the Tikar, after which the concept of *Mang-Djala* was initiated in order to restore and establish peace between them (Ngaoundéré 05/06/2011). This has been broadly discussed in chapter three. For others, such as the Gbaya, the Laka and the Dii in the second focus group, the origins of *Mang-Djala* is to be traced back to the migratory movements of those who were negatively affected by ethnic wars (Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011).

The general view is that people came together for two main reasons – to co-exist peacefully with one another, and to enjoy mutual protection and assistance. These two motives are linked to every aspect of their daily needs and not only to important events in life such as funerals, marriages and the inauguration of new leaders. In this way people developed an awareness of their limitations and the need to rely on one another to make life bearable, as well as to view the future with confidence. These needs are expressed or reiterated during events such as marriage and funerals, as discussed earlier. Thus, if one is living among one's *Mang-Djala* partners, one does not need to depend on the presence of relatives or ethnic communities to help one to face daily challenges.

Essentially, the institution of *haram* (see page 74 paragraph 1) allows people to commemorate and keep the practice going. On this the focus groups were unanimous. They also agreed that there are no hierarchical structures in the *Mang-Djala* partnership; all are equal partners. Furthermore, during the focus groups discussion it was observed that the new generation is ignoring the value of the concept because of modernisation and the breakdown of traditional ways of passing on knowledge, such as from parents to children. In addition, they also mentioned that because the concept is transmitted through oral tradition, nothing is recorded for the future generations.

As far as those who are partners in a *Mang-Djala* relationship are concerned, the concept of *Mang-Djala* has been a blessing because it has established and perpetuated peace for generations. There is thus an urgent need to record the mechanisms and benefits of the practice so as to provide future generations with a resource for positive and harmonious

living, as well as a record of how their parents and ancestors lived. The shared aspiration is to have *Mang-Djala* taught at secondary level and to undertake the initiative to write the history of *Mang-Djala*. This is because, as the focus group Mbum, Pere, Chamba remarked, one's *Mang-Djala* partners constitute a place of refuge – when one's own people turn, it is among one's *Mang-Djala* partners that one can find guaranteed refuge and safety. It is believed that those who have no *Mang-Djala* partners cannot survive (Ngaoundéré 27/1/2012).

In reaction to the possible use of the concept within the Church, the concern among the focus groups was that in the cultural context, *Mang-Djala* functions efficiently, but to transpose it into the Church setting will require proper education of all Church members in order to avoid misunderstandings. However, all the participants are eager to implement the concept in the context of the Church, and have acknowledged its potential efficacy in reinforcing the unity of the Church, although this will require the urgent education of young people in this regard.

#### **4.6 The traditional rulers and elderly people on the concept of *Mang-Djala*.**

During a conversation one of the traditional ruler, the meaning of *Mang-Djala* was presented as follows: “Those with whom we are living are great and trustworthy people, they should be told about all that happens to us – *en hoola be* [“we should trust them” in the Fulfulde language] (His Majesty Harouna: Tibati 27/03/2011). According to this view, this partnership is so strong that no outsider can infiltrate and divide it. Rather, one is motivated by the sense of mutual support, and when one organises the *surga* (communal effort), the *Mang-Djala* partners are the first to taste the local beer or the food prepared for that event. The *surga* entails calling on friends and relatives to assist for a whole day in cultivating one's farm by providing local beer and food, as discussed earlier in chapter three. His Majesty, the Belaka of Ngangha, has emphasised that in a *Mang-Djala* partnership, people live as one entity, engaging in a journey by confronting the same obstacles in order to reach the same objectives (Belaka Ngangha 27/12/2010).

His Majesty Mohamadou Mvouen Vincent recounted the same *Mang-Djala* legend of origin with regard to a human sacrifice used to seal an alliance of peace between those who were involved in a conflict, as mentioned earlier. He furthermore narrated the story of his enthronement during which his *Mang-Djala* partners “confiscated” his throne until his people entered into negotiations with their partners, after which the throne was released for the continuation of the ceremony (Mohamadou Mvouen Vincent: Mbella Assom 27/03/2011). This is an extremely significant manoeuvre. It combines the element of play which is

fundamental to *Mang-Djala* partnerships, with a pretended suspension of the symbolic authority of the throne. In other words the message seems to be that not even the ultimate power of the king can supersede the power of *Mang- Djala*. Yet it also implies that *Mang-Djala* operates on a level that transcends normal authority structures in society.

According to him, the concept of *Mang-Djala* has been a tradition which has promoted positive human relationships which is why a number of the traditional rulers who are *Mang-Djala* partners have decided to revive the practice and save it from extinction. In this regard the first festival was organised to commemorate the partnership between the chieftaincies of Nghanha (Mbum) and Bankim (Tikar). The next festival will be conducted by the chieftaincies of Yoko (Voute) and Bankim (Tikar). In this way, the elders intend to renew their ties with all those who are in partnership in that group of *Mang-Djala* (Mohamadou Mvouen Vincent: Mbella Assom 27/03/2011).

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In presenting this data, the views of the participants collected during the course of the fieldwork were presented as accurately as possible in order to avoid any misinterpretation of the facts provided in their responses. Repetition of data was avoided where possible as the participants in many ways shared the same views.

In the introduction, this section was divided into two main focal areas, namely ethnicity and the concept of *Mang-Djala*. In the first section it was argued that tribalism is a reality in Cameroonian society in general and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular. Many factors have contributed to the rise of tribalism within the Church, in particular the Cameroonian context in which tribalism has become a blight on society and a cancer that has penetrated the Church. Subsequently, although the missionaries' influence on tribalism within the Church had been viewed with a measure of criticism, most of the participants believed that they have in many ways contributed to its spread.

The second aspect concerned the concept of *Mang-Djala*, and raising this issue seemed to regenerate a renewed awareness and interest in its value amongst the people. It was found that *Mang-Djala* has played a reconciliatory role in times of conflict and it has enabled different ethnic groups to integrate this concept into their daily lives. In spite of its weakness, in that it is not understood by all ethnic groups in the Church, one can assert that if the concept of *Mang-Djala* is approached from a theologically sound perspective and correctly appropriated and applied, it may enlighten the concept of Christian unity and reinforce unity

among all Christians in the country. After all, the participants that are constituted of: the Church leadership, some Regional Bishops, some Presidents of Regional Councils, some clergy, some chairpersons of local congregations, some lay members, three focus group discussions, some traditional rulers and elderly people unanimously challenged the current situation and appealed for the rediscovery and the revalorisation of the concept in view of its dramatic decline in terms of both awareness and practice.

Having presented the findings coming out of the fieldwork the next chapter will attempt to analyse and reflect on these findings.



## Chapter five: Data analysis and interpretation

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter four presented the findings collected in the course of the fieldwork. Two things clearly emerged in the research – firstly that ethnocentrism continues to be a major problem in Cameroon – both in society and church, and secondly *Mang-Djala* continues to be a possible antidote to it. Just as there is a strong impression that ethnic conflict is a problem there is also a strong impression throughout a broad cross-section of the church and society that *Mang-Djala* has the potential to be a strong cohesive force in Cameroon and can contribute to the notion of Christian unity, provided it is well appropriated and applied in the context of the Church.

Chapter five will attempt to analyse and unpack and reflect some of these impressions. The focus will remain on the two central areas of study, ethnicity and *Mang-Djala*. Concerning ethnicity the views of church members will be discussed, excluding those members who were not church members (eg Muslims), but concerning *Mang-Djala* all the informants' views will be included in the discussion. Concerning ethnicity its present-day level of entrenchment in the Church will be discussed, bearing in mind that ethnocentrism – that is an abuse of ethnicity, constitutes a hindrance to African Churches, particularly in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

Here the discussion will be of the views of those who are involved in the life of the Church. An attempt will be made to show how ethnicity is perceived by the Church members, and the way in which people may become enslaved to the dictates of their own ethnic groups at the expense of Christian community. The role played by missionaries will be examined and an attempt will be made to establish their accountability, if any.

Concerning *Mang-Djala*, its viability in contemporary Cameroonian society will be investigated to establish whether it is functional and also whether it is applicable to all the participants and whether *Mang-Djala* continues to be a viable tradition in the broader Cameroonian society as well as in the church.

### 5.2 The views of the Church member participants on tribalism

The informants used the word “tribalism” to describe the kind of ethnocentrism that this study is concerned with. Whether referred to as tribalism or ethnocentrism the attitude or

behaviour under scrutiny is that which separates one ethnic group from another; it is what Scripture calls the “the dividing wall that is hostility between us” (Ephesian 2: 14 NRSV)) as stressed by Aboagye-Mensah (1999: 18-21). This is reinforced in the report of the committee ‘*Un dans le monde*’ [One in the world], which, although cited in a previous chapter, is important enough to recall here in its translated English version:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, one of the Cameroonian Churches established for many decades, has not been spared the challenge of the ethnic diversity of its 172 000 members, coming from 42 different ethnic groups, which has made for difficult cohabitation between its members. The stress always being put on the blood bond to the detriment of Baptism; peace and unity have yielded to exclusions, quarrels and fights over interests, hence the division of the Church was about to occur because of the ethnic conflicts between 1997 to 2000. (Seminar on the launching of ‘one in the world’: period: 8-11 July 2002.)

Subsequently, Reverend Thomas Nyiwé, the National Bishop, in his book entitled: *Etre Connu Par Christ, Chercher à connaître Christ, Faire connaître Christ: le rôle primordial de l’évangélisation dans l’accomplissement du ministère holistique de l’Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun* [Be known by Christ, Seeking to know Christ, Let Christ be known: the primordial role of evangelisation in the accomplishment of the holistic ministry of the E.L.C.C], asserted that: “*L’ethnicité [est] comme un véritable obstacle à l’évangélisation au sein de l’Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun.*” [“Ethnicity is a real obstacle to the evangelisation within the E.L.C.C”]. (Nyiwe 2012: 41).

Although ethnicity affects the church universally and Africa is no exception. , as Philomena Mwaura writes:

The challenges experienced by the Church in Africa are usually traced to the manner in which the Gospel was brought to us. Much has been written about the Christian landscape in Africa, its demographic characteristics and how vibrant Christianity is. Observers and scholars of Christianity in Africa also remark that numerical growth has not translated into a transforming spirituality that fosters Christian and national identity. Ethnicity is still a demon threatening to tear not only the nation apart but also the Church (2009: 21).

During the 1960s Catholics in a [Ghanaian] diocese “burnt their bishop’s Episcopal throne outside the cathedral because he was not of their ethnic group” (Shorter 1999: 29).

These observations on ethnocentrism also reflect the unanimous view of the participants in the E.L.C.C. One of the participants argued that: *“l’Eglise existe dans la société et est influencée par cette société qui l’entourne. Donc si le tribalisme existe dans notre société, forcément nous le retrouvons dans l’Eglise”*. [The Church exists within a society and is influenced by that society that surrounds it. Hence, if tribalism exists in our society, forcibly we find it in the Church] (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011).

Amidst this confusion, the role of the Church as the alternative community reflecting the values of God’s kingdom is at stake. Consequently, the Church should not consider itself as a resigned victim or as defeated, but rather view its role as a challenge; to strive for the consolidation of its unity and for the transformation of society as a whole. In order to achieve this:

The believers will have to become more intensely aware of their deep unity in Christ. They will have to realize that no earthly division or diversity can ever outweigh the reality and the glory of this unity. [People] might deny or obscure [it], but they can never erase it (in Klaus Nürnberger and John Tooke [ed] 1988: 33).

Thus in spite of its noble and legitimate divine mission, the Church may be absorbed by a corrupt society and miss its goal of being the light of the world if it does not stand firmly against the ideological forces present in the society. In order to preserve its legitimacy in the sight of the world, “the Church has the responsibility to confess its profound, inviolable unity in Christ and to experience and make this unity visible in this broken and divided world” (1988: 34).

Likewise, the national Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship, Reverend Djidere argued that:

*Le tribalisme est une réalité qu’on ne peut plus démontrer. On entend toujours le nom ‘étrangers’ et on se demande à quoi cela se réfère; c’est-à-dire ‘étranger’ par rapport à quoi si ce n’est de l’ethnocentrisme ou l’idée selon laquelle l’Eglise est la propriété privée d’un groupe ethnique pour qu’on considère les autres comme ‘étrangers’?*

[Tribalism is a reality which does not need any proof any more. We always hear the term ‘foreigners’ and one could ask to what this expression refers? ‘Foreigners’ with regard to what if not ethnocentrism or the idea according to which the Church is a private property of

an ethnic group? Hence, others are considered as ‘foreigners’.] Conversation with Mathieu Djidere on 25/06/2011).

Considering Reverend Djidere’s statement, it appears that tribalism is deeply rooted in the Church, to the point of adopting some vocabulary such as ‘foreigner’, which is an informal term used to discriminate against a category of Christians, notably those who ethnically are considered as not belonging to any of those groups initially targeted by the two missions. In those days, there were not as many ethnic groups as today. In the American mission field these groups were respectively known as the Gbaya, the Dowayo, the Chamba and the Mbum. In the Norwegian missionary field they were referred to as the Mbum, the Dii, the Pere and the Nyem-Nyem.

The impact of this discrepancy is still a contemporary reality. As a matter of fact, apart from the theological Institute of Meiganga and the Ngaoundéré hospital that was the achievement of the two missions and where the missionaries of any field could be sent to work, each mission continued to send its missionaries to work exclusively in its own field and sent financial support to the Bible schools which each had built. In other words, each mission remained strongly attached to the ethnic groups among which it worked.

However, the context changed because other ethnic groups have joined the Church. This has led to the proliferation of contradictory opinions on the number of ethnic groups that constitute the membership of the Church. Whilst the lowest approximation of the total number of ethnic groups within the Church is 40, some of the participants believe that the Church is constituted of all the ethnic groups (Rev. Mathieu Djidéré: Douala 25/06/2011, Rev. Dieudonné Ousmanou: Ngaoundéré 06/05/2011). This indicates that the Church has grown substantially, which should be seen as the process of witnessing for Christ towards reaching the end of the earth as commanded by Christ (Act 1: 8).

Unfortunately the pioneers – those ethnic groups who first received the Gospel, and who had sometimes been active in accompanying the missionaries in their journey, seem to frown upon the positive manner in which other ethnic groups have joined the Church in response to the Gospel. By so doing they contradict their own efforts towards evangelisation to which they initially were committed, as the presence of other ethnic groups are the fruits of their labour.

To ascertain tribalism in the Church, the National Bishop acknowledged that: *“le tribalisme existe bel et bien, mais nous croyons que cela peut changer si nous regardons plus loin”* [definitely, tribalism exists but we believe that it can be changed if we look further] (Ngaoundéré 18/05/2011). This shows his commitment to address the issue of tribalism, but what are the concrete strategies and how long is this confused situation going to last?

Reverend Jean Baiguele, on the other hand, in his proposed solution to the problem, stated that: *“Pour faire face à ce problème de tribalisme, L’Eglise doit commencer par bannir le langage de majorité et minorité, pour parler juste des Chrétiens et traiter tout le monde équitablement”*. [To address this problem of tribalism, the Church must start banishing the language of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ in the Church and speak just of Christians and to treat everyone as equal]. (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). One could see that ‘foreigner’ is not the only informal term used to discriminate; ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ are also used so as to determine the more influential ethnic group.

Dieudonne Depa who is one of the so-called ‘foreigners’ for being a Bamileke coming from the western part of the country, appealed to the Church for its support: *“L’Eglise à mon sens devrait travailler pour amener les uns et les autres à se comprendre, à s’accepter mutuellement, à se pardonner et à regarder le point central qui est le Christ”*. [The Church, according to my understanding, should work in order to bring people to mutual understanding, mutual acceptance and mutual forgiveness and to look at Christ who is the centre]. (Ngaoundéré 24/01/2012 in). This is a distress signal that the Church is lamentably drifting of course, unless a rescue mission is undertaken.

It is worth mentioning that those who are called upon to work towards the integration of the ethnic groups tend to withdraw from their mission with a sense of helplessness when confronted with the effects of tribalism. They prefer to resign and abandon the victims of tribalism to their fate; hence the multiplicity of ethnic groups becomes a material burden to the Church. Therefore one agrees with the viewpoint of the National Bishop, although stated in a paradoxical form, that “ethnic multiplicity represents richness and poverty” for the Church (Ngaoundéré 18/05/2011).

In referring to ethnicity as poverty, the Bishop seems affected by the prevailing instability in the Church. However, to qualify ethnic diversity as poverty is to misconstrue the nature of the Christian Church, because diversity is part of God’s creation. That is why the Bible uses the image of a body to speak about the Church; otherwise, how should one interpret passages

such as Acts 2: 5-12, or Revelation 7: 9 that talk about the Christian Church being made up of diverse people praising God? Although the National Bishop's opinion in this regard was initially moderate, it has not provided a way to deal with such "poverty". However, one should not become fatalistic and misinterpret matters, as Mwaura (2009: 26) rightly points out: "the real question is not how to eradicate ethnicity but how to integrate it into social relationship". Before proceeding, it is important to consider the views of the Church on tribalism.

### **5.2.1 The ubiquitous presence of ethnicity in church and society**

According to the participants, ethnic diversity has always been problematic in Cameroonian relationships. The manifestation of the culture of diverse ethnicity in Cameroon, involving more than 250 different ethnic groups, has led to tribalism which in turn has complicated the acceptance of other ethnic groups. It has created boundaries between groups as it becomes motivated by egocentrism, selfishness and exploitation. Although the main focus of this study is on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, reference to the existing ethnic boundaries in Cameroon as a whole serves to provide a broad overview of the circumstances in which the Church is called upon to witness to the Gospel of Christ. Against this background, the Church has become embroiled in a vicious circle of ethnicity, in which any attempt to self-professed ethnic superiority is a real threat to Church cohesion. This detracts from the Christian message and brings the credibility of the Church into question – the Church becomes entangled in a turmoil that engulfs the Christian testimony whereby the way out is difficult or even impossible. The specific case of the ELCC is somehow worsened by the manifestation of a type of discrimination that is linked to its two different missions background and has motivated the creation of the informal expression '*filis ou fille de l'Eglise*' [children of the Church or son or daughter of the Church] (see page 45 paragraph 4 and 5).

### **5.2.2 Ethnicity and the fragmentation of the Christian community**

The objective of the committee '*Un dans le monde*' was an attempt to find an approach capable of averting the mounting ethnic division within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. It was with these concerns in mind that Bishop Nyiwe, whilst acknowledging the collective strength represented by the array of ethnic groups in the Church pointed out that

the multiplicity of ethnic groups becomes a weakness when these different tribal components cease to think about unity beyond barriers, ethnic borders; when they start to think only about their ethnic or tribal appearances, you see the weakness of the church. You see a divided

church, a shattered/segmented church, a church that represents churches. When ethnic identity prevails over Christian identity, each ethnic community withdraws into itself and represents itself as the Church. (Ngaoundéré 18/05/2011)

From this analysis one may conclude that ethnic division is deeply rooted in the Church and is yet to be arrested or eradicated; which calls for renewed efforts and approaches to solutions. One may deliberate on whether there has in fact been a concerted effort by the leadership to address ethnic issues; there may be hidden agendas in perpetuating this state of confusion in the Church, because there has been no efficient strategy to date aimed at bridging ethnic boundaries.

This could infer that the Church leaders who succeeded one after another so far may have colluded with politicians and have surreptitiously adopted this demagogy and the policy of divide and rule. Perhaps this also answers the conundrum as to why these leaders seem not to consider ethnicity in the ELCC as a serious matter, even when it sometimes seems to turn into violent conflict. Here one may refer to the incident mentioned earlier when the bishop's Episcopal throne (see page 108 paragraph 4) was set alight because of his ethnic affiliation. Taking into account the Cameroonian and the Ghanaian experiences, one could adduce that ethnically divided African Churches have a long way to go before the professed unification of faith can be translated into a practical reality. The probable underlying explanations for these ethnic dissensions will be considered next.

### **5.2.3 The grounds of ethnic divisions in the Church**

The Bible story of Zebedee's sons who requested Jesus to grant them to sit, one at his right and one at his left, in his glory (Mark 10: 35-40 NRSV) is relevant here. Interpreted in the Cameroonian context, the struggle for power and position is a deep-rooted issue in Christianity which seems to underpin most issues of ethnocentrism in the E.L.C.C. This does not justify the practice of ethnicity, but rather identifies it as a crucial issue that needs particular attention. In secular societies, particularly those in African countries, most of the conflict and violence are motivated by the quest for power. The Church is not exempt from this power struggle as pointed out by the participants in this study, as the Church is an inherent part of the society within which it functions and will hence be influenced by that society.

Yet, power struggles within African Churches in general could be linked to the crucial role they played in the development of the continent. For example, they were pioneers in bringing

western education to Africa. Consequently, “Almost every President [and political leader] in Africa is the product of [that] education” (Lamb, 1982: 140).

Beyond that, the increasing number of Christians in Africa (Lamb, 1982: 142, Gifford, 1998: 22) has become sometimes a kind of Church leader’s ‘*bait*’, who use the pulpit and Church meetings abusively to gain the politicians’ sympathy as they are in a quest for their electorate in the context of a democratic Africa. Hence, to have status in the church is significant for Africans, whereas to have status in the church in the West does not mean that you have that much power. In this context, Church leaders become very influential, proving that status and position in the church is very important, which renders it more vulnerable to becoming an arena for power struggles. Conversely, in western societies the church does not have that much influence because of secularization.

A careful consideration of the different views held by the Church’s participants on what brought tribalism into the Church reveals that they too consider the issue of power and position in the Church as catalysts to disorder. The fight for power and position seems to lie at the heart of the tensions the Church is presently experiencing which the National Bishop termed “the idea of ethnic battles during elections within the Church” (National Bishop on the 28/05/2011 in Ngaoundéré).

Below are also some participants’ assertions that attribute ethnic strife to the struggle for power in the Church:

- Tribalism is real in the Church but more visible during the election of the Church leaders (Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011).
- Some positions in the Church seem to belong exclusively to the majority (Rev. Hamidou Hayatou on the 06/11/2010 in Poli)
- Some people for their own reasons and hidden agenda have wanted to preserve their advantages or to acquire them. That is what brought this kind of conflict. (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011 and 24/01/2012).

One may then agree that “tribalism is manifested in the Church [for the acquisition] of power, privilege, profit, creating an environment where some [are considered as being] there to worship others” (Asogwa 2012: 95). Moreover, events that have disrupted the life of the



Church may be identified as evidence of ethnic divisions based on people's hunger for power and dominium over the Church. Some of these are as follows:

- In 1977, during a general synod, an ethnic group threatened to leave the meeting if its candidate was not elected (Reverend Adolphe Telessam and the National Bishop Assistant respectively on the 07/05/2011 in Garoua and the 18/06/2011 in Ngaoundéré).
- In 1993, the then vice-president of the Church died unexpectedly during a meeting aimed at reconciling two of the major ethnic groups fighting in Poli over the control for regional leadership (Reverend Hamidou Hayatou, Mbe 06/11/2010).
- In 1997, one of the favoured candidates lost the election for making a tough but pertinent statement against the interests of the ethnic group who was in support of him. (The National Bishop, Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011).
- In 1999, during the General Secretary's election tribalism manifested between two major ethnic groups that led to the temporary suspension of the debate. (the National Bishop, Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011).
- In 2011, a division occurred because a vital sector of one of the major ethnic groups withdrew from the Church after failing to become the first elected bishop of the Church (several participants).

Generally, one may claim that Church elections in the ELCC have either strongly contributed to ethnic division or they have exacerbated the burden of ethnicity. In this process, four such events will be presented as case studies in this analysis.

Following on from discussion with the participants and from my personal view as an insider, it appears that not many Christians are willing to express their feelings on marginalisation or reveal their stance on the effects of ethnicity. They content themselves by conceding that ethnocentrism and tribalism exist in the Church. There are many who endure the effects and aftermath of ethnocentrism or tribalism but will not denounce these or express their views openly but instead choose to align themselves with the *status quo*.

The National Bishop Assistant has consistently emphasised this problem: "Souvent d'autres ne réagissent pas parce qu'ils sont minoritaires, mais les groupes majoritaires pensent qu'ils doivent s'imposer" [Others often do not react because they are a minority, but majority groups think it must be necessary] (Ngaoundéré 18/06/2011). This is a form of silent

oppression practiced by the ethnic majority against the minority. By silencing these groups in many major church decisions and events, they abuse the power and authority invested in them by the Church. When individuals want their own ethnic leader to acquire a key position in the Church to promote their own importance, they plot to fight it out during elections through ethnic alliances, which the National Bishop dreads. According to this understanding, the leadership appears to either shelter people from oppression, or gain access and control of the profits and the control of others. Consequently, there is a great risk of compromising one's ministry for the sake of such alliances. The Church then faces a kind of battle which Nelson terms "[the] haves versus [the] have-nots" (1969: 32)

However, this reticence to act against oppression may also be ascribed to other factors. It may be that the minorities are of the opinion that they are powerless and cannot reverse the situation. It may also be that they have no interest in the struggle for justice, or that no-one is prepared to listen to them; or perhaps they are unconcerned about what may happen in the future. The selected four events mentioned earlier in the chapter will now be discussed.

First event:

In 1977 during a meeting of the general synod, an ethnic group threatened to walk out should its candidate fail to be elected (Reverend Adolphe Telessam and the National Bishop Assistant respectively on the 07/05/2011 in Garoua and the 18/06/2011 in Ngaoundéré). The Church at that point was still in the early stages of its existence as an independent Church (it achieved independence in 1960), and had only been in existence for seventeen years, yet ethnic division around the issue of power was already visible. Although the participant has not named the ethnic group (deemed unnecessary here as the issue at stake is the motive for certain attitudes), people were fighting for power instead of committing themselves to achieve the vision of the Church, even in the early stages of the Church when it was seeking to build its unity and consolidate itself in its mission. The notion of unity – cohesion centred on Christian faith – that would undermine the boundaries of ethnicity, was lacking. Whilst the Church was struggling to strengthen its foundation, the boundaries of ethnicity were expanding. At that time an immediate solution to the challenge of ethnicity should have been envisaged that would have allowed a healthy development of the Church, but unfortunately the Church failed to perceive it as a threat that would endanger its future and unity.

The missionaries should take some responsibility for the problem in the way they handed over leadership of the Church to the locals without drawing their attention on the detrimental

consequences of ethnicity. Because, as the presence of the missionaries was substantially influential at the time, the populace would have obeyed them and by so doing would have led to the creation of a strong barrier against the development of tribalism that could cause division in the Church. However, none of the locals were prescient or idealistic enough to foresee ethnicity as a threat to the Church. Whereas, if this issue had been taken into consideration from the beginning, a plausible approach to ethnicity would have been put into place and its effect would have not been felt as strongly as it is today. This may be deemed a lack of vision or a lack of wisdom on the part of the Church in protecting its mission from this onslaught by its members, who are so inclined to ethnocentrism.

Second event:

In 1993, the then vice-president of the Church, Reverend David Bouba unexpectedly died during a debate in Poli which he was attending with the view to reconcile two major ethnic groups of the Church that were in conflict (Rev. Hamidou Hayatou: Mbe 06/11/2010). His death may have prolonged the conflict had his family members become embroiled in accusations against the two ethnic groups for causing the death of their relative, given that this death may have been due to a heart attack brought on through anxiety resulting from his attempt to resolve the conflict.

Third event

In 1997, one of the favoured candidates lost the election for making a hard-hitting statement against the interests of an ethnic group who was in support of him (the National Bishop: Ngaounéré 28/05/2011). This statement was revelatory in the sense that it showed the extent to which ethnic interest prevailed over common interest. It also revealed a lack of objectivity on the part of the Church in selecting its leaders. Often individuals may want to impose their own interest on a few at the expense of the entire community in exchange for their support in the elections. This represents a form of corruption, because it diverts the vision and mission of the Church. The negative aspect here is that if these individuals had succeeded in the election, they may not have been free to fulfil their duties objectively and may have yielded to the blackmail of their supporters, even if their actions were detrimental to the Church.

Subsequently, the fact that this ethnic group had prioritised its own interests to the detriment of the community as a whole, proved their intention to dominate the Church, when on the other hand, the candidate who refused to compromise his integrity and vision for the good of

the Church should have been the kind of leader the Church should have looked to. This apathy also showed that the contestant belonged to a minority group and the voters passed them off as vital to the candidate's success. Upon reflection, it is clear that it is this kind of rationale that often creates skewed perceptions in the community.

There are other issues which one should not ignore, such as the allocation of scholarships, in which the National Bishop stands accused of not being impartial; and which sometimes sparked turmoil. During our conversation the National Bishop analysed the granting of scholarships since 2009 (Ngaounéré 28/05/2011). The observation one can make from his analysis is that, within a Church of more than forty ethnic groups, some groups were allocated up to three bursaries, whereas others received none. It is therefore to be expected that complaints would persist in spite of the efforts made to overcome tribalism in the distribution of scholarships. At this point, it is difficult to avoid the accusations, since the Church is financially dependent on its partners and the number of scholarships granted annually is limited. However, this is one of the major grievances that the leadership of the Church will always face; dissatisfaction of the majority and animosity from the minority, both of whom may feel discriminated against.

Reverend Pierre Ngnitchefe pleads that: "*le merite doit être valorisé*" (merit should prevail) in such cases (Yaoundé 24/06/2011 in). But this sounds unsatisfactory, because many of the best candidates may come from the same ethnic group. Hence complaints become unavoidable. In this environment of misperception and turmoil, Luzbetak may be correct in pointing out that: "the minority tends to be oversensitive and predisposed to criticize the dominant group unfairly. Again and again, justly or unjustly, the dominant group is condemned by the minority..." (1988: 179), because of what Reverend Doko Michel terms "*le partage de gâteau*" [the share of the cake] (Ngaoubela 06/05/2011).

During the course of my work I met with the former General Secretary of the Church, Paul Salatou, with whom I discussed the issue of tribalism in the Church. He revealed that sometimes tribalism is the outcome of frustrations and disappointment with the way in which the Gospel initially was preached by the missionaries. The first missionaries preached a gospel of poverty, upholding the dictum that salvation and wealth were incompatible. This view of the gospel created a Christian who remained poor (Ngaoundéré 12/01/2013). This assertion is proven to be correct with regard to the way in which some famous missionaries, who were thought to have done so much for Africans, such as the French missionary Albert

Schweitzer, treated their employees. Albert Schweitzer, according to Lamb paid his African labourers seven bananas a day, and denied them an increase of one banana because he felt that this would disturb discipline and morale (1982: 141)! Decades later the new generation of missionaries changed this discourse to one where wealth was viewed as a blessing from God. The new generations of Christians felt that their underprivileged grandparents had been betrayed by the missionaries who, in their revised approach to evangelisation, and in their desire to reach the unconverted, opened themselves up to the formation of new ethnic groups whom they provided with many opportunities and advantages. The quest for power arose from their frustrations with the teachings of the missionaries and thus they relied on their ethnic influence to establish themselves as a force to compensate for previous loss. This analysis provides insight into what Reverend Doko Michel intended by saying: “*ceux qui sont venus hier hier profitent...*” [Those who came yesterday, yesterday are benefiting...] (Ngaoubéla 06/05/2011 in). Although this observation has merit, it would be erroneous and even short-sighted to consider the relevance of tribalism only from this angle.

Another obstacle to peace is the democratic re-election process of the leadership of the Church which Paul Salatou also raised. Whilst the process itself is above reproach, it nonetheless seems to have become harmful to the Church. In the context of a multi-ethnic Church, it is difficult to avoid the appropriation of power by those who are numerically in the majority, even if they unjustly protect their selfish interest to the expense of the minority. In this regard democracy has a limitation as the model of governance; especially within a community of Christian fellowship. The leadership of the Church becomes politicised to the extent that those who are in office tend to usurp power through whatever means. In this situation, the so-called opposition becomes frustrated, particularly when they do not have sufficient access to the profits. Consequently, they begin to mobilize their own ethnic support in preparation for the upcoming elections and ethnic alliances are created to secure or to disrupt the ‘confiscated leadership’. Hence, the terms ‘foreigners’, ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ which the participants tend to use disparagingly either to repulse others or to claim one’s own supremacy. Such strife can be compared to the one that arose among the disciples who were concerned about which of them was the greatest (Luke 9: 46). In spite of Jesus’ clear response that the least among them is the greatest, Christians find it difficult to accept this. Instead they seem enslaved by the sin of pride which led Adam and Eve into the fall (Genesis 3: 4-5).

Fourth event:

In 2011, ethnic division seemed to have reached its peak. At that time the Church was experiencing a period of unprecedented turmoil which eventually necessitated government intervention. Two of the most important churches were closed down, one for a few months, the second for more than a year in order to avoid clashes in the place of worship. The aggrieved group employed the services of lawyers in their numerous attempts to have the bishop dismissed from his office in order to take over. In Ngaoundéré, the Governor failed to reconcile the conflicting parties. This seems to indicate that in a milieu of conflict people tend to sacrifice their spirituality for self-interest. In this specific instance a form of role reversal occurred between the Church and the Government; instead of the Church carrying out its reconciliatory role in society and government, it was the reverse. The church's role in Jesus' ministry of reconciliation in the world had not only lost its essence *vis-à-vis* the society and government, but also its testimony to atheists. In the midst of this chaos, the missionaries were also, wrongly or rightly, accused.

#### **5.2.4 The complicity of the missionaries**

The previous chapter (page 92-93) provided divergent views of the participants regarding the accusation held against missionaries. Some thought that the missionaries profoundly influenced the development of tribalism, whereas others believed that the missionaries stood falsely accused, arguing that the two missions had at heart the aim of building a united Church. Instead, it was the indigenous populace who did not perceive or understand the missionaries' strategies of unifying the church and who were responsible for the tribalist policy of exclusion. The missionaries did not foresee the conflicts which subsequently arose; hence they could not address an issue which did not yet exist. Therefore Christian teaching with regard to the ethnic problem was not a priority for their mission. However, even if the missionaries failed to foresee these conflicts, one should not lose sight of the possibility that the source of the current conflict may be linked to the missionary background.

Although ethnicity and ethnic conflicts are believed to be phenomena inherent in human societies (Oyono, 2004: Xi) and are "...an old issue... encountered in the Bible, in various traditional and modern cultures and societies in the history of humanities" (Mwaura 2009: 131), there are various external factors which contributed to their aggravation among which the missionary background may be included. Hence, Mwaura is accurate when she observes that:

although ethnic groups existed in Africa before the 19th century and did not always live in peace, colonialism and its policies of “divide and rule” together with the patterns of establishment of mission stations, in particular ethnic communities, exacerbated ethnic conflicts that are a major feature of African states today (2009: 22).

Reflecting along similar lines, Kamara also states that

In spite of the clear separation between religion and state, the relationship between the missionaries and the colonial government was symbiotic, as many missionary activities served to effect colonisation. While the colonial government scrambled for land and political control, the missionaries scrambled for the souls of the Africans thereby realising a convergence of interest. While there are no records indicating that the Church adopted force in any of its activities, the Church effectively implemented the ‘divide and rule’ and pacification policies. [Furthermore], first and foremost, missionary settlements and the consequent foundation of missionary centres were structured along colonial administrative boundaries. Hence, as each group of missionaries scrambled for ‘converts’ the map of Christian denominations converged with the maps of colonial government and ethnicity (2010: 133-134).

Such external factors should be clearly identified to avoid confusion, as societies in Africa are regaining their self-awareness and are beginning to appreciate the loss of Africa’s cultural virtues and values due to the destructive effects of colonialism and the missions. As Hewitt argues, “for sixteen centuries, Western culture, European culture and Christian culture were interchangeable terms” (2012: 13). It became inevitable, therefore, that African cultural assets, among others, have become obsolete.

The attitudes of the colonists and missionaries may have enormously contributed to what Hobsbawm and Ranger call the “invention of tradition”, a new tradition imposed on Africans, as he comments that “[even] the African Christians who were taken up as clergy into the imperfect brotherhood of the Christian Churches themselves, were trained to perform the invented and re-invented rituals of nineteenth century European ecclesiology” (1983: 226). On the other hand one should acknowledge that, to some extent, the activities of the missionaries have been worthy and genuine, particularly in view of the investments missionaries have made in response to their specific calling from God. From this point of view, it seems that there was no intention on the part of the missionaries to create opportunities for those to whom they brought the Gospel, nor to use it as justification for expressing their extreme ethnic consciousness against other ethnic groups. However, in the

course of their ministry and their personal human relationships, missionaries may have showed more sympathy towards those among whom they were sent to work, caring for and supporting especially those tribes in their specific field of mission, even after the independence of the Church. This could possibly have created the impression that the tribes with whom the missionaries sympathised were more important than others.

Many of the missionaries have to some extent strengthened this impression by adopting a paternalistic life style towards the local Christians in their field of mission. It is this kind of relationship that Koulagna strongly criticised, pointing out that the first elitists of the Church were those set apart by the missionaries (1999: 31). With regard to paternalism, Kornfield maintains that “Paternalism creates dependency. It denies the wholeness of the individual and ultimately leads to his or her bondage and suppression. There can be no genuine reciprocity between individuals or groups when one of the treats the other like a child”<sup>44</sup>. Within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, this spirit of paternalism has strongly contributed to the Church’s financial dependency on the missionaries and no real effort is being made to escape this dependency. Economically, this weakness has inflated the boundaries of ethnicity because the missions were seen as the sole source of income. Hence, poverty and the contest for wealth have contributed towards ethnocentrism.

People who have hosted missionaries found it a privilege to teach their language and gave them enormous respect and have in turn been appreciated by the missionaries. They boasted that they themselves had “a high degree of respect for the local culture” (Smalley 1967: 255), and yet “they came to Africa as the soldiers of the holy Gospel, bringing Christianity and culture to a “pagan” people” (Lamb, 1982: 139). In this regard, Hiebert argues that when missionaries went to the areas in India they were to serve:

As guests they had a high appreciation of the cultures around them. They adopted local dress and lifestyles, translated the scripture into local languages, and used local worship forms in the Church” [But with the expansion of colonialism], they came ... to equate Christianity with Western civilization ... conversion involved not only following Christ, but also adopting Western cultural forms (1989: 102-103).

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<sup>44</sup> Kornfield, J. W. What hath our Western Money and our Western Gospel wrought?

<http://missionsmandate.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/what-hath-our-western-money-and-our-western-gospel-wrought-william-jl.pdf> Accessed 31/07/2013



Consequently, it became difficult to distinguish between spurious and sincere missionaries.

There is no evidence to confirm that this is possibly what happened to the missionaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. However, one of the participants affirmed that, at some point, American missionaries working among the Gbaya people conducted Bible studies in the local language (Gbaya), which was translated into French to the non-Gbaya people for the sake of his respect for and commitment to the local culture. Such an attitude was a mistaken approach and can only worsen the existing ethnic rifts, as it shows a kind of preference of one ethnic group over others in a context of a multi-ethnic Christian community. Consequently, it promoted the Gbaya people on the one hand, and on the other hand, developed hatred of others against the Gbaya.

However, the indigenous population and Church leaders themselves have not done much to stop the effects of ethnocentrism, not even in the midst of the turbulence that is currently affecting the Church. They seem to remain passive accomplices to the missionary legacy. Is that what Miroslav Volf means by stating that: “Churches, the presumed agents of reconciliation, are at best impotent and at worst accomplices in the strife” (1996: 36). Could we say that Churches are incompetent at solving problems pertaining to uniting people?

To some extent the response is affirmative, because the responsibility is from within, as Volf asserts: “along with their parishioners the clergy are often trapped within the claim of their own ethnic or cultural community” (1996:37). It is therefore biased to undervalue the commitment and sacrifices of missionaries. Reverend Bue Joseph and Reverend Oussoumanou Dieudonné are those who think that: “*la présence des deux missions a été une bénédiction*” [the presence of the two missions was a blessing] and that “*c’est nous qui n’avons pas mis à profit leur héritage*” (it is us that have not taken advantage of their heritage). (Ngaoundéré 07/05/2011 and 06/05/2011 in).

Although Volf may seem a bit harsh towards the Church with regard to its capability of achieving its reconciliatory mission, he reveals the high expectations the communities have of the Church in achieving reconciliation. Therefore it should be seen as new challenges that need to be taken up. Hence, working towards reaching that goal should motivate the mission of the Church. Otherwise, the identity of the Christian Church will always be put into question (Mark 9: 50). Failing to perceive this challenge may only exacerbate the current undesirable state of the Church. Meanwhile, if external tendencies resulting from missionary paternalism can be identified as destructive factors – external in the sense that they are

foreign to local customs and have been subconsciously adopted and are likely to create unease – they should be appropriately addressed. This will not be an easy task because those who are profiting from the unfortunate legacy of the missions and the chaotic environment, including the clergy (if this is indeed the case), will want to preserve the *status quo*.

Seemingly, the Gospel of Reconciliation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon appears to be trapped in the mire of ethnicity. Volf's allegation finds support in Mwaura's statement that "ethnic loyalty and ethnic tensions exist in the Church in Africa. The situation has robbed the Church of its ability to create a new community in Christ" (2009: 22).

Nevertheless, a desire to overcome the confusion may lead to the creation of forums where people can openly debate specific issues to promote the welfare of the Church. If such a space for debate is provided one could, in the quest for unity in the Church, suggest topics for discussion, such as the concept of *Mang-Djala*. This concept can be viewed as a catalyst for social transformation and for a new self-consciousness that may lead to a revival of the declining African cultures.

No matter how ethnicity is characterized, be it "ethnocentrism", "negative ethnicity" or "tribalism" – the challenge at hand should be considered as a shared concern and a constant cause of struggle within the Christian community. Although Smalley thinks that "ethnocentrism will always be with us" (1967: 257), it is important to bear in mind that the Christian Church will always be the community of all people, within which ethnocentrism will always be an aberration.

### **5.2.5 When ethnicity becomes an aberration**

From the above one may conclude that ethnicity becomes an aberration when it scorns human dignity, when it leads to denying others the right to exist and makes human life a kind of *vase-clos*, disregarding the presence of others. On the other hand, in the context of the Christian Church, the Christian community essentially consists of all the people as suggested in the Book of Revelation 5: 9-10; within which the principle of '*tribalite*' is a blessing – each ethnic group is part of God's creation and should be proud of it. This implies that no individual in the name of any ethnic group has the right to infringe on this divine ordinance. This supports the views of the participants who are in favour of banishing the terms 'foreigner', 'majority' and 'minority', as according to them these ethnically biased terms tend to create boundaries of differences and exclusions between Christians. Rather, the

participants espouse a desire to build a Christian community that militates for a genuine integration of all its members.

As no ethnic group can claim to be self-sufficient, it will always need the presence of the others to compliment and complete their lives. The image of Church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12) is also applicable in this context – the different ethnic groups are gifts from God to one another; while coming together, shows the beautiful mosaic of humankind in God's creation – people's differences become a source of blessing within the Christian community. Unfortunately the impact of ethnocentrism is often so strong that sometimes people overlook what they have in common or discount that which can unite or reconcile them. As an example, two participants acknowledged respectively that:

*Il faut dire que dans l'Eglise, il arrive que les gens oublient, surtout en cas de problème l'existence de ce concept, jusqu'au moment ou quelqu'un se rappelle et se rend compte que les parties en conflit sont liées par le Mang-Djala et tout change subitement.*

[Sometimes people forget, especially in case of problems, the existence of this concept or until someone remembers and realizes that the conflicting parties are bound by *Mang-Djala* and suddenly everything changes]. And:

*Parfois ces désunions font oublier à certaines personnes qu'elles sont liées par le Mang-Djala avec celui ou celle avec qui elles ont des problèmes. Il faudrait en ce moment là qu'une tierce personne leur rappelle qu'ils sont des Mang-Djala pour qu'ils reprennent leur bon sens.*

[Sometimes these disunions make people forget that they are bound by *Mang-Djala* with the person with whom they have problems. In such a situation a third person is needed to remind them about their *Mang-Djala* partnership for them to regain their common sense]. (The National Bishop assistant and the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship, respectively on 18/06/2011 and 14/04/2011 in Ngaoundéré).

The above statements have two implications. Firstly, ethnicity can cause people to drift apart from human relationships for various reasons. Secondly, this drift may become easy to reverse when an existing and accepted approach such as *Mang-Djala*, which can play the role of what may be referred to as an ethnic conflict break, is used to that end for the benefit of any multi-ethnic community. However, within a Christian community, only the Gospel should regulate its application.

### **5.3 Summary of the views of all the participants on *Mang-Djala***

As stated in the introduction, all the participants' views are to be included so as to have a wide spectrum of the concept of *Mang-Djala*.

#### **5.3.1 The viability of the *Mang-Djala* tradition in Cameroon**

Is *Mang-Djala* still viable as a tradition? If so, in what ways is it viable? How has it changed over time? What has it offered in the past and what does it offer to future contemporary society? In what ways can it be integrated into the church's ministry of reconciliation? These are questions that will be considered in the course of this chapter (sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.10).

According to Handler and Linnekin, tradition "refers to an inherited body of customs and beliefs and that it is a process of interpretation and attributing meaning to the present through making reference to the past" (1984: 273), one might agree with these authors that *Mang-Djala* embodies both continuity and discontinuity, making it viable in spite of the fact that its members may be considered as passive bearers of the tradition for failing to keep it alive and transmitting it to new generations (Goldstein 1971: 62).

Given that the participants in this research have acknowledged that it has become difficult to transmit *Mang-Djala* to new generations, one could almost consider *Mang-Djala* as a redundant tradition. However, in the past few decades, those involved in the practice have been able faithfully to transmit existing values and norms, hence securing its survival. But since then some interruption has occurred in the process of transmission, leading to the loss of some aspects of *Mang-Djala*'s potential. In other words, *Mang-Djala* has greatly declined but has not yet totally vanished so that it has, as it were, to be imaginatively rediscovered or reinvented.

As far as *Mang-Djala* is concerned, it might be possible to recollect and revive those important aspects that seem to have weakened but that are needed to harness the potential of *Mang-Djala*, as this study suggests, for promoting human relationships within the unity of the Church. In any tradition, there is always that which is believed to be the unchanging essential core (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 274) that keeps the flame of tradition burning. Hence, one must agree with Noyes, who points out that:

Tradition is thought inevitably to decline as modernity rises; both cannot occupy a common space. Within modernity, isolated traditions can be identified as relics or survivals signalling the distance of the present from a lost life world... Traditions cannot be

allowed to die because they are the spirit of the people. Rather they must be restored from their fragmentary form among the peasantry to an integrated modern form (2009: 240).

In this regard, Noyes is advocating a kind of ‘recycling’ of declined traditions whereby they may be allocated new forms and functions within their frame of existence in an attempt to rejuvenate them because they are of great value in keeping the communities in mutual relations (see Appiah 2005:121). The foregoing has been reinforced by Appiah, wherein he says, “some unfortunates are possessors of decayed cultures ... and efforts are necessary to be made in trying to rejuvenate them” (2005: 121). According to this understanding, if cultures are to maintain their genuineness, they are to be protected and preserved so as to avoid them decaying; because rejuvenating them may end up losing some of their essential aspects. However, if they had not been adequately cared for, rejuvenating them will always be necessary. Appiah’s esteem for culture is so high that he qualifies it as a primary and social good (2005: 120-130).

This acts as an encouragement to take seriously the *Mang-Djala* tradition in order to appropriate its potentialities in the transmission of the Gospel. In this regard, in relying on the assertions of the participants, one can only hope that *Mang-Djala* can be revitalised, based on some of the following observations.

*Mang-Djala* can be likened to a game that is played between two or three ethnic groups; it creates love and enthusiasm when these different ethnic groups meet. (the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship, Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011).

Where there is mourning, *Mang-Djala* brings real comfort to the bereaved family. (Mrs Atta Djoulde, Ngaoundéré 26/06/2011 )

*Mang-Djala* destroys evil at its root, that is, prohibits that which can harm human life; it is much more a question of humanism taking on another form. (Reverend Jean Baiguele, Yaoundé 24/06/2011).

*Mang-Djala* helps people to transcend their differences by relativizing the conflict through comedy. There is an element in *Mang-Djala* that is a subtle form of satire because when people laugh at themselves and especially at those things that divide them from others, they are enabled to transcend them. They no longer have the destructive force that they previously had. The sting is taken out of them. Further exploration on the aspect of comedy will be made under 6.3.9.

Although not limited to these views, some of these elements are currently being applied by those involved in the practice. One may therefore affirm that there still exists rudiments of the *Mang-Djala* concept that assist the inactive bearers of the tradition (as mentioned earlier in page 126 paragraph 3) to identify one another as such, in spite of the considerable changes which have taken place. These rudiments need to be rescued in order to prevent the concept from becoming defunct. The hope of achieving this revival lies in the support apparent in the statements made by the participants, that the concept is trustworthy. As evident from chapter four, the concept is believed to be a God-given approach to a peaceful communal life. Judging from the above statements one may well ask whether *Mang-Djala* could become a cultural resource for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

It is worth mentioning that, according to Cornejo:

Something is a ‘resource’ when it is part of a purposeful action performed by somebody. This is a consequence of the fact that every use of a cultural resource is an action, that is, something done with intention. [Going further], we understand that something is a resource because we recognize that it is proximal in relation to distal knowledge, which acts as a goal for action (2010: 64-65, 68).

Taking this statement as a point of reference, this chapter will now explore the concept of *Mang-Djala* as a cultural resource under the following headings: *Mang-Djala* and the sense of equality; *Mang-Djala* as a *social belt of life*; the role of *Mang-Djala* in grief and death; the function of *Mang-Djala* in deconstructing boundaries; *Mang-Djala* as the mediator of religious differences; honesty and the *Mang-Djala* partnerships; the use of humour/comedy in *Mang-Djala* relationships; *Mang-Djala* as an agent of reconciliation; *Mang-Djala* as reflective of covenant.

### **5.3.2 *Mang-Djala* and equality**

One of the elements that dominate the practice of *Mang-Djala* is its demand for equality. The account of Atta Djoulde in the previous chapter reinforces this. In the process of reconciliation that was mediated by Atta Djoulde and her aunt, in favour of the uncle against his nephew who were in conflict, something unusual occurred when she knelt to plead for forgiveness in favour of the nephew. The uncle did not accept her kneeling because in doing so, she was breaking the *Mang-Djala* rule of equality. In this regard, many of the participants affirm that in *Mang-Djala* there is no difference between men, women and children, which upholds the virtue of human dignity and equality. Ordinarily, kneeling is expected from the

offender who begs or seeks forgiveness. The gesture of kneeling is a sign of submission which expresses the guilt and humiliation of the guilty *vis-à-vis* the offended. Particularly in the African context where the notion of respect of youngsters towards the elders is so strong, it would have been ridiculous to see the uncle rebuking a person kneeling for forgiveness if not for the mediation brought about through the *Mang-Djala* partnership. Hence, forgiveness in the context of *Mang-Djala* may be seen as a gracious forgiveness where the guilty receives an undeserved forgiveness. One can approach this understanding from the Biblical account of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), where the father refused to recognise the gesture of humiliation from the son who was seeking forgiveness, asserting that the very return of the son was a sufficient gesture of reconciliation. This theological aspect of *Mang-Djala* will be addressed more fully in chapter seven.

From the perspective of forgiveness, *Mang-Djala* may appear to be in conflict with human logic, but also in ethnic circles people desire power and domination to gain the respect or submission of others, whereas *Mang-Djala* espouses the contrary.

### **5.3.3 The relevance of *Mang-Djala*: some parameters**

Given the esteem which the *Mang-Djala* partners ascribe to this concept, there is the possibility of unduly romanticising it. Hence, to what extent could *Mang-Djala* be deemed relevant in our contemporary society? This issue will now be discussed.

A lifetime of peaceful co-existence, friendship and harmony between the members may be viewed as the quintessence of *Mang-Djala*. This is what justifies the signing of the ‘pact of non-treason’ – an indissoluble pact which the members have to observe for the purpose of preserving peace; the members are under obligation to faithfully adhere to the terms and conditions of the pact. When one takes cognisance of the many views held by the members of ELCC on the relevance of the *Mang-Djala* concept, they appear to overemphasise its importance. This may be due to their experiences of the concept. The participants have stated repeatedly that *Mang-Djala* is the result of divine inspiration and that those who have no *Mang-Djala* partner would not enjoy a life of fulfilment. Or again; in the past, life was not possible without *Mang-Djala*. (focus group discussion Chamba, Pere, Mbum, Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012) as if it was compulsory for everyone to have a *Mang-Djala* partnership in order to exist.

The description of *Mang-Djala* as the pillar of unity, encounter and reconciliation (Rev. Baiguele, Yaoundé 24/06/2011) as presented in chapter four, is proof that it once played an

important role in Cameroonian society since its pivotal role was to eradicate all ethnic rivalry between the partners in this relationship – that is, to banish that which is prejudicial to human life, such as ethnic conflict, by promoting friendship and harmony.

In this regard, the concept tries to portray a vision of the world whereby those who are healthy and strong care about those who are sick and weak. Those who are well fed should care for those who lack food and are hungry. Those who are offended receive an apology from their offenders, keeping their life together in a continuous renewal. In this way it becomes possible to strive towards achieving the same goal as demanded by the tradition. In this regard, one may dare say that *Mang-Djala* has “renegotiated the boundaries of ethnic identity” (Hellerman 2007: 304) by drawing different peoples together, and by so doing has broken the sting of inter-ethnic conflict in the sense that there is a constant potential for managing misunderstandings and conflict (forgiveness and reconciliation) whenever they arise. *Mang-Djala* also provides a kind of code of conduct that prevents people from being intolerant and violent *vis-à-vis* their partners. Hence *Mang-Djala* is a foreshadowing of what Christian community is meant to be.

In essence, *Mang-Djala* is a shared lifetime adventure where people are interlinked for better or worse, as stressed by one of the traditional rulers. People live as a community engaging in a journey by confronting the same obstacles in order to reach the same ending (traditional ruler of Nghanhah and six notables, 27/12/2010), which is in line with the idea of Bosch who advocates for “the rediscovery of the Church as the Body of Christ and of the mission as building a community of those who share a common destiny” (1991: 362). During that on-going journey, sometimes in the midst of anguish, humour constitutes one of the important aspects of the concept that revives, maintains and consolidates the existing friendship between the members (focus group discussion Mbum, Pere, Chamba, Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012).

One of the limitations inherent in the concept of *Mang-Djala* is the danger that it will be abused by people for their own hidden agendas, even at the expense of the entire community. Some may unite in the name of *Mang-Djala* purely to dominate and to take control of the Church. This is not desirable if the Church is to benefit from the concept. Yet, even in its initial conception, *Mang-Djala* functioned in a closed environment, since it included specific members without providing any opportunity for an outsider to join.



Besides the fact that people have overestimated its importance, they may also have created a biased assessment of the concept. When questioned on the negative aspects of *Mang-Djala*, only two participants were able to identify some flaws. These were identified as the undermining of problems between the partners in case of serious issues (which was qualified as cheap reconciliation elsewhere in the chapter); and the fact that members should not oppose their partners in the name of *Mang-Djala*, which, in the context of the Church, could constitute a hindrance to the growth of the community.

If *Mang-Djala* has to play its role efficiently and achieve its goal, this being the well-being and harmony of all the members, the act of chastising should be fully integrated into its agenda, and not just to appease the wrongdoer in the name of love. This type of love is modelled on ‘cheap grace’ which according to Bonhoeffer (1959) is a kind of grace that overlooks sin and oversimplifies evil. As expressed in Bonhoeffer’s own words, “ ‘cheap grace’ is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession etc...” (1959: 36). This is a real deviance, given that the vision of the concept is to bring each of its members the experience of the the abundance of life.

Nevertheless, *Mang-Djala* reflects values created by humans and it would be overly ambitious to view it as infallible. A good example of this can be seen in its initial selectivity, where it presented an exclusive group with no provision made for the integration of an outsider. Hence, if the concept is not perfect in itself, undesirable aspects would obviously have to be modified if it were to become a metaphor for communicating the Gospel for the sake of evangelisation. This is because *Mang-Djala* is a human construction. It is also where, in Niebuhr’s book ‘*Christ and Culture*’ (1975), the conversionist motif becomes relevant and necessary. This motif is discussed in the next chapter on the dynamic of Gospel and culture.

Before moving on to a discussion on the implementation of *Mang-Djala* and for the sake of a better understanding, the hidden power that makes it esteemed and appreciated will be identified and discussed.

#### **5.3.4 *Mang-Djala* as a “social belt of life”**

*Mang-Djala* creates solidarity between people to depend and to rely on one another permanently. This makes the concept a vital asset and indispensable for true partnership. It throws light on the limitations of the human being in the sense that it demonstrates that no one is sufficient unto oneself, nor is any ethnic community independent from the rest of the

world. Whether it concerns a single person or a group, human beings are part of humankind as a whole and will always depend on one another. Therefore, one lives surrounded by others, hence always in relation with others.

According to Kaufmann in *I and Thou* Martin Buber, it is unthinkable to live a non-relational life, whether with one's fellow human beings or things, terming his theory as basic word pairs: I-You and I-It (1970: 33-34). In support of this, Charles Taylor states: "one is self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it" (1989: 35). As Luc Adamou, one of the participants puts it: "*Personne ne vit pour lui-même, ou isolé, on vit toujours en compagnie des autres*". [No one lives for himself or in isolation; one always lives in the company of others] (Luc Adamou, Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011). This has been highlighted by Benezet Bujo (cited in chapter three) who states that being human depends on one's fellowship with others. In order to make this fellowship possible, a strong and favourable framework is needed. That is what *Mang-Djala* is meant to be.

*Mang-Djala* is more than just an ideology; it provides a framework where people come together in practical expression of their fellowship. During this field work the verb "bind" was commonly used to express how people converged around the concept of *Mang-Djala* in order to improve the quality of life for themselves. As stated by Mohamadou Mvouen Vincent, a traditional ruler of Ngatti: "*Les gens mènent une vie d'interdépendance*" (people live an interdependent life" (Conversation on the 27/03/2011 in Mbella Assom). Practically, *Mang-Djala* has placed people on the same path for a united journey through life, facing difficulties, enduring hardship and celebrating successes and joyful occurrences together. The term 'social belt of life' highlights the pragmatic aspect of the concept, because *Mang-Djala* is meant to be functioning in all of one's actions. Because it originates from a sealed pact, *Mang-Djala* was from inception never a vague concept. It had specific objectives to achieve which included the overcoming of enmity between people and groups. Some of those specific objectives are: friendship, love and mutuality. In short, it helps to cultivate the spirit of social cohesion among the members.

The process of moving together towards the same destiny makes the concept dynamic and effective; it implies that one is, in one way or another, concretely taking part in the life of a fellow partner. This is the essence of the concept. *Mang-Djala* is a culture; it is unique and has its own specificity which constitutes its intrinsic value. *Mang-Djala* by definition is not

confined to the limited ethnic framework that defines culture. Rather, it transcends ethnic boundaries to create space on a large scale where one's sorrows and joys become the concern of one's fellow beings.

This reinforces the earlier assertion that "those who do not have *Mang-Djala* partners could not live a happy life" (Focus group discussions Gbaya, Ngambay, Dii, Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011 in). The concern facing one here is how to contribute efficiently and effectively to a problematic situation faced by a partner. Once that concern is no longer central and the virtue of acting for the benefit of the partner falls away, the value of the concept ceases to exist.

Besides, *Mang-Djala* as Reverend Baiguélé observed, is healing an evil from the root (Yaoundé 24/06/2011). In this sense, *Mang-Djala* acts to prevent bad things from happening. It prevents people from selfishness, exploiting each other, it prevents people against hatred, but more importantly, it is a prepared ground to bring people together anew whenever this pre-emptive rule is broken.

### **5.3.5 The role of *Mang-Djala* in grief and death**

In times of extremity such as sorrow, anguish, affliction and anxiety the presence and the assistance of the partners were compulsory. Sometimes members tried to alleviate the adverse circumstances by introducing some form of humour into the situation – for example, the descending of the *Mang-Djala* partner into the grave to claim provisions or money from the deceased family to organise the funeral as described in the preceding chapters.

In the accounts of Luc Adamou and Badomo presented in chapter five, it appears that currently *Mang-Djala* is functioning, albeit in an informal manner, among Christians *Mang-Djala* partners who are practising it without the official consent of the Church (Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011 and 23/05/2011 in). That is, within the Church, the relationship between the Christians who are *Mang-Djala* partners in time of sorrow is stronger than between those who are not, and may be seen as another form of exclusion by those who are unfamiliar with the concept, who may also feel suspicious about it. In other word, some members are aware of the beneficial effects of the concept.

Thus, *Mang-Djala* partners in times of sorrow intervene holistically – they provide their presence for moral support and their goods for material assistance that may help the bereaved to overcome their sorrow and expedite healing. The role of *Mang-Djala* in these

circumstances is to present the banal side of death. Death is an integral part of human life. Once the relatives of the deceased accept this, they are able to regain some of their erstwhile enjoyment in life. In the course of assistance offered by partners during funerals, some may imitate the deceased and show how he/se wore his/her clothes, how he/she walked, how he/she spoke, how he/she used to laugh, and so on (Reverend Jean Baiguele Yaoundé 24/06/2011), which is commonly referred to as the joking part of the concept.

However, in the African context, this practice may have a more profound meaning. It may not only provide humour for the sake of consoling the bereaved. It may be the expression of the immortality of the deceased that is part of African belief. The Senegalese poet Birago Diop expressed this African belief on the immortality of the deceased in a poem entitled “Spirits”<sup>45</sup>, as follows:

Those who are dead are not ever gone...

They are in the hut, they are in the crowd:

The dead are not dead...

And again:

To the bush that is sighing:

This is the breathing of ancestors,

Who have not gone away.

Who are not under earth.

Who are not really dead.

Those who are dead are not ever gone...

Therefore, the comedic interludes during funerals, such as mimicking the deceased could be a metaphor that represents a profound understanding of the deceased’s continuous presence. One should question the religious dimension in the concept only if this has been part of the original significance of the practice. It may also function as an acknowledgment of the importance of the deceased within that community, who will always be remembered.

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<sup>45</sup> Birago Diop: “Spirits” <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/poetry-throw-down-conscious-spoken-word/7137-dead-not-dead.html> Accessed on 08/03/2012

This creates a space for people within which they can express their pain through tears and laughter. In the focus group that united the Mbum, Pere and Chamba, it was agreed that during funerals where no *Mang-Djala* partners are present, tears will never dry in the eyes of the bereaved. (Focus group discussion Chamba, Pere, Mbum, Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012).

This statement is supported by Reverend Etienne Bakary who observed that in the case of a funeral, the presence of a *Mang-Djala* partner diminishes the burden of pain. (Gadjiwan 31/12/2011). His assertion is supported by Dieudonné Debah who added that the functioning of *Mang-Djala* during funerals stresses that a period of mourning is a natural part of human existence (Ngaoundéré 24/01/2012 i). Given these statements, one may also believe that by imitating the deceased, actors may want to prove to the family how close they felt to him/her and at the same time reaffirm their friendship and solidarity with the family.

Reverend Pierre Ngnitchefe has made a statement that confirms the above analysis by saying that “the concept of *Mang-Djala* binds us, the Kwanja, the Mambila and the Waawa, and has made us to stay one people though different” (Yaoundé 24/06/2011).

‘To stay one people’ alludes to what was referred to earlier as the ‘*social belt of life*’. It suggests the ability to look upon one’s partner as oneself. Dieudonné Debah who discovered *Mang-Djala* as an outsider, asserts that *Mang-Djala* denotes the merging of different people and creates a point of encounter which facilitates the *rapprochement* of groups. He concludes by stating that: “whatever else is established, getting people to transcend their ego, that is to rise beyond their self-interest in order to accept others, is the most important thing in human life; and this the practice of *Mang-Djala* provides”. (Ngaoundéré 24/01/2012).

### **5.3.6 The function of *Mang-Djala* in deconstructing boundaries and recasting identities.**

According to the former president of the Church, Reverend Songsare Amte Pierre, the fact that *Mang-Djala* can connect people from different countries makes it a “boundary breaker” (Yaoundé 19/09/2010). He also observes that: “this notion is shared by the Mbum and the Laka in Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic, as well as the Gbaya in Cameroon and the Central African Republic. In addition, in the north Cameroon the Pere are in partnership with both the Chamba and the Bata who are both domiciled in Cameroon and Nigeria” (Yaoundé 19/09/2010).

Consequently, this linking of people from different regions is in contradiction to the Berlin Conference which in 1884 decided to arbitrarily draw borders through Africa, separating

people who were from the same background and shared the same history. In this regard, Kamaara states:

The traditional worldview was especially disrupted by the scramble for Africa, the consequent partition of the continent in the process of colonisation, and the attendant process of civilising and Christianising the native. The famous Berlin conference (1884-5) which came up with... The decision made in Berlin, many miles away from Africa with no representation of Africans, provides the background to the current situation in Africa (2010: 131).

In the light of this statement, one may argue that in deterring the colonisers from dispossessing Africans of their identity, the power of *Mang-Djala* quietly defied the power of colonialism in the sense that the partners continuously remained bound beyond their boundaries, both physically and ethnically, finding ways of sharing their lives.

One might therefore conclude that, to some extent, the colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ destroyed the African mobilising strengths centred on some principles and concepts such as *Mang-Djala*. In the process of that policy, the *Mang-Djala* principle of *living together*, as discussed in chapter three, may have been progressively weakened until its decline. In this process, the concept shared by ethnic groups in neighbouring countries such as Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and the Central African Republic and which is said to have had a ‘*universal*’ character (Rev. Songsare Amtse Pierre, Yaoundé 19/09/2010), may have lost most of its efficacy.

However, the concept is still used to preserve a peaceful co-existence of groups sharing the same boundaries. The Ardo, (traditional ruler) of Balkossa who is in a *Mang-Djala* partnership with the Bata, reported that whenever a Chamba and a Bata meet, they are not concerned about each other’s citizenship. As mentioned earlier, this participant also asserted that the Pere and the Chamba, because of their solidarity, are like ‘*skin and flesh*’ that can only be separated with a knife (Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012).

Hence, true *Mang-Djala* partners can only be assessed on the basis of their actions towards one another. Yet, reflecting on this, one wonders if forming such partnerships was not also a way of pointing a finger at those who created boundaries between people who have always coexisted together. Unfortunately, this issue of the Church could not be discussed with this participant because he is a Muslim. Interestingly, when I met him, he was with his partner, a Pere who is a Christian. They were amazingly close, chatting, laughing and sympathising with each other, showing that *Mang-Djala* can also cut through religious differences.

### **5.3.7 *Mang-Djala* as a transcendent factor in religious differences**

Another remarkable aspect of *Mang-Djala* is its unprejudiced stance towards the different religions – Christians, Muslims and traditionalists are all in partnership as far as *Mang-Djala* is concerned. As a matter of fact some of the participants, particularly the traditional rulers, were Muslims and seemed unconcerned about the religious affiliations of the other participants. *Mang-Djala* partners co-exist in a way that one can hardly notice religious differences in the partnership. Therefore, although Cameroon is not facing religious contention, *Mang-Djala* may help to reinforce and perpetuate this peaceful co-existence.

When one refers to the statement of the Ardo, Hamadou Yougouda, mentioned earlier (Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012), that *Mang-Djala* partners are like ‘the skin and the flesh’ and one understands what it means, one can also understand that the concept remains a potential means to be used in many other domains where religious differences have created divisions between the members. In other words, in this relationship, one could approach one’s partner without questioning religious issues that may prevent opening up to one another. Hence, in the same way the concept is capable of breaking social boundaries between the members, it is also capable of breaking religious boundaries. What is needed at this level is a new impetus that will lead to interfaith dialogue.

### **5.3.8 Honesty and the *Mang-Djala* partnership**

Honesty between partners makes it possible to develop and advance together in a relationship. This is the most important characteristic of the concept. During the interviews the participants emphasised the central importance of honesty between *Mang-Djala* partners, irrespective of whether the truth was pleasing or not. As long as the truth is revealed for the sake of the well-being of the individual or the community, it promotes an enduring loyalty in the partnership.

Hence, partners are not afraid of being honest with any member seen as a wrongdoer. Partners are also responsible for addressing the *Mang-Djala* community when necessary. For example, Jean Mgbatoussong of the Ngambe Tikar chieftaincy observes: “*puisque le Mang-Djala a la possibilité de dire la vérité sans avoir peur, il peut user de cette latitude pour dire la vérité à une communauté Chrétienne en dénonçant leur mauvaise manière de faire, parce que le Mang-Djala peut même insulter quand c’est nécessaire*”. [Since any *Mang-Djala* partner has this possibility to tell the truth without fear, he can also use this freedom to tell the truth to a Christian community, because the *Mang-Djala* partners may even insult one another if necessary]. (Ngambe Tikar 03/12/2011).

On the other hand, he also articulates the fundamental role of the *Mang-Djala* partner which is to watch over his partner and partner-communities. One of the most important roles of the *Mang-Djala* partnership is to act as a sentry for each other. This is to say partners are like bodyguards or security guards to one another in the sense that each member has the responsibility to watch over his partner's safety and to alert him of anything undesirable that may happen to him. In so doing they create a cohesive process for monitoring the safety of the *Mang-Djala* adherents. This opinion is demonstrated in the accounts of some of the participants (the National Bishop and Atta Djoulde: Ngaoundéré 28/05/2011 and 22/06/2011) in chapter three. Everyone in the partnership is entitled to receive and to provide protection. For example, Atta Djoulde's account on reconciliation (see chapter five) shows how the family is protected from conflict.

'The language of *Mang-Djala*' as expressed by the National Director of Women for Christ Fellowship (Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011 in) becomes important and relevant. The 'language of *Mang-Djala*' refers to the fact that a *Mang-Djala* partner has the right to speak out against whomsoever if necessary in order to restore the peace. This harks back to the words of the Bible that "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4: 18a. NRSV). It is impossible to avoid conflict, but by design *Mang-Djala* is able to facilitate the reconciliation of people in conflict, because the goal is to reach a mutual understanding on disputed matters. In this regard, the focus groups of the Chamba, Pere and Mbum affirm the following:

*En cas de querelle ou de bagarre entre les Mang-Djala, dès que l'autre Mang-Djala apparait, il s'en prend a tout le monde, insulte tout le monde pour leur dire qu'ils sont insensés, qu'ils ne sont pas civilisés, que la bagarre c'est pour les animaux etc... et les tensions vont commencer a baisser.*

[In case of a fight or a quarrel between the partners, as soon as another partner appears, he attacks everyone, insults everyone telling them they are madmen/women that they are not civilised, that fighting is for animals etc.... and the tensions will start slowing down]. (Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012). This means in such a case, any of the partners, however insignificant, is allowed to "attack" the conflicting partners verbally and scold them for behaving like animals, in order to bring about reconciliation and re-establish friendship.



### 5.3.9 The use of humour in *Mang-Djala* relationships

In a fascinating article entitled ‘Laughing through tears: the redemptive role of humour in a fallen world’, Thoennes declares:

I have seen clearly in my life that the ability to laugh is one of God's greatest gifts for coping with the difficulty of life in a fallen world. For as long as I can remember, a sense of humor grounded in the knowledge that God loves me has often provided needed perspective and peace. Being able to laugh, especially in the face of hard times, and having the ability to make others laugh, have been among the greatest blessings of God in my life. So, my interest in humor is far more than just academic. And I hope yours is too (2007: 72)

Doubtless, whosoever discovers the importance of the role played by humour in human relationships could only align themselves with Thoennes, including the *Mang-Djala* partners. Hence humour is an important part of the *Mang-Djala* concept which can be understood as a consensual culture that countenances humour. This provides *Mang-Djala* with a particular character which separates it from other cultures. Humour is currently the most evident aspect of the surviving elements of *Mang-Djala*. It gives expression to the existence of a trustful, truthful and fruitful relationship between members and manifests the presence of the cardinal virtues of peace, joy and mutual understanding. Humour is an appropriate mode of exteriorising one's mood. According to Bergson “laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification. It expresses an individual or collective imperfection which calls for an immediate corrective” (1921: 8, 88).

In this regard, *Mang-Djala* partners, be they individual or collective, laugh at lazy people. An ethnic group can laugh at other ethnic group *Mang-Djala* partners when they do not perform well in producing enough crops for their community. In such a case, even a young person can tell an older person who is his *Mang-Djala* partner to come to him or to his house to fetch crops to feed his family, by telling him that his people are lazy and are not able to feed their families properly. Sometimes a *Mang-Djala* partner can address his *Mang-Djala* partner who may be a traditional ruler by saying that his community is full of lazy people because of their inability to produce sufficient food products for their families, which by extension implicate the ruler is lazy too and he will feel disgrace. This in fact will galvanise those people for the next agricultural season. In this way, teasing the partners calls for an immediate corrective action that promotes the importance of work. Biblically, laziness is deemed as bad behaviour and even a sin (1 Thessalonians 3: 10-12) and this practice in *Mang-Djala* seems to reveal this

truth. From this point of view, one can develop a theology of work from a *Mang-Djala* perspective.

In this regard, Arun observes that:

[Humour] relieves tension; prepares the way to reform; exaggerates to relieve tension; acts as a check to one-sided view; contrasts between the real and the ideal; helps to rise above selfish interests; champions the cause of ‘common sense’; fosters humility by showing the other side of life (2003: 159).

[Going further] Humour has a social function. It can only ‘occur’ among fellow beings, in a group. A social interactivity it relates play with rehearsal – it has originality in its being spontaneous or as an extempore reaction; defuses potential conflict; promotes aggressive exclusivism of people or group by refusing to take them seriously by ridicule or mockery (2003: 160).

In this sense, laughter can be used to criticise, to reprimand, to appreciate or to express one’s feeling of joy. Berger affirms this view: “people laugh to get over moments of social awkwardness, to indicate deference or to give evidence that the moment is amicable” (1997: 39). Laughter is a mode of absorbing distressing or sorrowful occasions such as bereavement without becoming too distressed, or to celebrate human dignity.

One may conclude that those who created the concept of *Mang-Djala* were motivated by thoughts along those lines. However, in Africa humour generally symbolises friendship and harmony. On a deeper level humour it is used to exhibit the subjection of the people before Yahweh. As Fleming observes:

[T]he humour of the ancient Israelites victimized somebody, whether the images of the neighbouring peoples, whose powerlessness before Yahweh was found ridiculous, or the neighbouring peoples themselves, whose strange names and odd appearance amused them (Gen. 25:25), or enemies who got the worst of it before the popular heroes (1962: 150-151).

In this manner, the prophet Hosea used satire to criticise his audience (Hosea 7:3-8). However, telling someone the truth using humour may not always succeed because he/she may think that the joke is just that: a joke. But in the case of *Mang-Djala*, joking has entered into the minds and behaviour of people. It has become an integral part of the tradition. It is recognized as a sociable way of conveying the truth and it is understood as such.

According to Mgbatoussong, ordinarily a *Mang-Djala* partner is free to address partners in a jocular manner. Through teasing he exposes the negative or undesirable behaviour. He is

allowed to insult them where necessary (Ngaoundéré 07/05/2011 and Ngambe Tikar 03/12/2011 in), which may be viewed in the same vein as the example of the ancient Israelites, as indicated earlier.

According to Berger, humour can be used to attack - this is when humour becomes satire because it exposes human stupidity and is defined by Berger as: “most often the attack is directed against institutions and their representatives, notably political or religious ones. It may also be directed against entire social groups and their cultures – say, against the bourgeoisie and its mores”. (1997:157).

This understanding is different from that which is portrayed by the *Mang-Djala* purpose of humour, because it is restricted to the *Mang-Djala* partnership. Nevertheless, even in this partnership, if the circumstances are serious, it would be wise to carefully select a way of approaching the problem to ensure its efficacy. It may be with this idea in mind that Madden asserts:

Participants in joking relationships need to be skilful, sensitive and aware of the limits of acceptable behaviour. Humour can be a means of injuring or ridiculing others. It is a very powerful aspect of human interaction and needs to be handled with care (1986: 197).

Yet, according to Andre Hohi, in everyday life joking is mostly used to cement the on-going relationship between the members. It maintains and revives such a relationship but, above all, it helps to perpetuate the practice (Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012). In other words, jokes reinforce the existing intimacy between the members. This may be one of the reasons why, although the concept has greatly declined, the aspect of joking remains active.

Joking during funerals allows the mourners at the graveside to burst into laughter instead of weeping. Tensions are suddenly broken and the depressing event is changed into a ‘happy celebration’; the atmosphere of mourning gives way to a less dismal mood. Reverend Baiguele calls it ‘moral healing’. Most remarkable, however, is the following which was related during one of the focus group discussions (focus group discussion Chamba, Pere, Mbum, Ngaoundéré, 27/01/2012 in). For *Mang-Djala* partners, while the body of the deceased is still at home, they can light a fire near the body, saying that he/she is feeling cold and needs a fire to warm up. This is to make light of death, but the message goes deeper. For *Mang-Djala* partners it is a way of minimising the power of death. Death is trivialised

because jokes lessen the gravity of the problem in the minds of the bereaved. Death thus becomes an ordinary phenomenon and is overcome in this way.

In this regard, Madden states that: “humour may be consciously invoked to dissipate anxiety or embarrassment in a difficult area. Joking is not a joke, it is a means to break the ice and to speed up communication on a delicate or alarming matter” (1986: 197). Listening to people describing how *Mang-Djala* partners behave towards the dead, one is struck by the similarity in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians where he seems to be ironical when addressing death and personifying it: “Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15: 55 NRSV). Humour hence possesses profound theological potential. In this regard, Thoenner states:

Christian laughter is the response of those who know God as their father and know that he has overcome the world and that he loves to share abundantly with his children the spoils of his victory. [Moreover,] God is the God of hope who turns our mourning into laughter because he is the God of the Cross – the ultimate answer to the problem of pain. Following Jesus turns pain into glory, confusion into wonder, sin into redemption, and Good Friday into Easter Sunday (2007: 82-83)

Based on this statement, one can assert that humour is a God-given tool to overcome the vicissitudes of human life. Meanwhile, the pre-Christian *Mang-Djala* partners had already in their midst a sown seed of the Gospel of victory. It is therefore understandable while it has been stressed that in the past life was not possible without *Mang-Djala*. In the case of death, it is said that tears never dry and the burden of sorrow never lightens without the presence of *Mang-Djala* partners, because *Mang-Djala* aims to ease the burdens carried by others (focus group discussion Chamba, Pere, Mbum, Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012 in) which constitutes the healing power of *Mang-Djala*. In this regard, Taylor rightly asserts “God gave men and women the capacity for laughter and humor, thus providing a means to demonstrate His healing power in the lives of His creation”<sup>46</sup>.

Although other aspects of *Mang-Djala*, such as its manifestation during the enthronement of traditional rulers or mutual support in the case of farming seem to have disappeared, joking during funerals and on other occasions continue and are most purposefully maintained. This may be due to the fact that deaths are always occurring among people. Seen from the aspect of conflict, death has remained the unceasing enemy of humankind. Therefore, the coming

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<sup>46</sup> [http://ag.org/wim/0805/0805\\_Theology\\_Humor.cfm](http://ag.org/wim/0805/0805_Theology_Humor.cfm). Accessed 06/03/2013

together in order to confront a common challenge in harmony with the *Mang-Djala* principle of ‘living together,’ has become strongly focussed on the challenge posed by death.

### **5.3.10 *Mang-Djala* as an agent of reconciliation**

It is important to begin this section by restating the affirmation of the importance of *Mang-Djala* in reconciliation by the participants’ “*Souvent en cas de conflit, les gens oublient jusqu’au moment où quelqu’un se rend compte que les parties en conflits sont des Mang-Djala et là, une simple solution est trouvée*”. [Often, in a case of conflict, people forget about the concept until the moment when someone realises that the conflicting parties are *Mang-Djala* partners and immediately a simple solution is found]. (the National Assistant of the Bishop, Nagoundere 18/06/2011).

“*Dans la situation conflictuelle actuelle de l’Eglise, si les Dii et les Laka s’étaient adressés aux Gbaya dans le langage du Mang-Djala qui est très profond, on serait déjà arrivé à une solution pacifique du conflit*” [In the current conflicting situation of the Church if the Dii and the Laka people had addressed themselves to the Gbaya in the *Mang-Djala* language which is very profound, they would already have reached a peaceful solution to the conflict.] (National Ddirector of the Women for Christ Fellowship, Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011 in).

As an example, during the focus group discussion with the Dii, Gbaya, and Laka, Luc Adamou revealed that during the Church conflict of 1999 under the late president Reverend Philemon Barya, the then retired president of the Church; Reverend Paul Darman asked him and the late Mathieu Yaya to re-establish peace in the central region of the Church. They were able to calm the tensions by approaching those in conflict based on the *Mang-Djala* language. (Ngaoundéré 19/06/2011).

### **5.3.11 The notion of covenant in *Mang-Djala***

As stated earlier, according to the legend on its origin, a bloody sacrifice and a declaration of oath were required to perform the sealing of the alliance which constituted the essential part of the process. (See chapters three and five). As Murray quotes from ‘Ursinus’:

A covenant in general signifieth a mutual contract or agreement of two parties joined in the covenant, whereby is made a bond or obligation on certain conditions for the performance of giving or taking something, with addition of outward signs and tokens, for solemn testimony and confirmation that the compact and promise shall be kept inviolable (1954: 3).

It has already been argued that the notion of ‘*living together*’ in *Mang-Djala* entails an alliance between two or three ethnic groups brought together for a common purpose. Hence in practice, *Mang-Djala* may be said to have fulfilled the expectations of that definition. Several reasons drawn from the participants’ responses have led to this assertion and can be summarised as follows: *Mang-Djala* is a pact brought about as a response to endless conflicts and war, materialised by a solemn sacrifice and an oath, in which members must never create problems for their partners, but rather are placed under obligation to contribute to their well-being (all the participants).

From the wording of the *Mang-Djala* covenant such as presented by the national retired president, Reverend Songsare Amtse Pierre, one appreciates the strength and the inviolability of the pact. The wording that accompanies the covenant is as follows: *Ce pacte a été scellé par le sang. Malédiction, maladie, mort sur celui qui verse le sang de l’autre* [This pact is sealed by blood. Curses, sickness and death be with the one who sheds the blood of the partner] (Yaoundé 19/09/2010 in). Hence the *Mang-Djala* covenant constructed a solid relationship between the partners and sheltered them from conflicts and wars. Consequently, the common interest and the principle of living together that underpinned the concept became obvious. *Mang-Djala* played an important role in the relationships of those who were involved in it at the time, but this does not answer the question as to how people currently view its application in the Church and its congregations.

### **5.3.12 Assessing *Mang-Djala***

The aim of this section is to assess the applicability of the *Mang-Djala* concept in the context of the Church. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon there is substantial evidence of appreciation for this concept. Various understandings emerged concerning the theological significance of *Mang-Djala* from the participants: These included the following:

Christ is our *Mang-Djala* in the sense that he unites all ethnic groups in the Church (Reverend Jean Baiguele on the 24/06/2011 and Reverend Emmanuel Ousmanou on the 28/01/2012 in Ngaoundéré). The point about Christ as representing *Mang-Djala* in Christian thought is that it would emphasise the work of Christ in uniting people worldwide and goes much further than *Mang-Djala*, which only brings together a few ethnic groups.

According to Rev. Jean Baiguele, God takes what is “pagan”, appropriates and sanctifies it for the well-being of his people. Hence, Christmas Day was as an example of contextualisation (Yaoundé 24/06/2011 in). According to Goldby and Purdue, Christmas is

the celebration of the unconquered Son's birthday which is celebrated annually on 25 December (1986: 20). Initially Christmas was not a Christian celebration. It has been 'emptied' of its "pagan" content and 'refilled' with a Christian one. In the same manner, the "pagan" practice of *Mang-Djala*, if well appropriated and converted, may help to understand the expectations for a Christian life. To support this truth, Mbiti observes that:

Our culture has its demons, which only the Gospel is equipped to exorcise and disarm. So now, it is the duty of the Church, particularly through its leaders and theologians, to guide our people in getting our culture evaluated, judged and rescued from its demonic powers and sinfulness (1977: 37).

In this regard, Percy, paraphrasing Roll, observes: "it is the Church that has always adapted to culture and the season, by investing these with particular meaning" (2005: 56).

Interestingly, as Reverend Paul Tshell (Songkolong 04/05/2011) and Adamou Luc (Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011) have observed, *Mang-Djala* is currently operating mostly among Christians, suggesting that Christians are aware of its potentiality for the Church. It may have been this awareness that led to the following statements: "God likes to restore unity and peace in our Church, by using this concept" (Reverend Dieudonné Ousmanou, Ngaoundéré 06/05/2011). "*Mang-Djala* is informally operating in the Church, what is needed is to formalize it and make it official" (Reverend Ndoyambe Laonon, the National Director of the Christian Youth Movement, Ngaoundéré 28/01/2012). The concept is already promoting the Bible teaching on Christian fellowship. In other words, in a Christian community, "all become *Mang-Djala* in Jesus Christ" (Reverend Emmanuel Ousmanou, Ngaoundéré 28/01/2012). In view of these assertions, one can affirm that the adaptation model of theology is indispensable for the incarnation of the Gospel within a given Christian community. Adaptation model in the context of African inculturation theology according to Ukpong is an "attempt to give African expression to the Christian faith within a theological framework" (1984: 501).

Given the above statements, one might also suggest that the Church is fertile ground and is prepared to welcome the concept in its 'Christian version'. But the challenge now is that the Church is expanding and is reaching new societies from different locations and new ethnic groups that have been integrated into the Christian communities of the E.L.C.C. One can only speculate how easily they will accommodate this new approach to the Gospel. How would the concept of *Mang-Djala* be made convincing and relevant in the E.E.L.C, particularly in

the face of the more than two hundred other ethnic groups that may be present in the Church when the fighting for power and exclusion is practiced by the very owners of this concept?

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to interpret some of the findings of the research and was divided into two major parts. The first part reflects on the issue of ethnicity, including its manifestations and consequences. Unanimously, the participants affirmed that tribalism is a reality which is haunting the unity of the Church. Several events have been identified by the National Bishop as manifestations of tribalism that have divided the Christian community. There was a general consensus amongst the participants that the ethnic groups have divided themselves into two conflicting groups (majority-minority). The National Director for the Women for Christ Fellowship and Mrs Berdatte Moudga summarised this as the outcome of all the individualistic and selfish claims, and saw it as a consequences of the decline of African values such as *Mang-Djala* (Betare Oya 07/05/2012). All the participants are of the view that tribalism is brought about by fighting for power and control in the Church. Hence, tribalism manifests itself most clearly when there is struggle for power and position in the church.

With regard to the responsibility of the missionaries on the issue of tribalism in the Church, it appeared to play a role although there was disagreement on the extent. Although most of the participants have pointed to the missionaries as being partly responsible for the development of tribalism in the Church, Reverend Dieudonné Oussoumanou and Reverend Joseph Bue do not share this view, arguing that the presence of the two missions has been a blessing. It is rather the people themselves who could not make good use of their legacy.

With regard to *Mang-Djala*, as it has been stated earlier, although the concept has greatly declined, that it might be possible to recollect and revive those important aspects that seem to have weakened but that are needed to harness *Mang-Djala*, as this study suggests, for promoting human relationships within the unity of the Church. As emphasised by most of the participants, *Mang-Djala* can still play a significant role, because “it promotes love, peace and joy”. (the Director of Women for Christ Fellowship: Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011). “I think God established the practise so that people should live with one another” (Luc Adamou: Ngaoundéré 23/04/2011). “It is like jokes that God has granted to people” (Mrs. Atta Djoulde: Ngaoundéré 22/06/2011). “Within the Christian community, all become *Mang-Djala* in Christ” (Reverend Emmanuel Ousmanou: Ngaoundéré 28/01/2012) and so forth.



Other positive aspects that have emerged from this analysis are:

- *Mang-Djala* draws people together to sustain and protect one another and encourages them to move in the same direction.
- *Mang-Djala* forbids the harming of one's partner.
- *Mang-Djala* promotes love and enthusiasm for a shared goal between the members.
- *Mang-Djala* is a game (joking) which rebuilds and reinforces human relationships.
- *Mang-Djala* is a prepared ground for reconciliation in case of conflict.

Having exposed the burden of ethnicity and the need for reconciliation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon, could *Mang-Djala* provide an added value to the African ecclesiology of unity? This question will constitute the central argument in chapter seven.

## **Chapter Six: Mang-Djala as social contract and as covenant: Resonances with a secular and a religious theme**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The thesis so far has given a brief historical background to the church in Cameroon; attempted to describe the concept and practice of *Mang-Djala* in Cameroonian society in terms of its origins, objectives, and manifestations; presented the empirical findings of the study which were the various understandings of the practice from a range of informants in the Cameroonina church and society; and attempted to analyse and interpret these findings. This chapter will attempt to interpret the phenomenon of *Mang-Djala* in terms of two major analogies, one secular and one religious. These are the concepts of social contract and of covenant. The task will be to analyse each concept respectively and compare them with *Mang-Djala* in order to throw more light on the meaning and significance of *Mang-Djala*. The purpose of this is to contextualize the concept by drawing some parallels with other better known concepts in secular and religious discourse.

### **6.2 The principle of social contract and its resonance with *Mang-Djala***

One of the great motivations of developing the social contract theory is the quest for social order whereby the right of everyone can be protected – the society organised in a way that everyone can freely move without any threat from his fellow human being. In order to achieve this desire, all the members should actively participate in the process. As quoted by Weber from Kant, “only the unanimous will of everyone whereby each decides the same for all and all decide the same for each – the general united will of people – can legislate” (2009: 6). Given this understanding of the term ‘social’, it is possible to establish some analogy with the concept of *Mang-Djala*. Mittleman has this to say about the social contract:

The idea of a social contract goes back as far as Plato’s Republic (2006: 48). A social contract is premised on the idea that people naturally would like to commit injustice toward each another without having to pay the price for it. But because they typically do have to pay a price, they decide “to set down a compact among themselves neither to do injustice nor to suffer it (2006: 48).

In other words, a social contract results from peoples’ awareness that they are inclined to evil and everyone wants to dominate. At the same time they do not want to accept becoming a victim of injustice from their fellow human creatures and thus develop the idea of a social contract.

The philosophy of the social contract therefore recognises the corrupt nature of humankind that prevents people from doing good works due to their predilection for evil, and attempts to address this weakness in a humanist way. Viewed from this perspective, the philosophy of *Mang-Djala* is closely related to the philosophy of the social contract, in the sense that it attempts to restore the fragmented human society to its basic state – the state of innocence that is before the depravity of humankind, by using exclusively human reason and wisdom.

### **6.3 Yearning for social life: the social contract theory and the concept of *Mang-Djala*<sup>47</sup>**

While one glances through the promoters of the social contract theory, what appears in their advocacy for this theory is that the lack of an organised society is a hindrance to human welfare. Hobbes (1651) expresses this in terms of a state of war, which is the inability of human beings to strive for peace and which he bitterly laments. ,

[I]f any two [people] desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and the way to their end, which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only, endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another... If one plants, sows, builds, or possesses a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossess, and deprive him, not only of the fruits of his labour, but also of his life, or liberty (1651: 142).

Jessop, (1960) commenting on Hobbes in this regard maintains that: “everyone acts solely for himself, dominated by the passion for self-preservation... (1960: 19). This type of life is dominated by what one may refer to as ‘the law of the jungle’; where the weak cannot stand before the strong, but rather must bow for survival. It is a life without any rule of conduct that ensures safety and security for everyone. This rule of conduct is the greatest virtue that the social contract attempts to promote under the law that is used to create order within a given society. Such law is “a supreme authority and power” (1960: 21) under which people can live together, without infringing on the rights of others.

The argument the study seeks to underline is that the social contract is an attempt to harmonise the deficiency of justice and dignity in human existence that are causing the disintegration of our society. In other words, the social contract is an attempt to formulate an ideal that can stimulate a well-structured world that provides everyone with an opportunity to

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<sup>47</sup> It could be argued that using a foreign concept such as the social contract to explicate an indigenous concept such as *Mang-Djala* is not well advised. However it is appropriate in the light of the fact that social analysis is one of the prime tools used in this thesis.

blossom, while living in the company of his fellow human beings; it constitutes an effort to create an environment that is propitious and worthy of human lives. Gibbard, (2008) feels optimistic while he expresses this vision of life by dreaming of a rational world, arguing that “the ideal social contract [is] the way of living together that no one could reasonably reject” (2008: 63). The aim of the social contract theory is to give an opportunity to everyone to become an indispensable link that fits within a given structure or system.

The social contract can obviously be favourably compared with the description that the researcher has given *Mang-Djala*, namely as a *social belt of life* (see page 131). *Mang-Djala* is to do with living together in spite of the forces that attempt to tear people apart, in this case ethnic conflict, by – a life whereby each member is an important and indispensable link in the system. Described as the *social belt of life*, the concept of *Mang-Djala* is an expression or a longing for the kind of life which strives for an ideal existence which, as expressed by Gibbard cited earlier, no one could reasonably reject.

Therefore, both the social contract theory and the concept of *Mang-Djala* can be thought of as advocating for a social good, in relation to people’s culture. Culture in this context is defined according to Taylor’s understanding, as cited by Bate: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [the human being] as a member of society” (2002: 25-26). Such social good can also be understood in terms of what Griffin qualifies as common goods which, as quoted by Appiah “are defined in terms of a relationship among persons – they are defined in terms of the group. They are goods an individual cannot enjoy by himself; they depend upon social interactions” (2005: 128-129). Hence, such common goods on the one hand contrast drastically with any idea of self-centeredness, and on the other hand lead to aiming at a common goal – driven by the satisfaction of all the members of the community.

In this regard, *Mang-Djala* can be considered as that contract between its members, who, in inventing it, were determined to overcome their common nefarious past and project a brighter common future; that is to say, *Mang-Djala* is a social rule that helps to regulate the lives of the people in a community. In other words, the concept of *Mang-Djala* is an advocacy for social good. This presupposes that all the members are subjected to duties as well as deserve rights *vis-à-vis* their partners and the whole community. In this way, the concept of *Mang-Djala* becomes a contract that “is specifically designed to respect, defend, and even enhance” (Novak 2005: 2) the rights of each member. Although this rule has been an oral rule, it has

had a satisfactory outcome in the sense that it has terminated existing quarrels and had reconciled and converted the belligerent parties into a community of fellowship. What defines *Mang-Djala* as a social contract is also the fact that the agreement that takes place is not *ad hoc*, but has been strengthened and perpetuated for generations. By so doing, the *Mang-Djala* community was developed on the basis of living a life of legacies whereby new generations would have a solid ground to identify another member as a partner and to become mutually part of one another's lives, thus having the responsibility of transmitting that wisdom to others. In this regard, the concern of the promoters of *Mang-Djala* could be expressed as: "what would life without such a contract be like?"<sup>48</sup>. Browne, who formulated this question with regard to the social contract, has come to expose the effectiveness of the social contract. A social contract therefore is a projection of a kind of society within which people strive for a life whereby the common interest prevails over that of the individual. This shows the position held by Rousseau as presented by Rusling, according to which "the social contract [is] an agreement between individuals that is held together by common interests"<sup>49</sup>. However, even if one could question the degree of feasibility of such a contract, the intention that is manifested shows that people long for an ideal life – life in community, which Rousseau tries to describe in term of an ideal society. According to Rousseau, as presented by Dunn,

The ideal society... in the social contract is... a communitarian society in which the responsibility and duties of citizenship outweigh individual rights and freedom. Selflessly, citizens bind and commit themselves to the common good for all, willing to make sacrifices for their political community. Their virtue is richly rewarded. Through their devotion to their community, their self-discipline, and patriotism, they thrive as human beings, thus realizing their full rational and moral potential (2002: 9).

Rousseau refers to his communitarian vision as a general will which is "general not because of a broad number of people subscribe to it but because its objective is always the common good of all" (2002: 10). This general will is advocated and well expressed in the concept of *Mang-Djala* although it may seem very allusive in the sphere of politics. Fundamentally, Rousseau's social contract is all about social cohesion, harmony and peace.

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<sup>48</sup> Browne, J.K. Introduction to the social contract theory.  
<http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ362/hallam/Readings/SocialContractHelium.pdf> Accessed 06/06/2013

<sup>49</sup> Rusling, L. Introduction to the social contract theory.  
<http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ362/hallam/Readings/SocialContractHelium.pdf> Accessed 06/06/2013

#### **6.4 The social contract theory and the concept of *Mang-Djala* as a quest for human welfare**

It must be mentioned that both the social contract theory and the concept of *Mang-Djala* transcend religious affiliation, probably because of the tendency for such affiliation to create boundaries that prevent achievement of the social goals of the two concepts. The social contract is a secular concept that has emerged in a context of the waning influence of religion in society. *Mang-Djala* exists in a context where religious influence is still strong and potentially divisive. It is therefore important that if people embrace it they are forced to transcend their religious differences. This is further testimony to the potential power of *Mang-Djala* since religious belief in Africa is usually so powerful. Hence, the social contract and the concept of *Mang-Djala* do not have any religious agendas in their respective operation. Rather, both are tools for social construction.

However, the intention here is to explore to some extent the philosophy of the social contract and relate it to the concept of *Mang-Djala*. Therefore, one should stress the fact that, “the concept of the social contract in its basic form is explained as an agreement that [human beings] will give up their state of nature in exchange for a social order in a form of a government that will ensure their well-being” (Gletus & Jacobs: 2010: 262). The core of the social contract theory is humanistic, that human beings are central. If this humanism is the focal point of the theory, then this understanding of the social contract is related to the expectation of those who originated the concept of *Mang-Djala*. One can therefore recall one of the participants’ (Rev. Jean Baiguélé) statements that: “*le Mang-Djala est beaucoup plus une question d’humanisme prise sous une autre forme*” (*Mang-Djala* is much more a question of humanism taking on another form). (Yaoundé, 24/06/2011).

As such, *Mang-Djala*, in promoting human welfare, appears to be secular although not as stated as it was in the social contract of nineteenth century. Here it was clearly stated that in the European countries the “inflexibility of the divine law was removed, giving room for greater mobility in seeking an acceptable path that was adopted by many countries that [were] practicing varying degrees of secularism to varying degrees of fundamentalism” (2010: 265).

On the other hand, the context within which *Mang-Djala* emerged was a conflicting context; much like the European context within which the social contract emerged. According to the social contract history, at the time the theory was developed, there was an uneasy “prevailing

political situation like Hobbes who was in the midst of an important civil war in England and Rousseau in the time of the French revolution (1789-1799)” (2010: 262-263).

Accordingly, as for Hobbes, one of the prominent promoters of the social contract seemed to have been affected by his own environment, and was reacting to that situation. He was clearly influenced by the religious war between Protestant and Catholic and the continuing turmoil under Oliver Cromwell which influenced his philosophy (2010: 263). Hence, the social contract theory was a response to a desperate condition within which people were subjugated by their fellow human beings. *Mang-Djala*, although arising from a very different framework, culture and context, had as its background a similar conflicting environment whereby people felt the importance of overcoming their differences and coming together as a community for a renewed and improved vision for life; one may say under the slogan: *we have to live together* whereby the concept of *living together* is espoused, as envisioned in the concept of *Mang-Djala*, through its etymology and philosophy (see chapter three).

Warfare in society always exposes human wickedness, selfishness and self-centeredness that drive human beings to act in ways that are destructive to the social fabric. Therefore there is always a need to establish a social contract or agreement that can regulate the society in such a way that a human being's action should be restricted so as not to negatively affect the society. An established agreement or regulation allows for the control of an individual's passion that may degenerate into open conflict. Unfortunately, the promoters of *Mang-Djala* from the modern time failed to ensure a proper transmission for further continuity, to perpetuate it like the social contract in the European context<sup>50</sup>. The notion of social cohesion strongly emphasised in Rousseau's social contract and in *Mang-Djala* appears to be absent or vague in Hobbes' social contract, because it seems not to promote societal fellowship but rather highlights the rights and duties of people with regard to the rules of their society. But still, it maintains the same goal - that is the welfare of the individual in society.

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<sup>50</sup> In the European context, the social contract was developed as a model of governance aimed at organising a just and peaceful society, which can protect every citizen's right, while at the same time subjecting him/her to certain orders and to which everyone should consent. In this regard Gletus, CJ. M. & Jacobs, CN maintain “The concept of a social contract results from the concept of ‘state of nature’ where in the absence of an organised state and therefore in the absences of justice the men was that were in constant state of war which then necessitated the need for a social order and hence the development of the theory of social contract” (2010: 262). The theory of social contract has evolved and is continuously evolving in political sphere and has influenced the whole political system in western countries. Gletus, CJ. M. & Jacobs, CN observed that: “the development of the social contract will continue to have a place in society in its quest for a constant search for the rights and liberty of the individual in his place in society” (2010: 265).

However, when a country such Rwanda face ethnic conflicts that degenerate into open warfare, it may be ascribed to the lack of the strong presence of a social contract; since a social contract was a reaction and a preventative measure against abuse and human barbarism that tended to dehumanise people. In this regard, *Mang-Djala* to some degree is closely related to the social contract in its operation, as it is designed to counteract barbarism amongst humans. Moreover, *Mang-Djala* was not just an imaginary ideology or a theory which people could agree or disagree with while they tried to apply it to their organisation. Rather, it is something tangible which people keep to. Some people have experienced its effectiveness and it has become a part of their own culture. Thus people are aware of the fact that human beings are predisposed towards evil, but at the same time they show their willingness to eschew evil. In this regard, Dunn, commenting on Hobbes states:

Hobbes had maintained that human life in the state of nature was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Though people were free and equal, they were engaged in perpetual warfare with one another. (2002: 5). Hobbes, for example, contended that in order to escape from the state of perpetual warfare that existed in the brutish “state of nature,” people entered into a pact, a contract, in which they signed away their freedom and all their rights to a sovereign who would rule over them, guaranteeing them life, security, and order. The ruler’s power over them was absolute. (2002:9)

Hobbes is opposed to Rousseau who maintains that humans were originally good, by arguing that: “if modern individuals appeared corrupt, unequal, and enslaved, it is society – not human nature – that is to blame (Dunn 2002: 6). Hobbes’ position contrasts with Rousseau’s view in the sense that for Hobbes, human beings are by nature corrupt. This constitutes the main source of their antagonism. Although Hobbes’ position is expressed in the context of secularism, one can perceive it in the light of Romans 7, where Paul discourses on the hold of sin over human beings. The social contract theory in this regard is aimed at freeing human beings from this grip of sin, which he expressed in terms of the state of nature (Romans 7). From the perspective of a theologian, one may also say that Hobbes was influenced by the Epistle to the Romans. In this sense Hobbes’ view is consistent with the teaching of the gospel.

In relation to the topic of this chapter, one may establish the similarity between the social contract and the concept of *Mang-Djala* by saying that, just as Hobbes developed the notion of the social contract to counter human antagonism, so *Mang-Djala* has been developed in the Cameroonian society to do the same – to interrupt the human’s hostilities and to bring up



a new community of noble people. Conversely, Rousseau fails to perceive this reality by not acknowledging the effect of sin that has corrupted humanity, by believing in the perfection of humankind.

However, considering the context and the circumstances within which Hobbes reacted, one realises also that he had been traumatised due to the conflicting environment, and had to understand an existing inner evil power in human beings that subject them to violence. At the same time, one can detect in Hobbes' statement a kind of lamentation or anguish in the quest for a balanced, fair-minded and just society. It is for this reason that the social contract has been developed; in an attempt to achieve that goal. Given these pertinent observations and social contract objectives, one can once more relate it to *Mang-Djala* by revisiting Reverend Baiguele's statement, according to which *Mang-Djala* is in fact an antidote for conflict at its root.

Divergent views are evident amongst the proponents of the social contract, such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau regarding the views they hold of human beings, their rights and duties or obligations, and the way society should be organised. However, they have in common a concern about social order, although in a way that upholds secularism, which in fact is not so much at the expense of Christian morality. One can select some of their positive aspects to foster Christian morality and understanding; although Gletus & Jacobs' perception of the social contract theory is that it was developed at the expense of religious morality in many European countries during the nineteenth century (2010: 264).

However, while the central concern of the social contract is to organise an entire society in which people can live peacefully and confidently, in *Mang-Djala* the interest is narrowed and focused on interpersonal relationships in order to develop friendships and fellowships between the members that would constitute the foundation of a wholly noble society. Therefore, it is these interpersonal relationships that constitute the basis on which a balanced, fair-minded and just society can be established. Unfortunately, *Mang-Djala* as a local and limited concept could not muster as much influence as the European social contract. However, the ideology underpinning the social contract worldwide is hidden in *Mang-Djala* at the lower end of the scale. *Mang-Djala* pursues the same objectives as the social contract, though on a lesser scale, but is more pragmatic and effective in comparison to the social contract.

## 6.5 *Mang-Djala* as covenant

This section seeks to explore the significance of the concept of “covenant” from its etymological understanding in order to establish, on the one hand, the link between *Mang-Djala* and covenant and, on the other hand, to identify underlying similarities and possibly also the differences that may promote an understanding of *Mang-Djala* as covenant. In so doing, this study intends to focus on the second part of the objectives of the study itself – that is, the appropriation of the concept of *Mang-Djala*, in an attempt to suggest possible solutions to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon; and to assess the validity and the applicability of the concept of *Mang-Djala*. Therefore, reflecting on the theological understanding of covenant proves to be a necessary undertaking. Yet it must be said that the concept of covenant, even in its Biblical understanding, is so broad that expounding on it in this limited study may seem inadequate. However, Chennattu argues that “scholars agree that the idea of covenant in the Old Testament is not univocal. It is almost impossible to catalogue all the interpretations of the various covenants under one description or definition” (2006: 52).

It is on this basis that this study will consider the multiple understandings of the concept of covenant in order to find the point of contact that may link it to the concept of *Mang-Djala*. By assuming that God is the source of human relationships – from the creation, and that meeting Him symbolises entering into His presence by way of covenant in order to live fully under His blessings with other fellow human beings, the study will attempt to restrict itself to a few aspects, so as to extract the meaning of the Biblical concept of covenant and the related implications of meeting God under the banner of such covenant, that may assist in understanding *Mang-Djala*. Starting from the definition of covenant, and presenting an overview of covenant in the Bible, mostly the Old Testament, the study will argue that, in meeting His people through His covenants, God fulfils His intention *vis-à-vis* human beings; he becomes the source of man’s covenant whereby he gathers the scattered under his divine kingship for fullness of life. Through his forgiveness and reconciliation he controls human beings’ mutual forgiveness and reconciliation through which his purpose of *living together* is restored.

### 6.5.1 The etymology, definition, and meaning of covenant and its resonance with *Mang-Djala*

Nicholson (1986) provides insight into understanding the theological meaning of covenant from its etymological setting, with regard to this study. He presents numerous views related

to the etymology of covenant, among which one is very close to *Mang-Djala*. According to that view, “the word covenant derives from an Accadian word *birtu* ‘clasp, fetter’. Thus, it designates “binding together” two or more parties, hence a ‘binding agreement’, *bund* [in German] and the like” (1986: 95) which may come to mean an alliance or treaty – a bundle of life. Although he has not proposed any Biblical reference in support of this view, 1 Kings 5: 12b “so the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. There was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty”. (NRSV) could neatly fit the requirement.

According to Dumbrell, (1984: 16), one of the various meanings of the Hebrew “*berith*” is ‘mutual agreement’, which if taken back to its Assyrian origin, will come to mean ‘bond’ or “fetter” (1984: 91-92). Botterweck and Ringgerren shed additional light on this issue by stating that in the “ancient Near East as well as in the Greek and Roman world, the terms for “covenant” are distributed according to two semantic fields: oath and commitment on the one hand, love and friendship on the other” (1975: 256). Thus there is a strong correlation between oath and commitment that makes “covenant” unique with regard to other agreements or social contracts.

According to Trumbull, etymologically “covenant” in English means “a coming together” and could also mean a “sacred and indissoluble joining together of the two parties covenanting as distinct from any ordinary agreement or compact” (1899: 5). Sacredness and indissolubility are intrinsic attributes to covenant, making it unique in its application. When one follows the process of a *Mang-Djala* agreement the obvious sense of that sacredness and indissoluble joining together makes it a covenant.

The immediate remark that one could make about the terms “covenant”, “alliance”, or “treaty” between human beings is that their roots may be traced back to beyond the Ancient world, linking it as a result from the fall of the first humans and may be seen as an outcome of a divine wisdom to restore human beings’ fellowship anew. In this regard the participants who see *Mang-Djala* as a God-given wisdom are correct, for the obvious fact that *Mang-Djala* is all about restoring a broken peace.

Milton specifically observed that “the very fact that [the word] *berith* is found no less than 278 times in the Old Testament bears witness to its importance”. He mentions that only a few instances of *berith* are used to designate a relationship between humans (1961: xi). Drawing on his understanding of the concept of covenant from the Webster’s New International

Dictionary 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1948, vol. I, he asserts that “the simplest and most natural definition of covenant is an agreement between two or more persons or parties. The word ‘contract’ is given as a synonym. A contract, however, [he argues] suggests a mutual agreement between equals” (1961: 2). In this regard, he seems to have thrown light on the ambiguity that may have surrounded the difference between a covenant and a contract. If this explanation which Milton provides stands, then to use covenant and contract as synonyms is a misapplication and needs to be corrected in such a way that a contract designates an agreement between equals. However, the focus of this study is not about underlying differences and will not extend to it.

Nevertheless, in taking into account this explanation, it becomes more complex to state whether contract and covenant are synonyms, because sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably. An obvious example is found in the book *Social Contract: Issues in Political Theory* where the author states: “[human beings] must, for the sake of peace, make a contract or covenant ...” (1986: 53). The use of those terms as synonyms may be his desire to highlight the importance of making peace, but then he should have stated whether the terms were abusively used for that specific purpose.

Yet the topic of this chapter, being *Mang-Djala* as social contract and as covenant, demands that the study seeks to identify the existing similarities between these concepts in order to relate *Mang-Djala* to the one as secular and to the other as religious. Hence, it is necessary to clarify what one understands by covenant if *Mang-Djala* is to be considered as such. In this regard, exploring the term *berith* proves necessary.

### **6.5.2 Different perspectives of the word *berith***

Milton mentions three basic perspectives related to the significance of the word *berith*. These perspectives appear to be the cause of the confusion between the two terms. Firstly, *berith* denotes a mutual relationship with the emphasis on a reciprocal relationship in which the covenanted people are equal. This reiterates the view according to which a contract is an agreement between equals. This is the viewpoint that will mostly constitute the basis for this study, as far as the concept of *Mang-Djala* is concerned.

However, for the sake of clarifying the above-mentioned misunderstanding, and for the sake of knowledge, the other viewpoints prove to be equally important. Hence, the second viewpoint stipulates that *berith* originally implied a relationship between two unequal polarities: the master who offers the relationship to the subordinate. Bregrich supports this

position as quoted by Von Rad that: “covenant” is to be understood as a relationship between two parties of unequal status” (1975: 129).

As Milton explains, “the maker of the *berith* alone acts; the recipient is completely passive, except as he may express the wish or the request that the *berith* be made” (1961 2). Here one can identify the relationship between God and humans and Milton qualifies it as a religious *berith* and defines it as “a sovereign disposition of God” or as “the absolute sanction by God of an arrangement” (1961: 7).

The third significance, according to Milton, is a political one and is mostly known as a treaty. According to Milton:

The Biblical concept of *berith* in relation to law and government and humans relations becomes ... more significant when we see it illustrated in the Mosaic covenant. Here a religious *berith*, with religious sanction, and with a divinely promulgated moral laws undergird all of Israel’s social and legal relationship” (1961: 14).

In this third significance the Israelites’ social, moral, legal and governmental organisation is seen as founded upon and according to the religious *berith* – dictated by God. However, it does not involve a direct relationship between God and the people. Emphasising this point, Mittleman maintains that:

The covenant, particularly the Sinai covenant, establishes an enduring “vertical” relationship with the divine – and it initiates a proper “horizontal” human political society as well...even when kinship emerges, the king is drawn into a covenantal relation with God but also chosen by the people and rules as a constitutional monarch, his powers delimited by the covenantal agreement, the Torah (2006: 48).

In addition, according to Milton, “a *berith* between [humans] was an agreement to be honoured at any cost. [its use in the Old Testament] may refer to a covenant of friendship between individuals (1 Sam. 18: 3), or to a covenant between a King and his people (2 Sam. 5: 3)...or to a league between nations (1 Kings 5: 12); but in every use of the word the binding nature of the *berith* as a mutual agreement is implied” (1961: 4-5). This critically denotes two major aspects: mutual agreement – the parties freely consent to be bound to one another and consent to adhere strictly to the terms of the binding agreement. This undergirds the analogy of the Arabic word *adh* as presented by Pedersen, and reflected by Nicholson, according to which “[*berith*] designates a mutual relationship of solidarity with all the rights

and obligations which this relationship entailed for the partners involved” (1986: 88). Elsewhere, he terms this as a “bilateral acceptance of obligations... [in which the] parties were subjects to the [*berith*] and both took on obligations, in the instance a non-aggression pact” (1986: 91).

Novak’s exploration of the term *berith* highlights five important nuances of the word *berith*:

[A] relationship between God and humans; a relationship between humans themselves; a relationship between God and Israel or the Jewish people; a relationship between the Jews themselves; a relationship between Jews and gentiles (2005: 33).

From these, Novak considers only two that could be termed “covenant” (*ha berith*) in the pure sense of the term, which he calls *master covenant*. These are the Noahic covenant and the Mosaic covenant because of their direct connection to God, and are deemed everlasting as they are enduring. He views the three other forms of *berith* as derivatives of the two above-mentioned covenants, although all are about relationship. He maintains that: “the other three covenants – those between humans, between Jews, and between Jews and non-Jews – all require one of these *master covenants* as their past or background, their foundation or ground, and their future or foreground” (2005: 34). On this point, Novak agrees with Milton on his analysis of the divine and the human *berith*. Although it is difficult to clearly distinguish between contract and covenant, at least there is no doubt that contract is different from covenant, despite the fact that they are all about relationship and agreement.

When considering some of the participant views, it appears that the concept of *Mang-Djala* contains the same characteristics as the concept of mutual agreement. From its etymology, the word *Mang-Djala* denotes the idea of mutuality – *living together* on the basis of mutual agreement; because to bond together as locusts, entails mutual agreement, based on the specific terms of that agreement which pilots or regulates the life of those who are bound by the agreement. As some of the participants have stated, the practice originated between partners signing a blood alliance, which is an indissoluble bond for the purpose of making peace” Benoit Tindankir: Ngaoundéré 20/04/2011, the retired President of the Church Reverend Pierre Amtse Sognsare: Yaoundé 19/09/2010, His Majesty Mohamadou Mvouen: Mbella Assom 27/03/2011). According to the legend of origin, a human sacrifice made to seal an alliance of peace between those who were involved in a conflict confirms the sacredness of the concept.

These versions confirmed Bah's version, according to which, in a ritualistic sacrifice aimed at sealing a pact, a Tikar and a Vouté were killed and their blood mixed together. By participating in such a ritualistic sacrifice, the two communities buried the axe of war forever (see chapter three on page 58, paragraph 2). Hence, a *Mang-Djala* partner should never shed his partner's blood, and whoever breaks this agreement would face misfortune – that is a pact of “non-treason” As the retired President of the Church, Reverend Pierre Amtse Songsare states, “Curses, sickness, and death were invoked against he who sheds his partner's blood or betrays this alliance” (Yaoundé 19/09/2010). All these are signs of the seriousness and commitment of those who are involved in a *Mang-Djala* partnership. That is why many of the participants qualified *Mang-Djala* as the pillar of unity, encounters and reconciliation between people (Dieudonné Debah: Ngaoundéré 24/01/2012), banishing that which is prejudicial to human life (Rev. Jean Baiguele: Yaoundé24/06/2011), such as ethnic conflict, by promoting friendship and harmony (The National Director of women for Christ fellowship: Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011). All of this is summarised in Eldridge's phraseologies: ‘walking together’, ‘companion on the road’, ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’ (see chapter three on page 60, paragraph 2).

In this regard, *Mang-Djala* is closely related to the *berith* that denotes a mutual relationship based on reciprocity, and in which the covenanted people are equal. This viewpoint, underpins this study because in *Mang-Djala*, the parties involved consent freely to be bound to one another and consent to keep strictly to the terms of the binding agreement.

Thus the word *berith* in its translation has not facilitated an understanding of the different forms of covenant or the difference to be made between covenant and contract. Milton acknowledges that *berith* is a complex term that may create misinterpretation. Consequently, he recommends that the relationship between the several “covenants” await further study (1961: 2, 5). He holds that even covenant in the sense of a mutual agreement is regarded as taking place in the presence of God; hence it is absolutely binding on the parties thereto (1961: 13). Therefore, if *Mang-Djala* is to be considered as a contract and not a covenant as such, to some extent it bears a religious connotation that may allow qualifying it as a religious contract, since it is not a direct binding agreement between God and the *Mang-Djala* people, nor was initiated by God. As part of African culture, one cannot simply ignore or overlook the possible religious implication of the practice from the sealing of the *Mang-Djala* covenant. However, it is clear that in its operation, the concept of *Mang-Djala* does not require any religious commitment between the members or as a precondition of membership.

To proceed with the viewpoint relevant to this study – the agreement between equals, Milton maintains that “the colloquial use of *berith*, where it refers to human relationships, can readily be seen to approximate that of covenant in the sense of mutual agreement” (1961: 3). Vivid examples of such relationships in the Bible are those between Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21: 27, between Jacob and Laban, and Jonathan and David (1 Samuel 23: 18). An important ceremony which should not be overlooked is that of making such a covenant termed *karath berith* or a cutting covenant, by implication a covenant by sacrifice (Ps 50: 5); (1961: 3), which, in the case of *Mang-Djala*, as highlighted earlier, has played a significant role in the sealing of the covenant between the parties.

Milton makes reference to Kaustzsch’s emphasis on the fact that *berith* bears a secular origin and has been contextualised to denote a religious covenant by maintaining:

There can be no doubt that *berith* belonged at first to secular speech and meant dissection... that is, the dissection of one or more sacrificial animals, so that the parties concluding the agreement passed between the pieces and invoked upon themselves the fate of these animals in case of a breach of covenant (or oath) (1961: 4).

In this regard, the relationship with *Mang-Djala* is evident from this statement, but it does not mean that *Mang-Djala* had a purely secular background as *berith* when it is examined exclusively from an African world-view. This is to say, in the African context, it is almost impossible to realise such a ceremony as purely secular – without any religious connection or inference. Besides, the term ‘sacrifice’ in the context of covenant always suggests a religious corollary, because a sacrifice is assumed to be offered to the gods in the traditional religious context. Therefore, even in the initial setting of *berith*, the sacrificed animals would have been offered to the gods; hence, it may be regarded as a prepared space for God’s self-revelation to his people, whereby he initiates entering into relationships with humans through *berith*. In this sense, there will be no complexity in understanding *berith*, whether as secular or religious, but rather as a divine or human *berith*, – both embedded in a religious corollary. Such interpretation would facilitate not only an understanding of the different forms of *berith*, but would see the human *berith* as God’s way to prepare man for the final divine *berith* – the new covenant that reached its climax on the Cross at Calvary. The theological reflection approach in relation to *praeparatio evangelica* which allows such interpretation is amply discussed in the next chapter in the dialogue between Gospel and culture. Given the religious implications in all the three forms of *berith*, one can say that ‘contract’ and ‘covenant’ can be



used interchangeably. In this regard, *Mang-Djala* can be used to express a contract or a covenant where applicable.

This feature of *Mang-Djala* as reported by a number of the participants during the fieldwork constitutes an important point of departure between the concept of *Mang-Djala* and the concept of covenant under the form of human *berith*. On this basis, *berith* offers a conduit to interpreting and understanding *Mang-Djala* as covenant. This is so because, in the African context, anything pertaining to invoking a blessing or a curse, even if not audibly stated, has an inherent spiritual implication – the religious aspect may not be audible nor visible, but its implication is necessary for the covenant to be authentic. Mbiti, realising this, argues

That African peoples are deeply religious is a well acknowledged fact. In their traditional setting, the whole of life is regarded as a religious phenomenon. People grow up with a religious attitude which they do not question since it is a corporate rather than individualistic “faith”. [Later he asserted]: African traditional outlook in life has no dichotomy between the religious and the secular; all is religious (1970: 20-21, 26).

In the ancient East the fact that the oath has not taken place in the presence of Yahweh does not mean the absence of any religious implications, because those people may have their traditional divinities. It may be stipulated that making a covenant between humans must take place in the presence of a deity. That is why, even if the covenant is between humans, in Israel, the covenant is always said to be held before the Lord – the case of Jonathan and David serves as an example here.

Milton is therefore vindicated in positing that the *berith* or covenant pertaining to human relationships with regard to the Israelites’ context was often associated with religious sanction and because of this a covenant between human beings was regarded as inviolable (1961: 13). Unfortunately, he made an observation that revealed the lack of seriousness with which people make use of their covenant, and perhaps this may have been the reason why people rather advocated for a secular status of the social contract, so as not to bear the consequences of offending a divine ordinance. Milton observes:

If we have lived to see the day when treaties between nations have all too often been treated as a mere scrap of paper, and when men have become clever in evading personally assumed obligations to one another, it is to our sorrow and shame; for without a sincere regard to the principle of personal obligation involved in the Hebrew *berith*, and in all law worthy of the name, there can be no peaceful society. The Biblical concept of *berith* in relation to law and

government and human relations becomes even more significant when we see it illustrated in the mosaic covenant... The *berith* between [humans] has a religious significance, in that it is a matter of divine concern that [humans] keep their pledged word not only to God, but to one another. For as between Jacob and Laban of old, so God is still a witness between [humans] in every mutual agreement that they may make; and it is when [humans] perform as before God their pledged word to one another, that law and order prevail, and selfish strife gives way to mutual concord and peace” (1961: 14).

Thus those who believe that *Mang-Djala* is a God-given concept may have to bear in mind the traditional religious implications of the concept, as well as a sincere belief in the efficacy of *Mang-Djala* and the faithfulness of the members, according to the participants; like the account of Mrs Atta Djoulde, (see chapter three) which reveals the religious implications of the concept of *Mang-Djala*.

Following Milton, one realises that even the divine *berith* that pertains to the relationship between God and humans has an impact on the human *berith*. The fact that *Mang-Djala* is considered as a God-given wisdom is not accidental. It may be understood, to use Milton’s expression, as “a revelation of the divine will and purpose”. Milton believes that “there can be no covenant without self-revelation on the part of him who makes it” (1961: 15). Hence, even the human *berith* is to be seen as deriving from the divine *berith*. In this case, *Mang-Djala* can be seen as deriving from the self-revelation of God and as being interpreted as the preparation for the Gospel for those involved in it.

With regard to Milton’s view, one may say that there is a close correlation between the human *berith* and the divine *berith*, if covenant is to bear its full meaning. In other words, the human *berith* depends on the divine *berith* – the human *berith* is not an independent *berith*, but a kind of “*by-product*” of the divine *berith*. This can be interpreted in terms of his statement that:

The divine *berith* implies a revelation of the divine will and purpose, and these in turn reflect the divine character. Revelation does not consist on a list of divine attributes so much as in series of divine actions. That God makes a covenant with [humans], it is the same as to say that he acts in relation to them with gracious purpose; that he seeks fellowship with them and offers fellowship to them; and not least, that he calls them into a holy partnership of service in relation to other [humans]. The covenant is a way of interpreting history which recognizes the presence and activity of God in the historical process; which believes that God has set a goal

for human history, and has given to [humans] whom he has called a divine mission relevant to that goal (1961: 15).

The correlation between the human *berith* and the divine *berith* is the offering of fellowship to humankind calling it to a holy partnership of service in relation to others. God forms a relationship with humankind to achieve this goal. In other words, the human *berith* bears a relation to the divine *berith* – human *berith* is a kind of response to the divine concern that human beings are called upon to live in a partnership that expresses a genuine fellowship – a fellowship that strives for a divine fellowship. That is why *Mang-Djala* in this regard can be seen as a *by-product* of this divine *berith*. In other words, *Mang-Djala* is a covenant and bears a religious connotation as it is related to God's activity; that is, to bring people together to understand a covenant to mean the principle of *living together* set by God himself.

The obvious remark at this point is that from the creation the intention and activity of God has been to gather human beings into divine fellowship. Jesus expresses this intention in his lament over Jerusalem (Luke 13: 34-35). On the other hand, one sees humankind striving for such fellowship through multiple covenants. Wright and Fuller's contribution to the debate has thrown light on this issue that depicts humankind's constant need of fellowship in the presence of God. They posit that:

The ancient world was full of covenant; and [a human] lived and moved throughout [his] life in an interlocking series of covenants. When two parties are bound together in an agreement or treaty, sealed by vow, but in which no means of enforcement are available, there we have a covenant. To this day international treaties have the form of covenant: they are agreements between two parties sealed by vows, but no means of enforcement are available other than those contained in the vows. In the ancient world the witnesses of the human covenants were the God or gods of the respective parties. They were called upon as the witnesses who would keep the covenant in case one or both of the human participants broke it" (1957: 86).

In the ancient world covenants were seen as the basis for constructing the net of life between people. This explains the term *social belt of life* as relevantly used to express *Mang-Djala*. Without such a net, life has no meaning, because life is made to be shared, and fellowship lies at the heart of life. The assertion also shows that people are aware of the fact that life, such as willed by God, is a matter of fellowship, and they are anxious and eager to experience such life in the presence of God or the gods. For this reason God, or the gods of the ancient world,

were called to witness the seal of the covenant – the expression of the people’s intention to live as partners with one another. This is related to the philosophy of *Mang-Djala*.

However, on the human side a perennial relationship through covenant has always been subjected to their unfaithfulness to keeping their commitment due to their imperfect human nature. Jesus drew his disciple’s attention on this matter in Gethsemane saying “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14: 38b NRSV).

This constantly places the terms of a covenant under a threat of breaking. Wright and Fuller highlight human weakness by referring to the biblical story of Laban and Jacob, which ably addresses this experience. In Genesis 31, where it is stated: “the Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent from one from the other” (v. 49b NRSV). According to their comment, this passage may be read as follows:

The words do not mean that God will kindly keep [the covenantal people] from getting into danger after [their] meeting has broken up! They are rather part of a covenant: we have made our mutual vows, but they are human and sinful. Our agreement is in danger if we are left to our own devices. We beseech God, therefore, to be the guard of our solemn vows to the end that they are kept, when we are no longer present with one another to look after each other in our weakness (1957: 87).

Within the human *berith*, the parties involved do not consider it as a completely independent covenant that is out of divine control – they still expect God to secure their mutual commitment towards one another. This is one way to restore a broken covenant because it facilitates forgiveness amongst the the partners to the renewal of their covenant. Considering this factor, one can state that human *berith* develops from the divine *berith*, or the divine *berith* has a strong impact on the human *berith*.

This is where forgiveness and reconciliation are needed for the restoration of any kind of broken contract or covenant, in the sense that a covenant constitutes an established foundation on which people, by virtue of their binding agreement or covenant, could come together again after having been drawn apart. The importance of spiritual values will be discussed at length in chapter seven on the theological reflection of *Mang-Djala*. However, it is important to bear in mind that throughout the preceding chapters, one of the important features of *Mang-Djala* has been that *Mang-Djala* is a means of reconciliation.

The argument was that as *Mang-Djala* is a community of human beings there will always be imperfections and limitations, since perfection is exclusively a divine competence. Misunderstandings and conflicts will occur between the *Mang-Djala* partners irrespective of their commitment to the agreement sealed between them. Viewed from this perspective human associations involve the continuous mending and rebuilding of damaged relationships, an activity from which *Mang-Djala* partners are not spared. In this regard, Mrs Atta Djoulde's account (22/06/2011) in chapter three supports the aspects of forgiveness and reconciliation inherent in *Mang-Djala*. Therefore, Milton is accurate in stating that a covenant is a way of interpreting history which recognizes the presence and activity of God in the historical process; which believes that God has set a goal for human history, and has given to [humans] whom he has called to a divine mission relevant to that goal (1961: 15). Through an indigenous contract or covenant such as *Mang-Djala*, one can see God's activity among the peoples for whom he has set a goal – to create a community that is the anticipation of the Christian community.

Hence *berith*, be it secular or religious, can be seen through the lens of God's activity among his human creatures. In other words a covenant becomes the ground where people recognize the presence of God. Therefore, the implications of meeting God under the banner of a covenant are that of living constantly under God's presence and forgiveness. This brings about the reconciliation in which everyone becomes a member and partaker of that community, which is a reconciled community founded on the principle of *living together*, as expressed in *Mang-Djala*. In this regard, Kunhiyop pointedly argues that: "our salvation is not only spiritual; but intensely physical and emotional, as the African holistic approach emphasizes" (2008: 66-67).

Irrevocably, what is revealed in God's covenant through the patriarchs, the prophets, has reached its climax in Jesus. This achievement has built up the pilgrim people of God that is continuously in motion towards their final destination – the kingdom of God. Whereas in *Mang-Djala*, although the quest for living and moving together is more physical and emotional, the future remains unspecified and one may say it has not been enlightened by the Gospel. In other words, the truth of *Mang-Djala* remains veiled until the light of the Gospel fully reveals it in Christ. One can now use the lens of the Gospel through *Mang-Djala* to come to the conclusion according to which, *Mang-Djala* is the new Christian community. This community is the reconciled people of God – the Christian Church, which is the fulfilment of God's intention to re-create humanity. This is endorsed with the divine principle

of *living together*, until the consummation of everything in Christ. In other words, *Mang-Djala* is nothing else but the preparation for the Gospel for the Christian community of the ELCC.

‘Covenant’ is thus but a theological concept because it originates from God’s self-disclosure, whereby God enters into human history to establish a people of fellowship who would share God’s presence and in return, celebrate that presence with one another. In so doing God himself has set up a new a principle of *living together* as the retrieval of his initial intention to bring his human creatures into his perfect fellowship. Therefore, a covenant may be understood as a new creation whereby God actively attempts to restore the broken relationship between humankind and himself.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to shed light on *Mang-Djala* as a social contract and as a covenant, in terms of a secular and a religious theme respectively. The title of this chapter has presupposed a difference between the theory of social contract and covenant. However, in the course of the study, the main focus of interest was rather to draw some analogies between the theory of social contract and the concept of *Mang-Djala* on the one hand and on the other hand the covenant and the concept of *Mang-Djala*. However, the discourse that attempts to draw the similarities is all about stressing on an agreement between two or more parties, to set up the principle of *living together*.

As it has been maintained throughout this chapter, the social contract theory, as used by its promoters, affirms that society is created by the common will of individuals who perceive greater advantage in association rather than in isolation. Therefore, they see the need to form some sort of agreement to treat each other with respect and follow certain fundamental rules. In this regard, the concept of *Mang-Djala* follows the same objective as the theory of the social contract – that is finding the solutions to humankind’s problems by the way of humanism. *Mang-Djala* as well as the social contract theory does not have any religious implication; therefore both line up within the secular framework, which constitutes their strength in the sense that anyone can adopt their philosophy. As for the concept of *Mang-Djala*, it has been argued earlier that the concept is a transcendent factor in religious differences. This in itself constitutes the similarity between the concept of *Mang-Djala* and the social contract theory. Nevertheless, the main point of resonance with the social contract theory resides in the fact that the two concepts have the same goals at heart - to achieve social

order, peace, fellowship and social cohesion. In this regard, the social contract theory as well as the concept of *Mang-Djala* constitutes the human being's yearning for social life and a quest for human being's welfare.

Furthermore, it has also been argued that *Mang-Djala* has some resonance with the concept of 'covenant' because it is also about agreement, with the difference that a covenant in this context has mostly a religious connotation. The study has explored the etymology of the word *berith* in its various perspectives in order to locate the point of connection with *Mang-Djala*, and has established a similarity with the first perspective of *berith* that denotes a mutual relationship, with an emphasis on a reciprocal relationship in which the covenanted people are equal.

It has been also been argued that, biblically, the covenant of a mutual agreement between humans is regarded as having taken place in the presence of God. And knowing that African cultures are always immersed in religious practice, *Mang-Djala* being no exception, it should not be completely relegated to the secular. In this regard, the aspect of sacredness and indissolubly joining together of the partners involved makes the concept of *Mang-Djala* a covenant.

It can be said that *Mang-Djala* is an intersection between the concept of the social contract and the concept of a covenant. It is much more than simply an intersection between two concepts. It gives way both to those who promote the social contract as secular and to those who believe in a covenant to make use of the concept of *Mang-Djala* for their interest, since it is all about the principle of *living together*. In the context of this study, *Mang-Djala* has been understood as a God-given concept by the proponents of the concept. Therefore, it is to be interpreted as preparation for the Gospel. Hence, it is subject to the dialogue between Gospel and culture to which the next chapter will attempt to address.

## **Chapter seven: The Gospel and culture - a theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala* and its implications**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Following the discourse on *Mang-Djala* as social contract and as covenant this chapter will attempt to explore the way in which *Mang-Djala* as a covenant can constitute the source of forgiveness and reconciliation, and the foundation on which a theological reflection of the concept of *Mang-Djala* can be built. The aim will be to show how this indigenous concept, through its positive elements, may guide the E.L.C.C. towards the Gospel. In so doing, it will also clarify the Christian understanding of the concept “covenant” which brings about forgiveness and reconciliation, allowing the E.L.C.C. to move forward into a shared future. This will have to be integrated into the dialogue between Gospel and culture; this dialogue being understood as the contextualisation of the gospel in the context of African culture. This integration will be undertaken in an attempt to respond to the following questions: the meaning of contextualisation; the importance of contextualisation in the relationship between Gospel and culture; and how *Mang-Djala* can be integrated into this framework.

Three main tasks are envisioned in this process: firstly, to present the discourse on the contextualisation of the Gospel in Africa as the framework within which *Mang-Djala* might be applied, as well as the theological reflection approach, whereby *praeparatio evangelica* is used as the theoretical model to analyse *Mang-Djala*; secondly, to consider *Mang-Djala* from the perspective of “covenant”, viewed through the lens of the Christian notion of “covenant” as a meeting place between the covenantal peoples, where forgiveness and reconciliation take place; and thirdly, to deal with the Christian doctrine of reconciliation as the culmination of God’s “covenant”. Contextualisation will play a pivotal role in this process.

### **7.2 The contextualisation of the Gospel in Africa – some general remarks.**

As contextualisation of the Gospel seeks to engage ‘culture’ and ‘Gospel’ in a fruitful dialogue with the aim of hosting the Gospel within a specific culture, a brief definition of these two terms as proposed by Newbigin is included:

By culture, we have to understand the sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings and handed on from generation to generations... [that] include a set of beliefs, experiences, and practices that seek to grasp and express the ultimate nature of things, that which gives shape and meaning to life, that which claims final loyalty. [On the other hand, the Gospel is] the announcement



that in the series of events that have their center in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ something has happened that alters the total human situation and must therefore call into question every human culture (1986: 3-4).

This is why scholars Moreau and Hewitt argue respectively that contextualisation is the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds (2006: 325) and that:

Contextualisation is therefore a theological and pastoral method that studies the particular context in which events unfold. [More importantly, it seeks] to integrate the Gospel message with a local culture in such a way that the message becomes part of the cultural system itself. (2012: 15)

More pertinently, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures” (1988: 11). The fact that this debate has become a new centre of interest for a number of Christian theologians illustrates that the discovery of the term ‘contextualisation’ has constituted an extraordinary step forward in what people were striving towards, elaborated by their quest for spreading an authentic Gospel to every culture. Arguing along similar lines Ukpong asserts that:

the term “contextualisation” is a neologism coined by the Theological Education Fund in 1972 to express the process and practice of relating the Gospel message to the people’s concrete life situation. It represents a new orientation in Christian practice and expression witnessed in this century. It arose out of the realisation that all forms of Christian expression are tinted with the cultural context traits from which they originate. This has led to a positive search for new Christian expression forms that will consciously take seriously new cultural contexts with which Christianity comes in contact (1987: 278).

If God is to save human beings, the Gospel that brings that salvation should never be foreign to the recipients of that Gospel and nothing should prevent it from meeting people in their context. That is why Mugambi argues that “...theology is always articulated in a particular cultural context, responding to questions which are always culturally conditioned (1995: 20)”. In other words, God in Jesus Christ comes to the encounter of the believer, to disclose himself through his/her (the believer’s) culture. In that way, culture becomes the way through which the Gospel can take root, grow and flourish within a specific Christian community. It is only then that “the converts and their descendants become free to appropriate the Gospel in

their own way, without the tutelage of missionary instructors and masters” (Mugambi 2003: 174). Newbigin subscribes to this, arguing that:

Every statement of the Gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the Gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life. There can never be a culture-free gospel. Yet the gospel, which is from the beginning to the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied (1986: 4)

Contextualisation is therefore the new hope for Christian Churches in their effort to transmit the Gospel in its fullness and authenticity in a given culture. That is why Nicholls firmly maintains, “contextuality... is the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one’s own situation. Contextualization is not simply a fad or a catchword, but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the word” (1979: 21).

Bevans persuasively argues that “theology that is contextual realizes that culture, history, contemporary thought forms and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression” (2003: 4). Thus, if the enthusiasm of Christian theologians is to communicate an authentic Gospel within a given culture, then the required effort to achieve this is to make contextualisation their primary concern.

In addition, Newbigin points out what many scholars have overlooked in their definitions. He maintains that, “the value of the word ‘contextualization’ is that it suggests the placing of the Gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future” (1986: 2). The analogy that one may draw for contextualisation is that culture can act as the star that led the Magi to meet the baby Jesus. Similarly, culture can be the star that enlightens our way to the Gospel, to Jesus. Just as the Magi followed the star into the future they were targeting – the final destination of their journey (Matthew 2: 1-12), we, too, may find the Gospel through our culture. As Christians we are on a journey (as were the wise men) and our Christian future is the eschatological salvation targeting the promised land – the consummation of everything in the second coming of Christ to which contextualisation should clear the path to the recipients of the Gospel in that context.

Bevans argues with other scholars that: “true contextualization accords the Gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which is both No and Yes, both judgement and grace” (2003: 120). Nicholls previously pointed out the pertinence of that truth by stating that: “the Gospel is never the guest of any culture; it is

always its judge and redeemer (1979: 15)”, which does not mean entering into a confrontation with the recipient culture, but rather calls for an authentic communication whereby Christ fully enters into the culture in order to embody the ultimate fulfilment of God’s promise to those specific people. It follows that the Gospel must appropriate the culture, dwell within it “full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14b NRSV). Hence, Newbiggin was correct in asserting that: “If the Gospel is to be understood, if it is to be received, if it is, as we say, to ‘make sense’, it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them” (1998: 141). Such understanding might have motivated Ross in this following statement:

The meeting between Christian faith and traditional culture takes places in a community moving through a particular history. The history in that regard cannot be separated from the life of Christian communities in Africa as they have responded to the times through which they have lived. It is precisely within the dynamic history of the encounter of African peoples with Christian faith, amidst social change, that African cultural identity can be properly understood in theological terms. The coming of Christ to a particular time and place does not act to render every other time and place of no account. The reverse is true... The particular history through which it has passed, the crises it has met and the response it has offered have acted to form a robust and well-defined identity. Theology rising from this history will not lack roots in real experience (2013: 95).

Hesselgrave and Rommen fully agree with this view stating in the preface of their book, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* that, “if the Gospel is to be understood, ‘contextualization’ must be true to the complete authority and unadulterated message of the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the respondents on the other” (1989: xi). This is to say, contextualisation should not dilute the message, nor open ways to syncretism, but rather should maintain the purity of the Gospel while translating it to the cultural audience. The fear of syncretism may be one of the reasons for the missionaries to avoid ‘contextualisation’. However, having come to this awareness of the importance of ‘contextualisation’, Mbiti has rightly criticised what ought to be considered as the failure of the Christian missionary’s enterprise. In fact, Mbiti, as recorded by Hesselgrave and Rommen argues that:

Missionaries have been unable to contextualize the gospel with an understanding of and appreciation for African thought and religion. As a result, the gospel has not been made

relevant to Africans, conversions have not been real, and African Christianity is superficial (1989: 99).

Practically, contextualization should be, as Moreau suggests, “comprehensive”, in the sense that it should go “beyond theologising to include all that the Christian faith is and all that following Christ calls us to do” (206: 325). Therefore *Mang-Djala* can serve as a touchstone to fit into such a framework so as to contribute to the authentic and transformational appropriation of the Christian doctrine of reconciliation within the Christian community of the E.L.C.C.

### **7.2.1 The centrality of the scripture in the dialogue between Gospel and culture**

Earlier (see page 171 paragraph 3) it was argued that contextualisation of the Gospel is all about engaging ‘culture’ and ‘Gospel’ in a fruitful dialogue with the aim of hosting the Gospel within a specific culture. On the other hand the Gospel is contained in the Scriptures, and is given to each culture in a form of packaging that needs to be unpacked in order to appreciate the content. In this regard, the elements of the culture constitute indispensable factors that facilitate that appreciation. For the Gospel to be relevant each culture should be able to decrypt the content of the Scriptures according to its own context; meanwhile, the Scriptures should test and appreciate the culture. On several occasion Jesus drew the attention of his audience to the centrality of the Gospel. To the Jews he said: “you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5: 39-40 NRSV). The Gospel is all about life, and understanding and appropriating that life in every culture brings the Gospel and culture into dialogue. The challenge of the Church today is about how to bring the Gospel to everyone in every culture.

According to Bediako,

Scripture is like a prism that refracts light, separating it out into its different, constituent colours. It is as the colourless light passes through the prism that the rainbow is revealed. In the Gospel and culture engagement, our concern is to seek ways in which the Gospel may be relevant to our culture. In order to discover this, culture must practically pass through Scripture for its light and shade to be discerned (2001: 2).

For Bediako, the emphasis is on the centrality of the Scriptures at the expense of culture in that dialogue between Gospel and culture. This should not be seen as undermining the

importance of culture, but rather, to indicate that the Gospel is the focal point towards which a culture can draw the Gospel's audience. The helplessness of human beings who are always accused of sin and their hope brought about by their unmerited forgiveness of sins because of the achieved work of Christ on the Cross, are brought together by the Gospel through the Scriptures. Bediako argues that "it is the Gospel which is more basal, more fundamental to our understanding of who we are, where we have come from and where we are destined" (2001: 2). It is therefore only the Scriptures that can articulate one's identity and destiny.

In this regard, Kudadjie's observation is that "we can use scripture to evaluate any culture or any moral values that we encounter in our Gospel and culture research" (2001:16). In other words, not all our cultures are applicable to the Gospel and culture dialogue. As Kudadjie points out, "one may first ascertain whether that particular concept or practice has a scriptural base. If it does, then that value or practice could be integrated into Christian usage and can subsequently be used in Christian theologising" (2006: 16). If this is the criterion for using cultural values for theologising, then *Mang-Djala* fits into that criterion because it upholds one of the most biblically recommended Christian virtues – that of Christian fellowship. Consequently, it is applicable to the framework of dialogue between Gospel and culture.

The dialogue between the Gospel and culture could become an unfortunate adventure that may be detrimental to the spread of the Gospel. That is why a thorough assessment needs to be done before undertaking such research. Kudadjie is observant in this regard, in arguing that:

A researcher into traditional and cultural values intended for use in the context, must at least subject the cultural practices to examination in the light of the Gospel, in order to see whether they are affirmed by the Gospel, or whether or not they have been changed (2001: 17)

### **7.2.2 *Mang-Djala* within the context of the dynamic relationship between the Gospel and culture – some general remarks.**

This section is intended to present an overview of *Mang-Djala* in the context of issues regarding Gospel and culture, and how to render *Mang-Djala* comprehensible in line with Mbiti's statement:

The Gospel does not throw out culture, to the contrary, it comes to our culture and it settles there, it brings its impact on our total life within that culture. It is within our culture that God loves us and calls us to repentance; it is also within our culture that God wants us to love, worship and obey him. God does not want us to be aliens to our culture – but only aliens to

sin. Our culture is the medium of receiving, diffusing, tuning and relaying the Gospel. Without culture we would not hear the Gospel, we would not believe the Gospel, and we would not inherit the promises of the Gospel. (1997: 27, 29).

Efficiently “proclaiming the good news involves identifying entry points that are understandable to the local community” (Smith 2006: 346) which could also be expressed as a *praeparatio evangelica*. Generally, African cultures in many ways constitute cultural resources that can serve as *praeparatio evangelica* but which have remained unknown to the detriment of the African Christian communities until recently. In this regard, Mbiti observes that: “it is only now that Christian leaders and scholars in Africa are beginning to awaken to the fact and seriousness of the traditional religiosity, and its value as a *praeparatio evangelica* [preparation for the Gospel] (1970: 21). This calls for African Christian scholars and preachers, in a quest for new approaches, to communicate the Gospel to African peoples to draw on the essential elements of their cultures that can serve as entry point in order to satisfy that end.

The objective of this study is therefore the quest for such an entry point that may allow the Gospel to converse with *Mang-Djala* to find a dwelling place within the ethnically conflicting Christian community of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. While it is worth mentioning that although *Mang-Djala* is a purely human notion, the word of God, which has a transformative power in all human enterprises, will hone it and make it useful. Mbiti is aware of such consideration when he confidently affirms that: “once yielded to the Gospel, even the weakest of our cultural expressions and elements can be used [in the service] of God to bring glory to him” (1977: 36). This idea is part of the essential statements of the Lausanne Covenant in 1978 as echoed by Nicholls (1979: 15). Hence the central challenge here is how to render *Mang-Djala* beneficial so that it might become that desired entry point.

### **7.2.3 *Mang-Djala* as *praeparatio evangelica***

Having discussed the issue of contextualisation of the Gospel in Africa, the next task will be to explore the meaning of the *praeparatio evangelica* and how the concept of *Mang-Djala* could be adapted to this. According to Deist, *praeparatio evangelica* is “anything that paves the way of either the proclamation or the acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1984: 133). Muller places the preparation of the Gospel in the context of cultures meeting Christ for the first time:

Preparation for the Gospel; specifically, [is] the work of the *logos* in and through providential revelation, human reason, and even “pagan” philosophy, which instilled in the “pagan” mind belief in the oneness of God and the desire for both pure worship and higher morality in the centuries prior to the coming of Christ and apostolic mission. The apologetic tradition of the early Church used the concept *praeparatio evangelica* to explain the presence of truths in “pagan”ism and the relationship of those truths to the Christian revelation... *Praeparatio evangelica* can indicate the truths concerning God known to any nation or in any religion prior to the coming of the Gospel (1985: 238).

One can therefore deduce that contextualisation has its roots deep within this *praeparatio evangelica* concept into which *Mang-Djala* fits.

In this regard, for the Gospel to be incarnated among the people, the elements of each culture can be seen as ‘a forerunner’ that paves the way to the Gospel – this role of ‘forerunner’ instils a semblance of the reality that is to come. *Mang-Djala* indubitably constitutes that vague picture which can only be completed when passing through the Scriptures for its light and shade to be discerned as already cited in Bediako (2001: 2). In that way, *Mang-Djala* will be revealed as a new way of understanding in an attempt to amplify the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. Mbiti similarly asserts that:

[the African cultures have] done the donkey work of preparing the ground, so that a world of faith such as Christianity comes “marching” to people who are not religiously illiterate. African peoples are disposed, almost by nature to receive and accommodate Christianity (1970: 21).

*Mang-Djala* is a prefiguration of what is to come – the first appearance of something that is going to reach its fullness – and hence can be categorised in Paul’s words as “a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2: 17 NRSV). In this regard, *Mang-Djala* has already done the hard work Mbiti refers to. Stated differently, *Mang-Djala* is a ‘servant’ to the Gospel as it facilitates its expansion. Smith is of the opinion that “there is little doubt that Christianity would never have moved beyond its Palestinian confines if the early Church had not been able to take up the challenge of the relationship of culture to faith in a positive way” (2006: 346). Even Ferdinando, who in his critique to Bediako’s book: ‘*Theology and Identity: the Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa*’ generally dismisses African culture as *praeparatio evangelica*, acknowledges that, “the fourth-century Fathers appropriated all that they deemed true in Greek thought and synthesized it with Christian revelation” (2007: 132).

Schnabel makes a series of convincing statements in relation to Paul, the Apostle of the gentiles in his speech in Athena (Acts 17: 15-34), pointing out that:

In his presentation to the Areopagus..., Paul employs convictions, arguments and formulations with which they were familiar and which they acknowledged as valid (2005: 180). It is on the basis of [his] critique of contemporary religiosity, particularly the Greco-Roman pluralism of gods and cults, of temples and mysteries that Paul calls his audience to repent and turn to the one God. He asserts that “God has overlooked the time of human ignorance” (17: 30) (2005: 182) The point of contact, or agreement, consists in the fact that Paul uses a vocabulary with whom his listeners are familiar but which gives a new meaning to old words, [(getting more insight from Barret, he pursued)] a meaning that is related to the old one, so that there may be a point of contact, but also different, so that the new message is communicated (2005: 183).

Clearly for Paul, apart from the content of the message itself – which is Jesus, the unchanged core and the focal point of the Christian Gospel--the essential component of transmitting that message is always found on the ground where the recipient community lives. Using local cultures gives the impression that the proclaimed God dwells in the midst of all people. One may also say that the proclamation of the Gospel as such is God’s way of re-creating the whole cosmos anew. Like Paul, Padgett believes that:

The word of God does not just come from heaven like a stone, but is spoken by God through humans in particular times, places, and languages... The gospel must therefore be brought into culture, in word and in deed, for the worship and mission of the church to continue according to God's plan of salvation... We need a gospel that speaks to people today, not a dead orthodoxy or a sterile repetition of past dogma (2006: 102).

Since the early Church, proclaiming the Gospel has been what Christensen expresses as weaving a new mat over an old mat (1990: 157), using what belongs to culture to receive the Gospel. Hence, African Churches should take it for granted in their approach to communicate the Gospel through the richness of their cultures. Having reached this point of awareness, any African theologian, while looking back to the African past might agree with Tlhagale that truly, “colonialism did not create space for the African culture” (2004: 43) to let the Gospel create faith within the culture. Tlhagale maintains that faith creates a new culture, a new meaning, even though this new culture may use distinctive features of the host culture. Faith is the lever that unshackles the African culture from its own self-imprisonment, from the limitations inherent in the African world view (2004: 44).



In this regard *Mang-Djala* cannot only function as an old mat on which a new mat (the Gospel) is woven, but becomes a new creation of the Gospel. That is why Mbiti's concern is emmanently relevant to this study: "...how to interpret the Gospel as a fulfilment in the African context, and to make it relevant for Africa?" (Mbiti 1970: 21). Meanwhile, organisations such as the Pan-African forum<sup>51</sup> known as AAATRS<sup>52</sup> may have been the outcome of the African theologians' awareness of the richness of their valuable cultures—which can include *Mang-Djala* – and their potential to unveil or strip the Gospel from its alien wraps. In this regard, Bediako strongly argues that:

... the Christian faith is capable of 'translation' into African terms without injury to its essential content. Consequently, the task of African Theology came to consist, not in 'indigenising' Christianity, or Theology as such, but rather, in letting the Christian Gospel encounter, as well as be shaped by, the African experience; and this task could proceed without anxiety about its possibility, but also without apology to western traditions of Christianity, since the western traditions did not enshrine universal norms (1994: 16-17).

Consequently, for Wagenaar, "Bediako's theology reveals a clear reluctance to regard African traditions as systems that are essentially independent of Christianity. That is why the African religious traditions receive the status of *Praeparatio evangelica*" (1999: 372) as Bediako himself strongly affirms (1992: 426-441). With this grounding of the universal validity of the Christian gospel, *Mang-Djala* can function as *praeparatio evangelica* in providing an indigenous framework that prepares the way for the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. From there, one is tempted to affirm that if "African Christianity has grown tremendously in the past hundred years and is predicted to have the fastest growth rates of Christianity on all continents in the years to come"<sup>53</sup>, doubtless the understanding that its cultures are the preparations for the Gospel has made a pronounced contribution indeed.

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<sup>51</sup> The Pan-African forum is the African Academy of Theology and Religious Studies (AAATRS) motivated by the urgent need to strengthen theological faculty development for African churches both in church related institutions of theological training as well as in public or private African universities, the urgent need to enhance contextual African theological developments seen as a challenge which cannot be answered by theological institutions staying in isolation from each other or by African theologians being more in dialogue with and oriented to their counterparts in Europe or the United States than with themselves in neighbouring African nations and churches, the urgent need to articulate Christian theology in dialogue with African wisdom, African living religions and with social, political and religious developments on the African continent (2012: 2).

<sup>52</sup> The all Africa Academy of Theology and Religious Study (AAATRS), [http://www.oikoumene.org/files/wcc-main/2012pdfs/AAATRS-project\\_.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/files/wcc-main/2012pdfs/AAATRS-project_.pdf) Access 03/04/2013

<sup>53</sup> The all Africa Academy of Theology and Religious Study (AAATRS), [http://www.oikoumene.org/files/wcc-main/2012pdfs/AAATRS-project\\_.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/files/wcc-main/2012pdfs/AAATRS-project_.pdf) Access 03/04/2013

As stated previously, the etymology of *Mang-Djala* relates to unity, but once that unity is broken, *Mang-Djala* acts as a mediator in rebuilding that unity by way of reconciliation. Therefore, in the context of this study, where unity is under threat in the Christian community, the concept of *Mang-Djala* is intended to be used as an entry point or point of contact from the perspective of reconciliation to validate its Christian character. This practice works to preserve the community by binding its members to a permanent contract that demands of them certain obligations that will prevent any dissolution of the society.

Using this concept confirms the assertion by Mbiti, that:

African traditional life is largely built on the community. Since the Church is also a community of those who have Faith in Jesus Christ, this overlapping concept should be exploited much more on the African scene, particularly in terms of the family, the relatives, the neighbours, the departed, the question of mutual interdependence and the sustaining of one another in time of need (1997: 31).

Nthamburi adds to this, stating that “the community consciousness is so strong in Africa that I am tempted to say that our proclamation and witnessing must be directed to the community in order that an individual who is a member of that community may respond to the message” (1983: 163).

Sharing the same line of thought, Kunhiyop asserts that “while [the] emphasis on [Christian] community ethics is very familiar to Africans, it is harder for those steeped in the individualism of Western ethics to grasp” (2008: 60).

Given the above line of reasoning, and exploring African values such as *Mang-Djala*, which in their early settings were meant to build and to reconcile strong communities based on reciprocal trust between the members, it becomes necessary to borrow it for the sake of translating the Gospel of unity and reconciliation. *Mang-Djala* thus becomes an important tool to achieve unity in the Church whilst also functioning as a ‘conflict regulator’ to maintain the reconciled community permanently alerted and tied. Analogically, what *Mang-Djala* is to the indigenous culture of the Cameroonian peoples, so unity is to the people of God. It is for these reasons that scholars such as Kraft have a positive approach to African cultures as a way of translating the message of the Christian community, stating that:

Africa can teach the rest of the world much about the closeness of community. The responsibility of one for another and the effects of the actions of each on the other are well

known to Africans and could be taught to others to deepen their Christian experience (1981: 304).

In order to understand Kraft's assertion, one must refer to Africa's abundant cultural resources which need continuous exploration while dealing with the Gospel and other cultural issues. *Mang-Djala* may constitute a cultural model which, if applied properly, may favour the Gospel-culture dialogue, leading to Christian unity and reconciliation. Reflecting on this, Reverend Emmanuel Ousmanou advocates for an 'evangelical language' by stating: "*dans la communauté Chrétienne tous deviennent Mang-Djala en Jésus Christ*" [within the Christian community, all becomes *Mang-Djala* in Jesus Christ], or Reverend Jean Baiguele's statement: "*Christ devient le Mang-Djala qui unit toutes les tribus*" [Christ becomes the *Mang-Djala* that unites all the tribes], as discussed in chapter five (see page 107).

In this regard, the Willowbank report states:

*C'est sous le contrôle du Saint-Esprit que les auteurs bibliques ont emprunté à leur milieu culturel des mots et des images dont ils ont usé en les renouvelant profondément, en les dégageant de toute connotation païenne pour en faire des véhicules de la grâce et de la vérité de Dieu.*

[It is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that biblical authors have borrowed from their cultural milieu images and words that they have used, profoundly renewing them, removing from them any "pagan" connotation, in order to make them vehicles of the grace and the truth of God] (1978: 16).

Similarly, Christensen argues that:

the task of Christian theology is to deepen the communication of the Gospel message in the most meaningful terms available to the local culture, and to let that communication expand both within and beyond the culture" (1990: 167).

This is what Lawrence Osborn calls the 'conversion of culture' which means "allowing the Gospel to bring [a] specific culture to fulfilment" (1995: 161), because "it is culture that shapes our response to the Gospel and shapes the kind of Church we are" (Bediako 1999: 9). Meanwhile, Richard Niebuhr's book '*Christ and Culture*<sup>54</sup>, in its discourse on the

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<sup>54</sup> In this book, Richard Niebuhr presents five models of relationship between Christ and culture. Rick Allbee and Richard John Neuhaus in their separate work (2005 & 2007) have respectively brought succinct summaries of Niebuhr's paradigms. The first paradigm, Christ against culture, suggests that Christianity should find culture irrelevant – this view encourages the separation of Christians from culture, either individually or collectively. The second Christ of culture is radically world-affirming with the goal of completely institutionalizing religion

conversionist motif among others (radical, accommodation, syntheist, dualist), becomes relevant and more applicable at this point. In fact, this position maintains that “human nature is fallen or perverted... [Accordingly], Christ is seen as the converter of man in his culture and society” (1975: 43). Bediako, in aligning himself with the conversionist motif, maintains that:

Gospel and culture engagement is about the conversion of cultures, the turning to Christ and turning over to Christ of all that is there in us, about us and roundabout us that has defined and shaped us when Jesus meets us, so that the elements of our cultural identity are brought within the orbit of discipleship. Our discipleship is to Christ who is Lord over us and everyone else. Therefore, there is no place for cultural or ethnic pride (2001: 2)

This position is upheld by Mbiti who further clarifies this by stating that: “...culture is created by man, and because man is sinful, what he creates, however beautiful, however great, however highly cultivated it might be, it nevertheless bears the imprint of human sinfulness – through individual sins, corporate sins, structural sins ...” (1977: 36-37). This point is also clearly pointed out by Osborn (1995: 160-161) as cited earlier. Therefore, it is the Gospel that sanctifies cultures in order to make them vehicles of the grace and the truth of God.

This had been also Augustine’s position, as presented by Niebuhr, that Christ is the transformer of culture “in the sense that he redirects, re-invigorates and regenerates [the] life of man, expressed in all human works...” (1975: 209) and to which Allbee and Neuhaus respectively align themselves (2005: 19, 2007: 56). All these statements constitute an insightful motive for undertaking this kind of study, where *Mang-Djala* is refilled with new content and is given a new statute for the people of God. Within this new framework, *Mang-Djala* still conserves its quality as a people moving towards its destiny, but with a new perception – the redeemed people of God – *Mang-Djala* and hence subscribes to what an earthly Christian community is meant to be. Forell is also of this view, holding that “it is the consensus of Christians that the Church is God’s pilgrim people hopefully and faithfully

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in culture – Christianity is reconciled with what appears to be the greatest achievement of culture. The third Christ above culture affirms all that is good in culture – Culture cannot be all bad because it is founded on the nature created by God. Although nature and culture are fallen they are still subject to God. The fourth Christ and culture in paradox is dualistic, advocating separate rules for society and Christians – the realm of the world and the realm of God exist side by side in a paradoxical relation, never to be resolved in this life. The fifth, Christ transforming culture has according to Rick Allbee much to recommend it (2005: 19) – the fall only perverted things which were created good, that these things remain inherently good and capable of reform, even though they are misdirected (Rick Allbee 2005 :18-19 & Richard John Neuhaus 2007: 56).

marching into God's future" (1973: 1). This reinforces Mbiti's argument when he states that "a Christian is a cultural pilgrim and not a settler, moving even with his cultural luggage towards the eschatological goal of the Gospel" (1977: 39).

In this progression the transformed *Mang-Djala* becomes also a site of dedication where Christ comes to meet and lead his followers towards their common goal. Kraft aligns himself with this view by stating that "God chooses the cultural milieu in which humans are immersed as the arena of his interaction with people" (1981: 114). Thus the Gospel itself is enclosed within culture, and transformation consists of unwrapping it so that its content (the Gospel) becomes accessible to a specific audience: the good news is 'translated'. In this regard, Sanneh posits that "religion was a translated faith right from the start: the Gospels are not a verbatim transcript of the preaching and actions of Jesus (2005: 214) into the culture in which it finds itself. In other words, the conversionist theory allows the content of the Gospel to be incarnated within a specific culture. To this author's understanding, this is what contextualisation, or the Gospel-culture dialogue is all about and into which *Mang-Djala* fits.

Concurring with Sanneh, where a Bible translation is undertaken, "it became the vehicle of indigenous cultural development and the basis of establishing Churches (2005: 114). In other words, the conversionist theory allows the content of the Gospel to be unpacked within a specific culture. To this author's understanding, this is what contextualisation, or Gospel-culture dialogue might mean and into which *Mang-Djala* is intended to contribute.

In the previous chapters, the concept of *Mang-Djala* has been described as a *social belt of life*, while one of the participants qualified it as '*skin and flesh*' that can be separated only with a knife. This is to express the driving force concealed within the concept that only those involved understand its deepest meaning; just as only committed Christians can understand the real significance of the Cross and its value within a Christian community, which may seem foolishness to other people (1 Corinthians 1: 23-24 NRSV). On the other hand, *Mang-Djala*, viewed as a closed circle – exclusively opened to its members within its initial context – becomes in the Christian context, an opened environment whereby baptism as a means of God's grace, opens the way to people to become part of that community, irrespective of their ethnicity, and to become fully members of the Church. "Concretely, [this] reception into the Church means reception into the worshiping assembly, not only admittance to hearing the proclamation and participating in prayer but also to the Lord's supper" (Schlink 1972: 73) – the full integration of the new member into the pilgrim Christian community. To this end,

*Mang-Djala* constitutes a *praeparatio evangelica*, albeit not in the sense that the concept was awaiting a specific fulfilment related to God's promise. Fernando seems to link the criteria of the preparation for the Gospel to God's promises and its fulfilment in the same way as for Israel (2007: 133-134). Given the role played by the concept in its initial context as an indigenous framework for reconciliation, there is no doubt that *Mang-Djala* has prepared the way to understanding God's covenant as the source of forgiveness and reconciliation.

### 7.3 Theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala*

The theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala* fits into the framework of local theology, which, according to Schreiter, emphasizes "the circumscribed context of the local reflection and [has] also some ecclesial overtones through its association with "local Church."" (1985: 6). This has been an attempt to respond positively to "the need to find theological expressions more attuned to changing realities" (Bevans 2002: ix) so as to respond adequately to the challenges of transmitting the Gospel adequately to a given community, by taking into account the fact that each context is unique and deserves specific tools to convey the Christian message. In another work, Schreiter states that:

Local theology is the result of a continuing adaptation or translation of the Gospel message and ensuing Christian tradition in local, concrete contexts. The purpose of this adaptation is to make the Gospel more intelligible and lively within the local Church, and to make the larger Church tradition and practice a better vehicle for responding to the Gospel in the local situation. Defined thus, local theology can be seen to be part of a long history of historical development within the Church<sup>55</sup>.

Given all that has been said in previous chapters and in the above about the concept of *Mang-Djala*, the assumption in this sub-section is that *Mang-Djala* prefigured the multiplicity of peoples under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As such, the Christian community can be regarded as the community of *Mang-Djala* because *Mang-Djala* is a covenantal community built on the principle of *living together* – although it is limited to its specific members without providing any space for outsiders to join. Hence, given the attributes of *Mang-Djala* in common with the attributes of the Christian community – the predominance of forgiveness and reconciliation – it becomes an exciting challenge to expand its understanding as an African expression to mean Christian communities, whereby Christian celebrations become metaphorically *Mang-Djala* celebrations. Meanwhile, the non-existence of a leader or dominant member in *Mang-Djala*'s initial setting may be seen as having been hidden until it

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<sup>55</sup> Local Theologies in the Local Church: Issues and Methods  
<http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/download/3018/2637>. Accessed 29/04/2013

is now fully revealed in the lordship of Christ, who is the Lord of the new *Mang-Djala* (Christian) community.

The implication of the above assertion is the equal importance of the members, which in the Christian sense is justified by the fact that before God, all are equal (Galatians 3: 28). Therefore the philosophy of *Mang-Djala* represents a hint of the full revelation of the real Lord. *Mang-Djala* becomes a kind of veiled Christian community pending its realisation, or a Christian community in incubation. Using the Christian lens to assess *Mang-Djala*, it can be seen as a new community whereby the individuals are joined both to God and to one another (Berkhof 1979: 339). Hence in *Mang-Djala*, the unrevealed vertical dimension of relationship which would otherwise enable it to be a fully Christian community, attains its completion in Christ, because in its initial philosophy, *Mang-Djala* does not in itself lead the partners towards the ultimate reality of human existence, namely God.

### **7.3.1 Christian covenant as *Mang-Djala***

As argued earlier (145 paragraph 4) in this study, in the Christian community Christ becomes God's meeting place, in other words, the focal and inclusive point of unity of all the nations. This is what Hellerman terms a surrogate people of God (2007: 305), and to which this study earlier referred in contrast to the Israelite's exclusive understanding of God's people. At the basis of the covenant is God's promise to bless and to forgive those who enter into the covenant with him. Therefore the surrogate people of God, whom Berkhof terms the new community, whereby the "individuals [are] are joined both to God and to other people" (1979: 339), reside constantly under God's forgiveness.

Although in its initial practice, *Mang-Djala* does not refer to the relationship between God and its own members, doubtless it strongly advocates for the second dimension of relationship which involves the members of the community, where forgiveness and reconciliation keep people together in spite of their differences. In this regard, becoming the surrogate people of God entails becoming the recipient of God's blessings of forgiveness on the one hand, and the subject of those same blessings in mutual forgiveness on the other. Hence in the Christian principle of *living together*, forgiveness is there to regulate human weaknesses and differences in order to prevent the dislocation of the community.

Yet, throughout the discourse on *Mang-Djala*, it has been shown that the etymology of the word '*Mang-Djala*' (*living together*) – which is also termed in this study as a '*social belt of life*' – forms the core concept, symbolised by the locusts' life style that might be expressed in

terms of ‘walking together’, ‘companions on the road’, ‘comrades at arms’, ‘allies’, or ‘alliance of war’ (see chapter three page 54). This shows a common consent and a strong mutual feeling of confidence and expectation from the partners. All the above-mentioned expressions enable *Mang-Djala* to be viewed as a covenant of common interest and common struggle, be it physical or spiritual.

Accordingly, *Mang-Djala* already embodies Christian unity as the Christian faith which binds the believers to live together as a community headed by Christ (John 17: 21), so as to testify to their common interest and goal, which is described as the unity of faith in Ephesians 4, and as a spiritual struggle in Ephesians 6. Since *Mang-Djala* promotes life in community, as repeatedly stated, one can speak about *Mang-Djala* and Christian community in an analogical way. In this sense, *Mang-Djala* becomes a metaphor which describes the Christian community. Henceforth, to use the language of *Mang-Djala* in the context of the Church is to point to something far greater, something that goes beyond the simple indigenous framework of *Mang-Djala*, to expose the immensity of God’s self-manifestation in the midst of his people.

### **7.3.2 *Mang-Djala* as the Christian community**

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred spirits live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1 NRSV). Wahlstrom comments that “God has created men [and women] – and even forms of higher animal life – as social beings who must live in community with one another” (1962: 143-144). Hence it becomes obvious that:

The community which possesses a variety of charisms and functions will regulate the faith of its individuals and will, in its turn, be enriched by the varied experiences of the persons making it up. It is the people as a whole who belong to Yahweh. There is no question of a thou and I, but of thou and we (Gutierrez 1991: 34).

In its application, *Mang-Djala* attempts to implement such a life ideal, although it is limited by its secular and human nature. Nevertheless, as in the context of Christian community, “people can also fully experience their participation in the covenant event only within a community in which they support and mutually enrich each other” (Berkhof 1979: 340). To enrich each other is to mutually bear burdens as “Jesus himself invited his followers into his fellowship and therewith to the fellowship with each other” (1979: 341). Meanwhile, every Christian community as a human community is a very complex and paradoxical entity, in the



sense that it struggles to implement the ideal of being a Christian community in their ongoing Christian life.

Although Bonhoeffer's statement: "It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among Christians" (1949: 7) was written to indicate the Christian's struggle in facing the hostilities and persecutions of this world, it can also be applied to this discussion. Conflicts, misunderstandings and tensions can occur at any time and divide a Christian community. Hence, to be a Christian community is not always guaranteed, as threats of division are recurrent and troublesome to any Christian community in many ways and at the same time may affect the relationship with God.

The early Church communities were stricken by those conflicts – the divisions in the Corinthian Church, which Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 3. On this point, Wahlstrom makes a remarkable statement: "the Church of today has all the weaknesses of the first disciples and the early Church, and even some new flaws of its own" (1962: 181-182). This is to say, as maintained by Gritsch and Jenson, an earthly, perfect Christian community is inconceivable, "even though moralists, puritans, and idealists in general may desire a pure Church" (1976: 128). In this regard, Bonhoeffer observes: "Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream" (1949: 15). If Christian communities are indeed imperfect communities, *Mang-Djala* cannot pretend otherwise. However, forgiveness and reconciliation that emerge from a covenant and are put into place as an antidote against the noxious effects of sin, and as the manifestation of God's grace, are the greatest strengths that keep *Mang-Djala*'s members together in spite of their fallibility and weaknesses. In other words, building a community on the basis of forgiveness and reconciliation in order to achieve a common goal is first and foremost a divine wisdom. In this regard, *Mang-Djala*, in promoting those values, becomes a Christian community where Christ is God's wisdom.

*Mang-Djala*, as previously stated, is a closed community which does not provide any room for the outsider. This can be understood along the lines of human limitations and imperfection. Yet as a community, it is transformed into what a Christian community is meant to be, once it is understood as an object of God's grace, although not built upon a divine special revelation. Its new framework of Christian community opens up a new insight and significance through Baptism, whereby "[each] individual becomes a true person [participant] within the Christian community" (Shaw 1963: 20), and within which he partakes

in the sacrament of the Altar (1 Corinthians 11). As Shaw cogently argues: “it is plain, then, that the believing participant at the Lord’s table finds himself linked to God’s redemptive, covenant-establishing work throughout history and thus with all those who belong to God’s people” (28, see also Brett 2003).

Thus, given the peculiarity of the Christian faith, *Mang-Djala* would have been used as a medium that would have acted as John the Baptist’s voice (Mark 1: 3), to be the forerunner in fostering the Gospel of reconciliation within the E.L.C.C. Nevertheless, what *Mang-Djala* can contribute to the Christian understanding of community is the fact that those who are bound by *Mang-Djala* have no right to self-withdrawal or mutual dismissal from the community. This is where forgiveness and reconciliation play a crucial role in keeping people together beyond their differences and weaknesses, so as to preserve the community. This is what might have motivated what in previous chapters was termed ‘blind forgiveness’ with regard to *Mang-Djala*, since a partner may ignore his partner’s evil in the name of *Mang-Djala*. Visibly, one can refer *Mang-Djala* to 1 Corinthians 13: 7 “it [(love)] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things” (NRSV). For the sake of that love, Jesus suffered humans’ fate on the Cross.

### **7.3.3 The Cross as the ‘universal *Mang-Djala*’ and its theological implications.**

The Cross is the symbol of Christian unity. It is here where one may learn of the knowledge of God as a gracious God. It is where forgiveness and reconciliation are manifested and available to everyone. Therefore, to say that the Cross is the ‘universal *Mang-Djala*’, is a metaphor to stress that the Cross universally brings people together – the community of faith, to meet under its banner and to embark on their journey, steadfastly headed by Christ towards their common goal, as a surrogate people of God. This is, as argued by Hellerman referred to below, in contrast to the Israelite’s understanding of the people of God. Hence, “Jesus becomes the new content of [*Mang-Djala*]” (Christensen 1990:176), since “in a Christian community, all become *Mang-Djala* in Jesus Christ” (Rev. Emmanuel Ousmanou), or “Christ is our *Mang-Djala* in the sense that he unites all ethnic groups in the Church” (Rev. Jean Baiguele and Rev. Emmanuel Ousmanou). These statements are further enlightened by Bonhoeffer’s observation that “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ” (1949: 10).

In this new context, *Mang-Djala* is an achievement of Hellerman's view, according to which Jesus is an ethnic entrepreneur (2007: 288), whereby he "relativized the Abrahamic bloodline and reconstituted God's people as a surrogate family" (305). Accordingly, "Jesus prepared his followers to redefine the people of God as a transnational surrogate kinship – one that would welcome not only the Judean into the family, but gentiles as well (Hellerman 2001: 89). In this new context, one could use an inclusive language such as *Mang-Djala* in our community to mean that "a new age [that] has dawned, and God [has] once and for all [intervened] for the salvation of his people and the establishment of his rule" (91). *Mang-Djala* therefore becomes the new way of understanding and interpreting God's redeeming work through Jesus Christ on the Cross that creates the Christian community of fellowship.

### **7.3.4 The implications of *Mang-Djala* as an agent of reconciliation**

In chapter five under 5.3.10, *Mang-Djala* was described as an agent of reconciliation. In this section emphasis will be placed on its implications in the light of the Christian teaching, and thus link it to the *Mang-Djala* concept.

In order to understand the Christian teaching of reconciliation, there are some key Biblical texts, such as: 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21; Romans 5: 6-11; Colossians 1: 20; and Ephesians 2: 14 that should not be overlooked because these texts underpin the Christian teaching on reconciliation. However, starting from the root of the word before moving on proves to be an inspiration towards deepening our understanding.

#### **7.3.4.1 Definition of reconciliation**

According to Schreiter "there is no agreed-upon definition of reconciliation in human societies, [because] the specific circumstances for which reconciliation is needed have a profound effect on the very meaning of reconciliation itself" (1998: 13). In the same line of thought, O'Leary & Hay assert that there is no one universally accepted definition of reconciliation (2000: 85). Nevertheless, an attempt at a definition made by Geiko seems to be insightful for this study. According to him, etymologically, reconciliation means '*concilium*' and

Suggests a deliberate process in which the conflicting partners meet each other "in council" to work out their different views and to arrive at some common agreement. Yet we usually think of "reconciliation" as involving more than mere negotiation; it points towards some profound change in consciousness (1997: 3).

A more detailed definition is proposed by Nelson, according to whom reconciliation has its root from the Latin *con* = with, and *cil* = go, which originally meant ‘get walking together’. Therefore, re-conciling is the act by which people who were formerly united but who now are apart, begin to stroll or march together again (1969: 15-16). This definition pointedly refers to the context within which the concept of *Mang-Djala* had originated. Reconciliation hence comes to mean an agreement by which people commit themselves to undertake a life-long journey together, facing the same challenges. In this way, reconciliation is a covenant of peace in itself, given the above discourse on covenant within which *Mang-Djala* may be defined.

It is therefore logical when Heineken asserts that in reconciliation, “the wrath-relationship is changed into a peace-relationship” (1949: 93). In the same line of thought, Dwight asserts that “the word ‘reconciliation’ in the Scriptures means “to cause to conform to a standard, to be adjusted to a specified standard” (1965: 84).

Given these insights, there are assumptions that need to be considered while discussing the theological mandate for reconciliation. Firstly, there are conflicting partners; there is a wrath-relationship between two partners. It may be between God and human beings, or between human beings themselves. In other words, there is a fragmented relationship that needs to be restored to its initial state – to return to the level of relationship that existed before it was damaged. This has been expressed through the Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship’s concern that: *Dans la situation conflictuelle actuelle de l’Eglise, si les Dii et les Laka s’étaient adressés aux Gbaya dans le langage du Mang-Djala qui est très profond, on serait déjà arrivé à une solution pacifique du conflit*” [In the current conflicting situation of the Church, if the Dii and the Laka people had addressed themselves to the Gbaya in the *Mang-Djala* language which is very profound, they would already have reached a peaceful solution to the conflict.] (National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship on Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011)

Secondly, in the relationship between God and human beings, God himself has worked out how to calm the tense relationship between him and the human beings who are his partners. Hence, “ultimately, reconciliation is not a human achievement, but the work of God”. (Schreiter 1998: 14). In this regard, reconciliation between human beings becomes entrusted to people or a gift from God (2 Corinthians 5: 18-20). In this case *Mang-Djala* functions as an agent of reconciliation to fulfil its responsibility as accomplishing the will of God.

#### 7.3.4.2 Christian mandate for reconciliation

In Christian teaching, reconciliation is the work of God. Hence, “reconciliation proceeds by doing away with, and the method of doing this was the atoning death of Christ” (Morris 1956: 223). In this regard, “reconciliation is ... a strictly theological concept; a supreme term to describe God’s redeeming work”: (Geiko 1996: 4), which implies “a state of peace and concord between God and his creatures, in which the will of God is known and is consciously pursued by human beings” (Winter 1995: 103). In other words, human beings are to partake in the reconciling work of God – they are called to become agents of reconciliation within their environment. Hence, “the salvation that [Jesus] mediates consists of fellowship with God and the related life, which also embraces a renewal of fellowship with others” (Pannenberg 1991: 398). According to the Christian understanding of salvation, there are two implications of which one should not lose sight: the fellowship with God, that is both concerned with the individual and the community relationship to God; and the fellowship with one another that has brought together all those who are in fellowship with God – the community of the saints who are called to share everything in Christ.

[Within the circle of that community, people] are meant to [fully] communicate with others, to share consciousness; to enter into other people’s views, understanding, enthusiasm, and insights, and to let [them] enter into [theirs]. The reality of friendship indicates that [they] have both the capacity and the need to care for one another, to be a support for one another, to grow together, into maturity and responsibility. (Cooke 1986: 9-10).

This is the ideal Christian relationship which is an expression of the anticipating Kingdom of God which the concept of *Mang-Djala* in its approximate objective strives to fulfil, albeit within a non-Christian context. Sin is troublesome to the point where the human being’s effort to create its own bliss is proven to be ineffective. In other words, that expected ideal will never be fully achieved due to humankind’s imperfection.

As maintained by Cooke, “sin is the negative force in [human beings’] lives, negating all that can bring joy and peace and excitement to [their] human existence” (1986: 23). Therefore the concept of *Mang-Djala* in itself can never satisfy the expectation of those who attempt to build an ideal society around this concept. Nevertheless, the concept expresses the human’s longing for such an ideal life, which cannot be achieved due to his shortcoming. However, the concept of *Mang-Djala* would help to translate a life as envisaged by the *Mang-Djala* originators, and as achieved by God in Christ. This can only be imputed to the believer by grace, because of the universalism of sin. Using the lens of *Mang-Djala* will therefore deepen

the understanding of God's purpose for his people; for which their undeserved forgiveness and reconciliation have been made constantly available.

In this regard, Wahlstrom rightly points out that "just as the individual Christian remains a sinner and lives by God's grace, *simul iustus et peccator*, [at the same time sinner and justified] so the Church is both holy and sinful, the people of God who live by grace alone. There is no pure Church" (1962: 181). Thus the Church as a community of believers is all about experiencing God's forgiveness and reconciliation. The doctrine of the justification by faith is the doctrine of God's gift of righteousness which is also evidenced in the concept of *Mang-Djala*, as it has as its focus forgiveness and reconciliation.

Gritsch and Jenson maintain: "The Church, like the individual Christian, is "simultaneously righteous and sinful" (*simul iustus et peccator*)" (1976: 128). Christians are righteous sinners and the Church is a righteous sinner and reconciled community which can only depend on forgiveness to overcome its own obstacles to move forwards in the companionship of one another under the aegis of God himself. This helps in understanding the mystery of a self-forgiving God in Christ that brings about the reconciliation that only faith can grasp. The concept of *Mang-Djala* may contribute to substantiate the implications of such act.

#### **7.3.4.3 Reconciliation and forgiveness**

If there is no agreed upon definition of reconciliation in human societies as mentioned earlier, is it possible to establish a relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness? There seem to be divergent views in this regard. O'Leary & Hay state that, "forgiveness may at times be a contributing factor towards achieving reconciliation, but is by no means a permanent contributing factor. Reconciliation is possible without forgiveness" (2000: 86). Can this reconciliatory feature be applied to the Biblical teaching on reconciliation and forgiveness, in which forgiveness seems to be a prior step towards reconciliation? Probably it was this manner of reconciliation that was advocated after the apartheid regime in South Africa, a reconciliation to which Nürnberger and Tooke were strongly opposed in the book "*The Cost of Reconciliation in South Africa*". Nürnberger and Tooke state: "reconciliation goes hand in hand with repentance where there is consciousness about one's sins, leading to confession followed by forgiveness and cleansing" (1988: 25), and further, "reconciliation is not possible without repentance, confession and forgiveness. Reconciliation without repentance cannot be reconciliation" (1988: 26). Similarly, Balcomb argues that: "reconciliation emerges out of repentance and forgiveness and results in peace and restitution" (1993: 70).

Clearly, because of the fallibility of human beings, forgiveness is always a necessity that reconciles people and renders life bearable for everyone. Without such means of renewing and harmonising ways of living together, human beings will behave much like animals. One understands therefore that forgiveness is a product of divine inspiration instilled in the human heart to make life possible with one another. It is from this perspective that *Mang-Djala* should also be understood.

In the context of Christian understanding, forgiveness is the fact of not imputing to a guilty party their wrongdoing, which consequently created enmity or antagonism that has necessitated the need for reconciliation. In Romans 5: 8: “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. A number of Biblical teachings oppose O’Leary’s & Hay’s points of view mentioned above. Christian reconciliation as well as forgiveness is strictly based on Christ’s saving work on the one hand, and on his mandate on the other. Commenting on Bonhoeffer’s book “*Life Together*”, Jones states that “Christian life is learned and lived through the cultivation of specific habits and practices of forgiveness, in the sense of holiness that enables us to learn our habits of sinfulness” (1995: 13). Based on this assertion, one may argue that the *Mang-Djala* partners were already living a Christian life. One of the important features of *Mang-Djala* is the process of learning and living by cultivating the practice of forgiveness that strengthens the fellowship of the members. These members live continuously as a reconciled people. Therefore, in the Christian context, it is not possible to conceive of a reconciled Christian community without forgiveness being at the centre of that community.

Similarly, Terrence asserts: “forgiveness is an on-going practice of reconciliation, [that should be] repeated again and again” (2008: 167). Here one may refer to Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question on how often one should forgive: “not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times” (Matt. 18: 21-22 NRSV). Hence there should be no limit in forgiveness, if reconciliation is to be implemented. Jesus expressed this in terms of love when he urged his disciples to love one other like he himself loved them. This view is confirmed by Schreier who states that “Christian forgiveness takes some of its distinctive features from modelling human forgiveness upon divine forgiveness” (1998: 57).

Here again, it becomes impossible to speak of reconciliation without making reference to forgiveness. This is because of the conflicting factor of sin which creates a wall of separation. Therefore forgiveness becomes a kind of bridge that links the two conflicting parties in order

to bring and keep them together in community. That is why, in making reference to the achieved work of Christ on the Cross, Paul says: "... in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Ephesians 2: 14 NRSV) "so that there could be one [reconciled] people" (Cooke 1986: 68). The breaking down of such a dividing wall is for the purpose of fulfilling God's intention to reconstitute his people, from which human beings' mutual forgiveness is imparted.

The Lord's Prayer, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6: 12) also may have been motivated by Christ's concern about reconciliation through forgiveness. It reveals the pertinence of antagonism between God and human beings, and between human beings themselves, which forgiveness only should address, so that peace may be restored. Notably, in forgiveness:

a healing takes place which paves the way for a better cooperation between former conflicting partners... Forgiveness is a genuine process of encounter, of healing, of the releasing of new options for the future. A guilty and painful past is redeemed in order to establish reliable foundations for renewed fellowship in dignity and trust. Forgiveness frees the future from the haunting legacies of the past. (Geiko 1996: 5)

According to this Christian understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness are interchangeable terms which constitute the core of the new covenant, because both deal with the restoring relationship that is achieved once and for all by Christ on the Cross. Through this act, Christ has created the Christian community – Christ's Church, which in the context of this study may be called a new *Mang-Djala* community, where all nations and peoples are united and bound to God, as well as being bound to one another in pilgrimage towards celestial bliss. In other words, reconciliation and forgiveness are two fundamental components of God's continuous activity in the creation and expansion of Christian communities, imparted to human beings and to prepare them to receive his achieved work of forgiveness and reconciliation. Hence, *Mang-Djala* may be deemed a preparation for the Gospel.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to bring together a number of divergent components. The following issues were explored:

- 1) The issue of contextualisation which underpins the importance of the study;



2) The dialogue between Gospel and culture into which the study should integrate the concept to be used;

3) The concept of *praeparatio evangelica*;

4) Theological reflection on the concept of *Mang-Djala*, whereby *Mang-Djala* can be seen as a *praeparatio evangelica*; that is, a preparation of the gospel among cultures that are yet to hear the message of Christ. This is linked to the implications of *Mang-Djala* as an agent of reconciliation, which regulates people's life through permanent forgiveness.

The overall theme of the chapter is that God, throughout human history, works out the restoration of his intention, namely to enable his human creatures to live together as a body. Therefore *Mang-Djala*, embodying the principle of *living together*, is given a new Christian context, in order to “be received within the [E.L.C.C.] as both a familiar yet new component... a symbolic vocabulary [that is] a new mat woven over an old mat” (Thomas Christensen 1990: 157). Hence *Mang-Djala* bears a completely new framework and meaning drawn from its initial context that enhances the Christian understanding of *living together*.

## **Chapter Eight: Concluding remarks and recommendations, signposts for the future.**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In this concluding chapter the overall research project is summarised by revisiting its goals, methods, and outcomes. An evaluation will be provided of the possibilities of using *Mang-Djala* in the ELCC by weighing up its potentialities as well as its limitations and the chapter will conclude by offering some recommendations for the church in the light of the findings.

### **8.2 The goals of the study**

The research was conducted around four objectives that constituted the essence of the study. These were:

- The analysis of the impact of ethnicity in Cameroon;
- The location of the sources of the problems caused by the ethnic diversity of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon;
- The evaluation of the initiatives that are being undertaken by the Church thus far to deal with the issue of ethnic disunity in the Church, in order to envisage new possibilities; and
- The appropriation of the concept of *Mang-Djala* in an attempt to suggest a possible solution to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

Achieving these goals presupposed undertaking a thorough investigation of the conflicting situation posed by ethnic diversity that has affected the whole of Cameroonian society and prescribing a way to remedy it within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. This led to the preliminary analysis of the impact of ethnicity in the Cameroonian society as a whole and then analysing its effects in the Cameroonian Churches in general and in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in particular.

### **8.3 Fulfilling the goals of the study**

Two kinds of research were undertaken to fulfil the goals of the study, namely archival and empirical.

### **8.3.1 Archival research**

The Church's archives constituted an important resource in this study. It resulted from the archives reflecting that for many years the church has not been paying enough attention to the alarm sounded by the multiple memoranda and letters by individuals denouncing the rise of ethnocentrism within the Church. It is through the archives also that it is possible to realise that the project "*un dans le monde*" [one in the world] that was initiated was a kind of brief response to the memoranda and letters, aimed at reconciling the conflicting parties. The archives were important in the sense that, on the one hand; they have proved and conserved the history of those conflicts, and on the other hand, they have proved that the Church's leadership was neither ignorant of the problems posed by ethnic diversity, nor of the necessity of establishing a lasting solution for the preservation of unity in the Church. In this way, the archives have contributed to assessing the impact of ethnic diversity in the Church, and have exposed the failure of the Church to address that problem effectively. Through the archives, it has been possible to maintain that the Church leadership, in its brief attempt to address the problem of ethnic disunity in the Church through the project "*un dans le monde*" [one in the world] has not done enough, given the scale of the problem. Accordingly, the need for a lasting solution to the problem is still to be explored. Therefore, it is appropriate that the study is suggesting the concept of *Mang-Djala* as an alternative approach to the problem.

Besides the Church archives, some newspapers such as *Oeil du sahel* which is an official newspaper, constituted another useful source of information that was consulted. *Oeil du sahel* has recorded a number of critical events in the Church, including some stages of this on-going conflict.

### **8.3.2 Empirical research**

The empirical research has two constituents: the interviews and the focus group discussion. Ultimately, these sources on their own constituted the driving force of this study, producing for the most part, the findings related to the concept of *Mang-Djala*.

#### **8.3.2.1 The interviews**

The aims of the interviews were twofold: firstly, to investigate the extent to which ethnocentrism is experienced by the members of the Church and, secondly, how they react to it. On this point, there is an agreement from the participants that discrimination resulting from ethnocentrism is real in the Church. In this regard, the interviews are important and constituted live tools for analysing the impact of ethnicity in Cameroonian society and

singularly in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon. They are also vital as, through them, it has been possible to identify the source of the current conflict as a struggle for power and control over the Church.

In an effort to locate the source of the problem, the interviews have been important in exploring the possible involvement of the missionaries. The interviews have been a kind of diagnostic process of the problems posed by the ethnic diversity of the Church, in order to prescribe a relevant treatment. At this level, the participants were exclusively limited to the Church's members, due to their involvement as actors in the life of the Church.

Secondly, the interviews were aimed at assessing the validity and viability of the concept of *Mang-Djala* and its possible use within the context of the Church. In this regard, the participants were extended beyond the sphere of the Church (Church's members) to include some traditional rulers, regardless their religious affiliation. The criterion of the traditional rulers' selection was also twofold: 1) their membership or affiliation with other ethnic groups as *Mang-Djala* partners. 2) the assumption that traditional rulers are known as the guardians of tradition, therefore they are proven to know more about the concept under study. As such, they were exempted from questions concerning the implementation of the concept in the context of the Church. However, their views are important in the sense that they lend credible the effectiveness and usefulness of the concept in its initial setting, and how it is presently conceived. Meanwhile, the Church member participants were asked to respond to similar questions to those of the traditional rulers, but with an extension that includes and emphasises the applicability of the concept in the Church.

### **8.3.2.2 The focus group discussions**

The focus group discussions were organised in order to bring together some members of ethnic groups that are joined together as *Mang-Djala* partners, with the same goal, that is assessing the validity and reliability of *Mang-Djala* with the view of its implementation in the Church. In this regard, the participants of the focus group discussion were constituted exclusively by the members of the Church. It is worth mentioning that the overall intention in these different stages was to ascertain the strength, the validity, and the usefulness of the concept.

Having attested that the concept of *Mang-Djala* as currently conceived within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon is viable and useful in combatting ethnocentrism within the

Church, the study attempts to recommend to the Church the approach that can be applied in view of the findings.

#### **8.4 The problems of ethnocentrism in Cameroon.**

Based on the findings the study shows that ethnocentrism is a fact in the Cameroonian society and that it has affected every aspect of that society, including Christian communities. This is revealed by the unanimity of views of the participants on this issue. As the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship commented about the ELCC,

The Church exists in society and is influenced by the society that surrounds it. And so, if there is tribalism in society, necessarily we shall find it in the Church as well. It has thus become the cause of several conflicts that we have experienced in the Church. (Ngaoundéré 14/04/ 2011).

The question which seems obvious is whether the Cameroonian government is striving to resolve that problem. However, this has not been the concern of this study and it has not taken the risk of interfering. Nevertheless, it appears that this situation of ethnic disunity favours politicians who apply the policy of divide and rule to maintain this unstable climate for their political benefit. In other words, Cameroon as a whole is affected by the phenomenon of ethnocentrism that is always a threat to its national unity and, because the church cannot be divorced from the society in which it finds itself, of the unity of the Church.

##### **8.4.1 The sources of the problems caused by ethnic diversity in the Church**

Based on the findings, and in line with the Bible story of Zebedee's sons who requested Jesus to grant them to sit one at his right and one at his left in his glory (Mark 10: 35-40), the study shows that the struggle for power and position (deep-rooted in the condition of life as we know it) also manifests itself in Christianity and has underpinned most issues of ethnocentrism in the E.L.C.C. That is what the National Bishop has alluded to in his arguments as "the idea of ethnic battles during elections within the Church" (National Bishop on the 28/05/2011 in Ngaoundéré). By saying this, he reinforces Asogwa's assertion that "tribalism is manifested in the Church [for the acquisition] of power, privilege, profit, creating an [unhealthy] environment [for social life]" (2012: 95).

##### **8.4.2 The initiative undertaken by the Church to deal with the issue of ethnic disunity in the Church**

On this point, the study has revealed that the only attempt undertaken by the Church to address the issue of ethnic disunity has been the project "*un dans le monde*" [one in the

world]. This project has been a fruitful enterprise because it has largely worked to mitigate the rise of ethnic conflict during the period of its activity; although it did not last long enough. Taking into consideration the first three goals of the study, it emerges that the Church has itself not taken seriously the issue of ethnic division within the Church. In this regard, expressing a concern for the unity of the Church by suggesting the appropriation of an indigenous concept such as *Mang-Djala*, in the light of the Gospel, should not be regarded as an overwhelming task for the Church.

#### **8.4.3 The appropriation of *Mang-Djala* as a possible solution to the problem of ethnic diversity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon**

I will attempt in what follows to give a balanced view of the effectiveness of *Mang-Djala* as an antidote for ethnic conflict in the church. To do this I will first of all outline some of the positive elements that came out in the study, after which I will discuss some of the limitations that also emerged.

It has been argued throughout the study that the concept of *Mang-Djala* is an indigenous concept that was coined in order to resolve interminable fights between different peoples. It was a common will of those peoples to have a framework of unity, where common interest would prevail over individual interest. *Mang-Djala* therefore was seen as a covenant of peace, justice, and reconciliation between those who have come together in the *Mang-Djala* partnership, allowing the members to share their joy and sorrow together and to bear their burdens with one another. In this regard, the concept of *Mang-Djala* is a kind of journey where the members have an interdependent life. The concept has been instrumental in building and strengthening human relationships within a number of ethnic groups in Cameroon. In substance, this constitutes the essence of what the study has revealed.

Yet, to appropriate the concept of *Mang-Djala* in the Church presupposes the effectiveness and the viability of the concept in bringing new insights in the quest for resolving ethnic dissensions in the Church. Nevertheless, in spite of the huge potentiality of the concept in achieving such a task, the applicability of the concept of *Mang-Djala* in the context of the Church has to be subjected to a specific principle of appropriation that is suitable for the purpose of the Gospel. Therefore the appropriation of *Mang-Djala* by the church in this context will need to take place in the light of the Gospel. It was thus deemed necessary that a discourse on the relationship between the Gospel and culture be undertaken to set the stage for understanding *Mang-Djala* as a cultural project that finds relevance in the context of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the precepts of the notion of *praeparatio evangelica*, preparation for the gospel.

In order to translate the Gospel of unity, the study consistently emphasises that *Mang-Djala* is a kind of ‘social belt’ of life that integrates all aspects of the lives of its adherents, because it operates in a sort of web or network whereby two or three, or even more, ethnic groups share life in an interdependent manner, integrating men, women, and children who are fully involved without any kind of discrimination. *Mang-Djala* evokes a vision of a world where people are interdependent – a vision that works to transcend ethnic divisions and differences that could lead to misunderstandings or conflicts among its members. *Mang-Djala* creates a social entity where all its components share a common vision of life in a quest for the well-being of the whole community. This shows why the concept is believed by the members to be a God-given approach to a peaceful communal life. Hence the concept constitutes a cultural resource for the E.L.C.C., because *Mang-Djala* operates in multiform dimensions that are summed up as the “social belt” of life.

The study also demonstrates the fact that *Mang-Djala* has created solidarity between people to depend and to rely on one another permanently and this makes the concept a vital and indispensable asset for community life. Yet, the naming of the concept itself was not a matter of chance, but a carefully constructed of what life is really all about and how it is intended to be lived. The notion of a “social belt of life” was used to characterise the concept as a generic expression reflecting the essence of its philosophy – that is the placing of people on the same path for a united journey through life, facing difficulties, enduring hardships and celebrating successes and joyful occurrences together by promoting friendship, love, and mutuality. In short, it helps to cultivate the spirit of social cohesion among the members. In so doing, the concept reveals human limitations which call for an interdependent relationship along life’s journey. In order to emphasise the viability of the concept, it has also been argued that *Mang-Djala* functions both as social contract and covenant. In other words it can be interpreted by way of a secular metaphor – the social contract, and a religious metaphor – the covenant. Both these notions were reflected upon extensively in chapter six

In order to demonstrate some of the positive findings concerning the contribution of *Mang-Djala* to the mitigation of ethnic conflict in the church, examples of some of the participants’ comments and descriptions concerning the possible role of *Mang-Djala* are quoted hereunder.

“*Mang-Djala* is a bit like a game that happens between two or three ethnic groups; it creates love and enthusiasm when these different ethnic groups meet”. (the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship, Ngaoundéré 14/04/2011 in). “During funerals where no *Mang-Djala* partners are present, tears will never dry in the eyes of the bereaved”. (Focus group discussion on the Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012). “*Mang-Djala* partners are like ‘*skin and flesh*’” (traditional ruler of Balkossa, Ngaoundéré 27/01/2012 in). “When one’s own people turn, it is among one’s *Mang-Djala* partners that one can find guaranteed refuge and safety”. (His Majesty Mohamadou Mven on March 27, 2011).

Through Mrs Atta Djoulde’s account about the conflict opposing an uncle and his nephew as documented in chapter three, the study demonstrates that reconciliation had played a major role and is at the centre of the *Mang-Djala* relationship. To feel responsible for reconciling one’s conflicting partners, as it has been the case in this account, indicates that, to a *Mang-Djala* partner, one is to be held accountable in rebuilding broken relationships between people from one’s *Mang-Djala* group.

From this brief summary of participants’ views of *Mang-Djala* one can assume the following functions that it can perform.

1. The suggestion made by one participant that *Mang-Djala* is a kind of “game” that can be played by its participants is very significant. As a game, *Mang-Djala* creates and entertains an ambiance that dispels any idea of war. In other words, *Mang-Djala* is a way to escape from the reality of conflict to which every human being is inclined to. One can think of *Mang-Djala* in the context of the game theory given the diverse number of actors (ethnic groups) involved. According to Hotz,

a game in the sense of game theory is given by a (mostly finite) number of players, who interact according to given rules. Those players might be individuals, groups, companies, associations and so on. Their interactions will have an impact on each of the players and on the whole group of players, i.e. they are interdependent<sup>56</sup>.

The factor of interdependence of the partners in *Mang-Djala* relates it to the game theory in the sense that all the partner members that are actors benefit from their

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<sup>56</sup> Hotz, H. A Short Introduction to Game Theory. [http://www.theorie.physik.uni-muenchen.de/lefrey/teaching/archive/sose\\_06/softmatter/talks/Heiko\\_Hotz-Spieltheorie-Handout.pdf](http://www.theorie.physik.uni-muenchen.de/lefrey/teaching/archive/sose_06/softmatter/talks/Heiko_Hotz-Spieltheorie-Handout.pdf). Accessed 11/07/2013



coming together and commitment to the rule of the game (*Mang-Djala*) that has established a safe and trustful environment for their life in a community. That is why, in his article: “*What game theory can tell us about saving the world*” (2007), King made the following statement: “The more we co-operate, the more likely we will be able to establish the kind of repeated interactions with family, friends, and colleagues which leads to long-term stable communities” (2007; 29). As the game theory is all about what King terms a win-win game (2007: 29) that benefits to all the parties involved, *Mang-Djala* can be well applied as it favours the stability of the whole community.

2. The idea that *Mang-Djala* provides a way to escape from the daily pressures in which ethnic conflict is experienced is a very important attribute. Human beings can become caught up in the trap of destructive habits such as jealousy, envy, hatred and many other human vices that ethnic conflict can fuel. In following some of these participants it would appear that *Mang-Djala* provides a kind of imaginative world where these things do not exist. To enter into this world is to gain relief, however temporarily, from their destructive effects and consequences. The comedy dimension of *Mang-Djala* as discussed in chapter five provides the relaxation for those pressures and effects a lasting, positive impact on the relationships of the peoples concerned.
3. The value of a powerful source of consolation in times of grief and sorrow coming from those who are normally involved in conflictual or potentially conflictual relationships cannot be underestimated. Once again the situation of conflict is not only evaded but healed and possibly also relativised or put into proper perspective. Rather like brothers who have lapsed into enmity because of family feuds who find each other when their parents die, so the deep bonds of *Mang-Djala* come to the fore at times of grief and sorrow and the rediscovery of the human element in these relationships is made.
4. The analogy of ‘*skin and flesh*’ that is used to describe the relationship between the *Mang-Djala* partners is a powerful feature and deeply significant. If this has really been the way people involved in *Mang-Djala* partnerships have lived, then the decline of the concept has been an immense loss and needs urgently to be retrieved and revalorised for the benefit of a contemporary society that is full of hatred, hostility and criminality. Hence, Christian communities are one of the best channels of promoting such a value. To live like ‘*skin and flesh*’ means harming one’s fellow is

harming oneself, which resembles a response to Matthew 22: 39: "... you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (NRSV) – one may say God's law was already written in the hearts of those peoples before the advent of Christian faith. Therefore, it is worth considering the concept of *Mang-Djala* as the preparation for the Gospel, which emphasises its viability.

5. The concept of the place of refuge, which features in the Old Testament practice of the city of refuge (Numbers 35: 9-11) once again reinforces the notion of *Mang-Djala* itself being a "place" to which one can escape. Metaphorically this could be seen as a sanctuary from differences caused by ethnicity. Literally it is also a place of sanctuary where, as in the Old Testament, one escapes the wrath caused by your injury or even murder of a fellow citizen. It offers respite for a "cooling off" period until rationality can return. It is uncertain whether a *Mang-Djala* partnership was ever evoked for this purpose, but the symbolic value of such a possibility cannot be underestimated.

These are just a few examples of the function of *Mang-Djala*.

The following limitations of the concept must, however, also be noted.

1. The research indicates that while *Mang-Djala* is still very much alive in the minds of people it is not an active institution in contemporary Cameroonian society. This obviously curtails its viability and begs the question of how it could be re-invigorated and made to function in a practical way in the church.
2. One has to ask whether the significance of *Mang-Djala* is confined to a symbolic level. If it is not operant in society at an institutional level, that is, there are no legal or other encoded requirements for its application, then its value remains symbolic. This, of course, should not be underestimated. Symbols can be extremely powerful phenomena, especially if they can be brought to the surface of a society's collective memory and represented in some way in times when they are needed most. It has been asserted above that *Mang-Djala* provides a vision of another way of living and relating. This can be extremely powerful. However, the question must be asked as to how such a vision can be made real to the average person in society and in the church.

3. Given the above considerations the question must be raised of the viability of *Mang-Djala* to counteract the extremely powerful influence of ethnicity in Cameroonian society. This research has indicated the pervasive influence of ethnicity at every level. *Mang-Djala* as a social construct needs to be assessed against ethnicity which is also a social construct. But the question is, which is the stronger? Ethnicity is a strong influence that requires a strong antidote.
4. The viability of *Mang-Djala* within the Church depends to a large extent on whether the custom can be integrated into the Church. Yet, this has been the wish of all the Christian participants throughout the interviews. Nevertheless, as for now, there is not a strong tradition in the ELCC of the integration of Gospel and culture. There will a need for a significant amount of groundwork to be done in the church for people to become open to the basic premise of bringing together Gospel and culture. There might be a resistance to this on the basis that the missionary legacy of rejecting all things related to indigenous culture are to be considered, at best, worthless and, at worst, sinful. Some suggestions are offered as to how this can be done below.

### **8.5 Recommendations: integrating *Mang-Djala* into the church**

If *Mang-Djala* is to be seen as a fresh paradigm in which to interpret the Gospel, its integration into the church provides substantial challenges. In this regard, the Church has at its disposal educational institutions and community fellowships through which it can be introduced to the church. These include Bible schools, the theological seminary, the Women for Christ Fellowship, the Christian Youth Organisation and more importantly, the Church meetings at different levels.

#### **8.5.1 The Bible schools and the theological seminary**

A wish of some of the participants was to teach the concept of *Mang-Djala* in schools so as to integrate it. The Church has four Bible schools where catechists are trained. This is a framework *par excellence* to introduce both the study about ethnicity and the concept as part of the curriculum in order to enhance the spread of the concept. Nyende has significantly expressed this concern about ethnicity by lamenting that:

Ethnicity is a crisis in Africa, for it threatens the very survival of Africa. It is a life and death issue which is totally against God's *telos* for this world. Theological education in Africa, therefore, would be failing Africa if it does not help students acquire, from the perspective of theology, knowledge and understanding of the forces of ethnicity, and skills through which

they can counter these forces and contribute to a peaceful and just society in the course of their work in the Church and the world. Indeed ethnic studies in the curriculum of theological education in Africa are imperative (2009: 144-145).

Therefore, introducing ethnic studies and the Christian version of *Mang-Djala* will be akin to diagnosing a disease and prescribing the cure at the same time. The need for ethnic studies would require the development of enlightened curriculum.

The reason is that catechists are trained to teach the Church catechism on the ground; in the local congregations. Hence, they can become the agents of spreading the concept as they are constantly in touch with the Christians in their respective localities. Another advantage is the fairly short duration of the training in the Bible schools (two years), given the urgency of the need. This is to say, if the program starts in a given period, after two years the notion will start infiltrating the Church in different parts and spread out.

At the theological level, this study will constitute a milestone for further research in such a way that the concept may become fully integrated as part of the liturgy for the Sunday service. Since the Church has at its disposal a theological reflection committee, this structure can work closely with the theological seminary on how to officially introduce some *Mang-Djala* aspects into the liturgy of the Church, especially the funeral liturgy as a starting point. As many Christians are familiar with the practice, giving it an official Christian meaning and approbation from the Church will certainly increase its impact and spread, although those Christians who do not know about the concept may be reluctant. Meanwhile, the study of ethnicity and the Christian version of *Mang-Djala*, once integrated in the curriculum of the Bible schools and the theological education, will arouse the interest of using such African expression within a framework of theology and expand.

Emphasising such a study in theological education will create awareness on the negative effects of ethnicity on the Christian community, and at the same time constitute a motive to take seriously that aspect during one's ministry. The lack of such awareness has not prepared the Church to deal with the onslaught of ethnocentrism. Consequently, it failed to counter its manifestation adequately, which in turn threatened to split the Church apart and leaving many Christians confused, not knowing here they stood.

### **8.5.2 The Women for Christ Fellowship and the Christian Youth Organisation**

The Women for Christ Fellowship and the Christian Youth Organisation are both part of the Church's programme of evangelisation among women and the youth working under the

Department of Evangelisation. As such, each organisation constitutes a body that has its own organisation and activities. At congregational level, each of the organisations come together weekly, in different part of the Church, for prayer and Bible study. These already can become frameworks for introducing the Christian approach to *Mang-Djala*. The advantage at this point is that in some areas among the women, there may be elders who may have some notion of the indigenous practice of *Mang-Djala*. In that case, their presence will be an important factor to introduce the concept to the whole group.

The main challenge, however, will lie among the youth who do not know much about *Mang-Djala* or do not know about it at all and among those women in congregations where the concept is completely foreign. This may require a longer period of teaching for them to accommodate to the idea. Nevertheless, if the Church regards this as a commitment, it may take time but will gradually lead to a satisfactory outcome.

The structure of the Church as such functions with synods at different levels. Although the Women for Christ Fellowship and the Christian Youth Organisation hold their own synod annually at district level, there is an annual general synod of the district in which delegates from different congregations participate, and where the women and youth organisations are represented by their district leaders. This may also constitute an important channel in the district to teach and spread the new approach to *Mang-Djala*. It may be advisable to develop a theme related to ethnicity and *Mang-Djala* during such meetings, followed by a workshop during which the delegates can debate on the impact of ethnocentrism and how to implement the Christian approach to *Mang-Djala*.

The same synods also exist at regional level and are held every two years. If the process is implemented at the lower levels, it can permeate up to the higher levels in the Church with the approval of its members; this would ensure a positive reaction. It is strongly recommended that teaching should start from the congregation and move towards embracing the entire Church. The main reason is that if the congregations agree to this, then the application of *Mang-Djala* will not be perceived as an imposition by the leadership of the Church.

In this process, one may develop the teachings at regional level during the regional synod around the same theme, and arrange workshops with the delegates who represent their districts and who may already have debated the same theme during their district conference. Following the same process, the national synod which is held every two years, like the

regional synod, may eventually officially approve the implementation of the concept in order to counter the problem of ethnocentrism within the Church. This concept may yet become the catalyst for social transformation and for a new self-consciousness that may lead to a revival of the declining African cultures in Cameroon.

Hence, besides the synods, workshops and forums could be organised at different levels of the Church. In order to achieve this, the Church in its general synod may want to dedicate a full year teaching the entire congregation on the topic of ethnicity and *Mang-Djala* and thus signal its desire to break the boundaries of ethnocentrism, in order to promote unity and fellowship as the putative norm of living together in the Church.

### **8.5.3 The constitution**

Given the detrimental effects of ethnocentrism over human dignity, the Church should include in its constitution a ruling to declare ethnocentrism as a sin against which every Christian should stand because it promotes discrimination which is against God's commandment to love. Thus far, in spite of the fact that the Church is a victim of ethnocentrism, it has unfortunately not taken a forceful enough stand against it. Such a ruling in the constitution could act as a safeguard which any Church member could use to take a stance against discriminatory terminology such as "*foreigner*," which many participants have condemned.

### **8.6. Conclusion**

Central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the need for reconciliation. The New Testament, especially the letters of Paul, demands that a major manifestation of the truth and power of the Gospel lies in the fact that Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, have been reconciled (Galatians 3: 28 NRSV). The fact that there continues to be huge differences between the Dii, Mbum, Gbaya, Dowayo, Chamba, Vute, Bafeuk, Tikar, Kwanza, Laka, Guiziga within the church suggests a major failure of the Church to embrace the full implications of the Gospel message. The very fact that this thesis had to be written could be interpreted as an indication of this failure. However, it is probably safe to say that the ELCC is not unique in this regard and similar divisions exist in the church throughout the world. This should not be used, however, as an excuse for the ELCC's failure to deal with the problem. This research has been motivated by a sadness and frustration that has emerged because of a problem that plagues the Cameroonian church. It has been conducted with the conviction that resources for positive transformation lie within African culture if the church would be sensitive and wise enough to discern it. *Mang-Djala* will certainly not become a

kind of magical solution to the problem – that is to overthrow the monster of ethnocentrism at once, but this research has hopefully foregrounded it as a potentially significant cultural resource that could contribute towards a solution to the problem.

It is my hope and prayer that this will be the case and that this thesis will be a catalyst towards this end.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Informed consent letter

School of Religion and Theolog (SoRaT)

University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg  
SOUTH AFRICA

Object: Informed consent letter

Dear Sir/Madam

I am Rev. Paul Deouyo. I am a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. I am doing research on the topic: **Church unity in a context of ethnic diversity, and the concept of Mang-Djala with reference to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.**

The objective is to find our traditional value such as an indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* that can help us resolve the question of ethnicity in the Church. Therefore, I am going to conduct interviews on the one hand with individuals and on the other hand focus group discussions. Your cooperation into this process will be very much appreciated; hence I hope to get useful information from you.

These interviews and focus group discussions are voluntary and you can decide to withdraw your information from the research whenever you wish.

As we all know, our Church is staggering since many years due to the threat of tribalism which is dividing Christians and sometimes we feel like the Church is splitting. As a minister in the Church, I am very much concerned by the quest for unity and reconciliation among the Church members. That is my motivation to choose this research topic hoping that it can help unifying the members or somehow to narrow the gape of the ethnic differences. As African we have some values which can be put into the service of the Gospel, and I would like to use one of them – that is the concept of *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor to communicate the Gospel of reconciliation.

I would like you to be partaker of this project by either being interviewed or taking part in the focus group discussions. I will not exceed 30 minutes in the interview, and one hour in the focus group discussion. While the interview will be more centred on the issue of tribalism, the focus group discussions will be centred on the issue of *Mang-Djala*. Nevertheless, it could happen that during the interview I come to introduce briefly the issue of *Mang-Djala*.

My prayer is that, this project should come to its completion, and that the Church should accept to make use of its outcome for the blessing of all of us. That will be our victory for the glory of God that our indigenous values can be used for the sake of the unity of the Church to which you could have so greatly contributed.

Contact: Rev. Paul Deouyo  
e-mail: [pauldeouyo@yahoo.fr](mailto:pauldeouyo@yahoo.fr) or [210522770@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:210522770@ukzn.ac.za)  
Tel: +270846587006 or +23795756336  
Supervisor: Professor Tony Balcom.

If you consent to be interviewed or to participate in the focus group discussions, please fill in your full name and sign the consent agreement below:

I.....(full name of the participant) hereby confirm that I understand the content of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating voluntarily to this research project.

I also understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, I desire.

*Signature of participant*

*Date*

.....

.....

**Appendix 2:**  
**Interviews English version**

**Interview with the national bishop in Ngaoundéré by Paul Déouyo on May 28, 2011  
(translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: **The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).**

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

In your article on the Church's mission in Cameroon, published in LWF in 2001, you make the following statement: "The ELCC is characterised by tribal pluralism... which greatly challenges the concept of communion at the practical level".

**1. What do you mean by that statement?**

An analysis of the social context in which the ELCC carries out its mission identifies the social and linguistic characteristics of the human beings at the receiving end of the mission. Such an analysis would make you realise the multiplicity of ethnic groups. This multiplicity represents both the mission's weaknesses and its strengths.

Strengths because, when you take into account all the ethnic components that meet to pray together, you would appreciate the blessing, the grace, the magnitude, and the unity of this togetherness and by anticipation you would recognize the picture of the universal church.

Weaknesses of the church become apparent when these different tribal components cease to think about unity beyond barriers, beyond ethnic borders, and when they think only about their ethnic or tribal separation. Then you see a divided church, a segmented church, a church that represents many churches because, when ethnic identity prevails over Christian identity, each ethnic community withdraws into itself and sees only itself as representing the church.

In 2007 during the general synod in Garoua, I said something that people did not appreciate. I said this: the idea of an alliance between two ethnic groups wishing to rekindle the ethnic

battle in the church is an idea that needs to be utterly resisted, because it aims for exclusivity and it is non-biblical. The unity that we are looking for is an inclusive unity, a unity that embraces everyone. This is what article 3 of the constitution of the ELCC, relating to criteria for belonging to the church, stipulates. On becoming a member of the church, one becomes a member of Jesus' ethnic group which makes no distinctions. Therefore, if a particular ethnic group sets itself up to gain more control over the life of the church, it is the duty of the leader of the Church to call them out and to make clear that "here we are going astray and doing the will of human beings rather than God's will". It is in this sense that I spoke at the Garoua synod and today I am criticized for it.

It is the Americans and the Norwegians who helped us found this church. They used educated people amongst the Boulous, the Bafias, the Bamilekes, some Bomouns and Tikars who came together here, in Ngaoundéré, at Mbe, at Meinganga, and who functioned as teachers and catechists in the very early days of the church. And so, today, when one of these persons presents himself as a Lutheran Christian, what do we say? Do we accept him in our midst, or do we act as though Lutheranism in Cameroon belongs only to the historic founder tribes of the church?

It's all this that I thought about when I made this statement in 2001 and history has proven me correct. Therefore, to live with the reality of ethnic diversity in the church implies that we have to transcend that reality in order to find the diverse groups meeting at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.

## **2. How does tribalism affect the Church?**

Tribalism has a real effect on the church as you can see from what I have told you. There also have been some specific incidents as a result of tribalism, like what happened in Bertoua in 1999 at the General Synod that I presided over. There tribalism manifested itself very noticeably. We attended the election of the General Secretary of the Church<sup>57</sup>, but we didn't have the power to influence the process. The tensions in the synod at the time ran so high, that it had to be temporarily suspended for things to calm down before discussions could be resumed. At the time, the two major ethnic groups were on the verge of fighting.

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<sup>57</sup> I attended this meeting and witnessed myself Bishop Nyiwe, after having given a teaching against tribalism in the church, has to kneel to ask forgiveness from the delegates because some of them interpreted his teaching as accusing them of discriminating against others according to their ethnicity.

Then, during the presidency of the late pastor Barya, his commitment to the congregation of Bethel II was obvious, and we saw the result of this commitment in the worsening relationship between Bethel I and II<sup>58</sup>. Then, at the General Synod of Touboro, a declaration made by one of the election candidates led to the withdrawal of persons who had championed his cause, because he had referred negatively to an institution in their locality.<sup>59</sup>

We also know that there are people who think they own the church and when there is any activity in which they are not involved, there is discontent. Tribalism does exist, but we believe that this will change in the future.

There is another problem that we don't often have occasion to mention. This concerns the relationship between the Dowayo and Chamba in the northwest area. Their cohabitation has always caused difficulties, even within the Church. And in the southwest region relationships between the Gbaya and the Voute are problematic. Even here, in Ngaoundéré, there is permanently latent tension between a number of small groups.

### **3. What is your opinion on the multiple memoranda about tribalism in the Church?**

The fact of certain ethnic groups, manifesting themselves through memoranda, reminds me that we must take these memoranda serious and that we must use them. We must seriously consider the relevant questions they ask and strive through prayer and dialogue to try and deal with the problems posed by these memoranda, although it can never be a case of solving all the stressful points they mention.<sup>60</sup>

### **4. What actions have been undertaken to address the issue of tribalism in the Church?**

We have tried to do some planning regarding the granting of scholarships in the past three years. There were thirteen recipients of grants from the Lutheran World Federation (2008-

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<sup>58</sup> These were two congregations that shared the same premises.

<sup>59</sup> The background to this statement was that that candidate Bishop Nyiwe mentioned without naming was teaching in the seminary. He was advocating an integration of two seminaries; one of which was dominated by a particular ethnic group which objected to his suggestion on the basis that it discriminated against them and their advancement.

<sup>60</sup> The bishop does not give the full story of these memoranda in this interview. They were, in fact, very important because as a consequence of these memoranda a project was started called *Undans le monde* (One in the world) which was an attempt to unify the different ethnic groups and which I discuss in my thesis.



2011) including four Dii, three Gbaya, a Mbum, a Tikar, a Bafia, an Ewondo, a Toupouri, and a Mambila. So they were quite diversified in origin.<sup>61</sup>

**5. How do you think you can reconcile those who think they are victims of tribalism?**

Reconciliation is a gift from God and this gift is always available, because God has already given it to us and it is visible in his word. This word is not a word of division but of unity and reconciliation. There is also the sacrament of baptism and the Holy Communion. Divisive barriers fall away when we meet to meditate on the word of God and pray and sing together.

**6. What is your opinion on the responsibility of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) as regards tribalism in the Church?<sup>62</sup>**

The influence of missions on the issue of tribalism in the church is complex. But in my analysis the Sudan Mission has encouraged the establishment of the principle of *tribalité* by stimulating ethnic groups or tribes to be proud of their tribal or ethnic affiliation. There is nothing negative in this, because this affiliation is a gift from God. But the part that hurts is the fact that the Sudan Mission approached *tribalité* as though, apart from the tribe that the mission dealt with, there existed no others. The mission behaved as if the Christian faith was only intended for those people that the mission promoted. That's how I see it.

The NMS, on the other hand, has generally encouraged diversity, cohabitation of different ethnic groups, without promoting a specific ethnic group. That's why it did not choose Dii, Pere or Tikar as the common language to be popularized. Instead the NMS initially chose the language of the Mbum. But when it became apparent that the Mbum were not very interested in the Gospel, Fulfulde was chosen instead. The first missionaries learned the Mbum language, but those who arrived later learned Fulfulde which is a popular language and spoken everywhere. That is why the question we are discussing is today of less acute importance in the regions covered by the NMS whereas in areas where the Sudan Mission worked, the problem is very acute, except in the eastern region which, although it fell under the Sudan Mission, was influenced by the mission policy of the NMS.

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<sup>61</sup> The background to this statement is that the bishop was accused of giving scholarships to one particular ethnic group and in response to this question he appears to be attempting to justify this action. There were, in fact, other initiatives that were taken (such as the one mentioned in footnote 4) but he did not speak about these.

<sup>62</sup> The ELCA mission is US based and the NMS is Norwegian based.

But in areas such as Mbéré and in the East, you will find indications of Sudan Mission activity. Years ago missionaries of the Sudan Mission conducted Bible studies with the Gbaya language and these were translated into French. This was a good thing because it showed their profound identification with the community. However, today this identification is used in a negative way. Someone told me: "Christians from my home would like to have a president who speaks to them in their own language." Nevertheless there are gifted people who can speak several languages and less gifted people like me: I barely speak French, English, Ffulfulde and even my own language.

**7. I am exploring the concept of indigenous *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor that may be applied in the Church. What do you know about that concept?**

About the concept of *Mang-Djala*, I have little knowledge. I agree that this concept in the theological context can help to facilitate, from below, the unity that we seek in the Church. From below, because it is a social construct. *Mang-Djala* is something that already exists whereas the unity we seek comes from above as a gift from God. But what exists at grassroots level can rise to meet what comes from above and such a meeting may allow for consolidation of the unity that we desire.

**8. Which ethnic groups in the Church are tied by *Mang-Djala*?**

The Tikar community, we know, is in a *Mang-Djala* pact with the Voute. Initially, there was an alliance between Voute and Tikar of which the conditions were well established, not in writing because it was a world of orality. If a Voute is attacked, the Tikar go to his defence and vice versa, and the two should never go to war. This alliance exists also between the Dii and the Gbaya and the conditions are the same. I'll tell you a secret that I have learned here. The Gbaya had to fight two wars with the Fulani in 1991 and 1992. And what I learned here is that the Dii were already preparing to organize themselves and defend the Gbaya. Fortunately these wars have stopped.

If these ideas are used theologically, they can illuminate the concept of unity and bring about a strengthening of unity. In the church, when there are burials, we always see cooperation between the Gbaya and the Dii. Is there not a possibility to develop this further so that we can say that between the Gbaya and the Dii there exists a solid unity and that unity should be used for the benefit of the Church? If the Mbum, the Tikar, the Voute, and the Bamoun get together, and the Tikar and Mambila also join around this concept, it would be greatly to our benefit.

**9. In which ways does ethnic disunity affect the *Mang-Djala* partners in the Church?**

I have not thought about this, but I don't think they are much affected. The link between partners is not as strong and as visible as in the past and in certain situations emotions tend to supersede the *Mang-Djala* principle. But we still must recognize that the concept remains a force that, when problems arise between different tribes, could help to pacify those who are bound together in a *Mang-Djala* alliance.

**10. How can *Mang-Djala* be used as a unifying factor in the church?**

We know that many of these groups are members of the ELCC. This means that *Mang-Djala* could form a basis for unity in the church. You would have to conduct several interviews to understand what people think about this question.

There is a "pagan" story I want to tell you. A great Tikar trader who lived among the Voute and who had contributed to the development of the village of Yoko fell sick. According to Voute tradition the Etong came from the south to take, through witchcraft, the soul of the Tikar. And the Voute then followed the Etong, also through witchcraft. They intercepted the Etong procession on top of a mountain which is on the road between Yoko and Ntui and they engaged in battle, Voute against Etong. Eventually, the Voute had to release the Tikar who is a *Mang-Djala* partner of the Voute. The Voute had won and the Tikar trader recovered his health. I must emphasize that this happened in the mystical world.

But this illustrates what we are saying. Here are people; involved in an alliance who watch out for each other and who accept that there are things they should not do to each other. In the context of the Church, such partnerships would be good. A study like this, which involves the people, must be properly done and interviews must be widely conducted so that you go to the core of your research question. . I encourage you in this study.

Thank you very much for your time and your contribution to this project.

**Interview with the national assistant of the bishop in Ngaoundéré by Paul Déouyo on June 18, 2011**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

- 1. What do you think about the national bishop's statement on the mission of the Church in Cameroon, published in 2001 in LWF Documentation where the bishop stated: "The ELCC is characterized by tribal pluralism ... which greatly challenges the concept of communion at a practical level"?**

I think the bishop in his statement recognizes that in the Church there are several ethnic groups. And when there are several ethnic groups that come together, it is never easy. We must work hard to establish communion.

- 2. How does tribalism affect members of the Church?**

In relation to tribalism, we must recognize that we already have several tribes in our Church and that each group identifies itself. This leads to many gatherings of tribal groups. And when there are big challenges like the choice of church leaders or the choice of candidates for any other office, we see groups trying to promote their ethnic interests.

- 3. What is your opinion on the multiple memoranda about tribalism in the Church?**

I have to say that tribalism manifests itself in many forms. One such manifestation is the getting together in tribal groups to respond to the claims of so-called victims of tribalism. The positive side of these gatherings is that members of the group consider together a number of injustices they have suffered. But the negative side is that we forget that there may be other groups that may have undergone the same treatment. There is also the fact that the majority groups trample on and harm minority groups.

- 4. What actions have been undertaken to address the issue of tribalism in the Church?**

The church has established the project "*one in the world*", in order to meet the ethnic groups and speak with them and unite them. It was working well for a while, but after the project was stopped ethnic disunity resurfaced and today the problem is worse than in the past.

As far as concerns incidents that are related to tribalism, there are exterior and interior incidents. By exterior I mean conflicts that have taken place outside the church like those between the Gbaya and Fulbe in Meiganga. These were really a manifestation of tribalism. But in the Church, what I call interior incidents, occur especially during elections when there are positions of power to be contested. Then each group does whatever it can to secure the position for itself and if that fails it becomes a problem.

**5. How do you think one can reconcile those who think they are victims of tribalism?**

So far we have tried to get closer to those who feel they are victims of tribalism to discuss the issue with them. After listening to each group we have come to the conclusion that all groups would like to enjoy the same benefits. Often perceived victims do not react because they are part of a minority group, while majority groups find it as their right to dominate.

Currently we are experiencing the most recent manifestation of tribalism. Namely, the Church, through its General Synod, has decided to change the system of church government, and then a particular ethnic group found itself more important than others and insisted that the first bishop should come from its midst. They failed and unfortunately they found it necessary to create disorder.

**6. What is your opinion on the responsibilities of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) in relation to tribalism in the church?**

The two partners (missions) were very helpful when it comes to evangelism but their approaches are somewhat different. The Sudan Mission that settled among the Gbaya translated the Bible into Gbaya and put much emphasis on it. While on the Norwegian side the missionaries were not focused on a single ethnic group, but rather thought it necessary to use an official language. Thus they chose Mbum and Fulfulde. The Mbum language did not work and finally they adopted French and Fulfulde.

**7. I am exploring the concept of indigenous *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor that could be applied in the Church. What do you think about that concept?**

Growing up, we heard this term in many circles. Among the Dii and the Gbaya, the Mbum and the Mundang, etc. But what is interesting is that these different ethnic groups live together, play together, and especially manage to easily find solutions to problems that seem difficult and complex. So *Mang-Djala* involves two or three ethnic groups, bound by

covenants which were sealed by their ancestors in the distant past, and that allow them to live together. The strength of this concept is that it is able to change moods. In particular, it has the strength to change an atmosphere of anger and sadness into one of joy and serenity.

**8. Which ethnic groups in the church are tied by *Mang-Djala*?**

There are several, but those I know are the Dii and Gbaya, and the Mboum and Mundangs.

**9. How does ethnic disunity affect the *Mang-Djala* partners within the Church?**

It must be said that in the Church, sometimes people forget, especially in case of problems, people sometimes forget the existence of this concept, until someone remembers it and realizes that the conflicting parties are bound by the *Mang-Djala*. And suddenly the whole situation changes. So I think that tribalism does not have much effect on the practice of the concept. I Today, if all parties could set their differences aside and look at the concept of *Mang-Djala*, it would help a lot.

**10. How could *Mang-Djala* be used as a unifying factor in the Church?**

As far as I am concerned, there is a positive and a negative side to the concept. The positive side is that, yes, even when both groups are angry, the introduction of this concept can simply ease tensions. Groups realise that the solution is reconciliation and this is achieved without much trouble.

The negative side is that there are many ethnic groups in the Church and, when just a couple of groups are involved in *Mang-Djala* alliances, those who are not will feel left out. Still, because of *Mang-Djala*, times of mourning become times of reconciliation for those who might have quarrelled but who are united by *Mang-Djala*.

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project

**Interview with Mrs. Jeannette Maina, the National Director of the Women for Christ Fellowship in Ngaoundéré by Paul Déouyo on April 14, 2011 (translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

**1. How is tribalism affecting the Church?**

The Church exists in society and is influenced by the society that surrounds it. And so, if there is tribalism in society, necessarily we shall find it in the Church as well. It has thus become the cause of several conflicts that we have experienced in the Church. Tribalism affects our church in that we know church services are held in indigenous languages. This is not because people do not understand other languages, but simply because they want to meet among themselves. And it is this desire that causes a lot of problems, divisions and conflicts in the Church.

In our Women for Christ movement, we do not hold gatherings according to our ethnic origins, but our meetings bring together women of all ethnicities. We try our best to use a language understood by all women. And during our conferences, we try to adopt the same principle, despite our ethnic diversity.

**2. What is your view of the memoranda written about tribalism in the Church?**

Memoranda are sometimes justified, but mostly they are individualistic and selfish claims. A memorandum, claiming that a specific people forms a majority in the Church, shows selfishness. It is true that there are groups who were a point of entry for the Gospel in Cameroon, but that does not give them a special status. After all, the Gospel went on to reach several other ethnic groups throughout Cameroon.

**3. What has-been done to address the issue of tribalism in the Church?**

The Church has no real policy to address the issue of ethnicity and this is a weakness. This ensures that the so-called minority ethnic groups will unite to oppose those known as the majority.

**4. How do you intend to reconcile the ethnic groups who think they are victims of tribalism in the Church?**

I do not have an immediate solution to offer.

**5. What is your opinion on the impact of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) on the issue of tribalism in the Church?**

The missionaries have some responsibility in this matter, but Cameroonian Christians are the ones that must recognize that tribalism poses a real community problem and they have to seek a remedy.

**6. I am exploring the possibility of using the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor that can be implemented in the Church. What is your understanding of that concept?**

The concept of *Mang-Djala* is not new to me. It's a bit like a game that happens between two or three ethnic groups and it creates not only love, but especially enthusiasm when the groups concerned meet.

**7. Which ethnic groups are tied by *Mang-Djala* in the Church**

There are a few that I know: the Dii, the Gbaya and Laka, and the Tikar, the Voutes and the Mbum.

**8. In which way does ethnic disunity affect the *Mang-Djala* partners in the Church?**

Sometimes this disunity makes people forget that they are bound by *Mang-Djala* to the very persons with whom they have problems. In such a situation a third person is needed to remind them that they are subjected to *Mang-Djala* so that they regain their common sense.

**9. How can the concept of *Mang-Djala* be used as a unifying factor in the Church?**

In our Church, today, if we had just had an open mind and applied the concept of *Mang-Djala*, we would already have reached reconciliation. The current conflict involves the Gbaya ethnic group whose *Mang-Djala* partners are the Dii and Laka ethnic groups. If the Dii and Laka had approached their *Mang-Djala* partner in the *Mang-Djala* language that conveys very deep meanings, we would already have reached a peaceful solution to the conflict. What is part of culture is not always bad. We can take that which exists in culture, such as this concept, and apply it for the benefit of the Church, because the concept of *Mang-Djala* transmits love, peace, joy, and everything else that can strengthen brotherhood and friendship.



Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project.

**Interview with Mrs. Atta Djoulde on the concept of *Mang-Djala* in Ngaoundéré by Paul Déouyo on June 22, 2011 (translated from Fulfulde)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

**1. What is your understanding of the concept of *Mang-Djala* as it functions in your ethnic group?**

Regarding the concept of *Mang-Djala*, we do not know all the details because when we were born we found this practice in place. Our parents simply presented to us our *Mang-Djala* partners. Those who are the *Mang-Djala* partners of my group, the Mbum Ndal, are the Voute, the Mundang and the Mbéré.

**2. What is, in the opinion of your ethnic group, the origin of the concept?**

As I said, when we were born the practice was in place. And we girls, children at that time, were not curious enough to ask parents what the *Mang-Djala* is. We simply practiced it. The origin of the *Mang-Djala* was explained to the Tikar. What I can say though, is that living among *Mang-Djala* partners means a life full of jokes. There is one day in the year that is decreed “day of *Mang-Djala*”. During this day, every *Mang-Djala* stops his *Mang-Djala* partners to pay tribute to them. God has given humankind the gift of joking and it is all done in a jocular way. On this day even traditional rulers of the highest standing are not left out. The *Mang-Djala* of the traditional leader goes and puts a small rope at the entrance to the palace so that the traditional ruler will know that his *Mang-Djala* has passed by.

**3. What are the circumstances, events and contexts where *Mang-Djala* is considered applicable?**

There are events where the *Mang-Djala* intervenes, for example in cases of mourning. Are you not a pastor and have you not noticed that, during some funerals you attend, the *Mang-Djala* enters the tomb and prevents the burial from taking place unless some payment has been made? In ancient times, after being paid, the *Mang-Djala* in turn would contribute his

own money, buy a lot of wine, and prepare enough food. They then return carrying food and drink to assist their bereaved *Mang-Djala*, They will do without sleep throughout the period of mourning and they take care of everything that needs to be done for their *Mang-Djala*. I believe this is done up to date.

In ancient times, the *Mang-Djala* partners were involved in all events where they could be of support to each other, but nowadays it is only during funerals that we see the *Mang-Djala* in action.

**4. In these circumstances, how strong is the influence of the concept for *Mang-Djala*-bound groups?**

I will tell you a true story about a personal experience of mine. I told you earlier that the Mbéré are our *Mang-Djala* partners. Here's the story: A Mbéré man got in conflict with his nephews, the children of his older brother. Their quarrel had taken place shortly before I arrived in the village with my aunt. The gentleman lived in a different village from his older brother and had come to visit him. When the problem with his nephews arose, he got angry and returned to his own village. When we arrived, we were informed of the quarrel and my aunt told me that we could not leave this situation unresolved and go home. We had to follow the younger brother to his village and hear his version of what happened.

So we took one of the nephews with us and went to his paternal uncle. When we arrived there, he received us and gave us a mat to sit on. We greeted each other and we made him know the purpose of our visit, namely the quarrel with his nephew. We told him that, when we arrived at the village we learned that he had been at his big brother's place, got angry after an argument with his nephew and left without even saying goodbye, and so we wanted to enquire what happened.

He said: "I cannot refuse to inform you because you are my *Mang-Djala* and you have come specifically for this reason. If you were not my *Mang-Djala*, I would not give myself this trouble, but because you are, I am obliged to tell you what has happened". When he finished telling what had happened, we realized that the nephew was at fault. My aunt wanted to mediate and she laid down in front of him to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the child. The gentleman rose hastily to help my aunt get up and said: "Who told you to lie down before me? I too do not have the right to lie down before you to apologize, however severe the harm I may have done to you. Now, because you did lie down before me, this village is going to

suffer because a *Mang-Djala* partner laid down on its soil to ask forgiveness. Don't do that ever again in any other village that is part of your *Mang-Djala*. For me it is already too late: I know that the village will fall apart".

What the old man predicted came true: the village became completely dysfunctional and the inhabitants scattered all over the area. So on that occasion I understood that the *Mang-Djala* is no small matter. If I had known at the time, , I would have asked him to inform me better about the *Mang-Djala* but I didn't, and my aunt and I went back home.

**9. What in your view are the benefits of *Mang-Djala*?**

The advantage of the *Mang-Djala*, for example in the case of mourning, is that it brings real comfort to the bereaved family. Through their actions, the *Mang-Djala* partners manage to calm the crying. The good of the *Mang-Djala* is also that one should not get angry with one's partners and that *Mang-Djala* partners are obliged to intervene in conflicts and reconcile the conflicting parties as I have told you.

**10. How does *Mang-Djala* affect different categories of people (men, women and children)?**

The *Mang-Djala* does not exclude anyone. Men, women and children receive equal consideration.

**11. What is the negative side of *Mang-Djala*?**

Personally, I do not see any negative side to the practice of *Mang-Djala*. Maybe others do, but I, personally, see *Mang-Djala* as good and very beneficial. And, besides, pastor, you have aroused in me the desire to conduct research on the origin of the *Mang-Djala*, mostly to understand its many practices in the past.

**12. How can the concept be expanded to include areas such as the Church, where there is disunity among ethnic groups?**

It is up to you pastors to reflect on how *Mang-Djala* can function in the Church because many Christians are already practicing it, most commonly during funerals.

**13. How can Christians promote the continuation of the *Mang-Djala* practice?**

We must encourage them to do so, if the church finds it necessary.

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project

**Interview with the regional bishop Rev. Jean Baiguele in Yaoundé by Paul Déouyo on June 24, 2011 (translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

**1. Which ethnic groups are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon?**

It is difficult to say exactly how many ethnic groups are in the Church, but I think there are at least twenty.

**2. What do you think about tribalism in the Cameroonian society?**

I think that tribalism is part of the social structure of the country and it plays a role in the ministries because, once a person is appointed as minister, he will make sure that at least 80% of his close associates share his ethnicity. The tendency is to divide the cabinet posts according to the tribes. It does not take into account whether those to whom we entrust responsibilities, are trained for their positions. An example is: teachers trained to provide general education, but who are entrusted with the positions of departmental delegates of Environment and Forests, or of Post and Telecommunications, when they don't have any knowledge relevant to the field.

**3. What are the current problems of ethnicity in Cameroonian society?**

Problems related to tribalism in our country are that values are attached to ethnic groups at the expense of social interest.

**4. How has tribalism affected the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon?**

In the Church we see a copy of the Cameroonian society. There is confusion between our Christian identity and the role we play in society. And we find this same confusion in the shell structure of the Church.

**5. What has caused tribalism in the Church?**

What brought tribalism in the Church, is the struggle for strong ethnic representation. We now find it difficult to return to the way the Church was before it became linked to ethnic or tribal considerations.

**6. How can the Church address the issue of tribalism?**

To address this problem, the Church must begin by banishing the language of “majority-minority”, and treat everyone of its members without seeing behind them tribal influences.

**7. What is your opinion on the impact of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) on the question of tribalism in the Church?**

Tribalism in the Church has partly to do with our two missions, because the Americans made the Gbaya believe that the Church is them and that, therefore, they are the key people of the Church. The Norwegians have worked with many groups, but they too showed a lot of fondness for the Dii compared to the other groups. Missionaries pay much more attention to pastors of the Dii, than to others.

**8. What do you think the leadership of the Church should do to prevent tribalism?**

To combat tribalism, church leadership must begin to live the truth and avoid seeing behind every individual a group, as a majority, or a minority, or a foreigner.

**9. I am exploring the possible use of the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor that can be implemented in the Church. What is your understanding of that concept?**

It is a concept that aims to eradicate or to silence ethnic conflicts or tribal warfare. This is a concept that deserves special attention because in living it, we do not consider each other as “other”, but as neighbours and as part of our own life. They have to be accepted and embraced unreservedly because from one’s *Mang-Djala* partner one has nothing to fear. We can play with a spear or a knife in our hand without fear.

**10. What is, according to your information, the origin of the concept?**

In the past, neighbouring peoples fought, killed and distrusted each other. The invention of this concept created a pillar of unity and led to reconciliation. For me the concept of *Mang-Djala* entails the killing of evil with roots and all, in other words, that which can harm human life is banned. I think that those who originated this concept were divinely inspired because the concept allowed for the banning of inter-village and intertribal wars, and it promoted acceptance of others. It is really a question of humanism presented in another form.

**11. In what circumstances, events or contexts do you believe that *Mang-Djala* is applicable?**

*Mang-Djala* is applicable in circumstances such as bereavement, wars, and conflicts. In fact, in such circumstances *Mang-Djala* trivializes a situation that may be tough, or painful, and that divides people. This is a concept that aims not only for unity, but that gives consideration to human life. In the case of mourning, the *Mang-Djala* plays a therapeutic role. *Mang-Djala* partners often imitate the deceased by dressing like they used to and by imitating their actions. And thus, instead of crying, people start to laugh and release their pain and forget it which constitutes a moral and psychological form of healing.

**12. What is the negative side of *Mang-Djala*?**

The negative side of this concept is that sometimes reality gets treated in a thoughtless way. For example, there may be a situation that must thoroughly be dealt with because it involves evil. However, in the name of *Mang-Djala*, we tend to pass it over which means that *Mang-Djala* leads us to refuse punishing evil. In doing so, we don't help the person who committed the offence. He will not amend his ways and repeat the same mistake in relation to another person who may not be a *Mang-Djala* partner in which case he will face serious consequences. But if he had been punished when he first wronged his *Mang-Djala* partner, there might have been no second offence.

**13. How could the *Mang-Djala* principle be expanded to function in other areas such as the Church that suffers from disunity among ethnic groups?**

In the Church, Christ is our peace, and if by transposition we could say that Christ is our *Mang-Djala*, we would not find ourselves ending up trying to fight. Christ becomes the *Mang-Djala* that unites all the tribes of the Church against selfish ethnic considerations. The visible sign of *Mang-Djala* is that you sit and eat together from the same dish. Can we not make a connection with the sacrament? Knowledge of the sacrament enables us to understand the work of Christ who comes to unite his Church. We know for example that Christmas was not a Christian feast. So God takes what is "pagan", sanctifies and appropriates it for the welfare of his people. So if the *Mang-Djala* principle implies that it is a carrier of light in human existence, then we can implement it, in the light of the Gospel, in the practice of the Church. Its "pagan" roots can help us live our Christian faith.

**14. How can Christians promote the continued upholding of the *Mang-Djala* practice?**

Christians have to convey this concept to future generations, but in light of the Gospel.

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project



**Interview with Rev. Michel Doko in Ngaoubela by Paul Déouyo on May 06, 2011  
(translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

**1. Which ethnic groups are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon?**

It is difficult to name precisely the ethnic groups that are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon today. We know that Cameroon has over 250 ethnic groups. This means that members of the Church could consist of as many ethnic groups that exist in the country.

**2. What do you think about tribalism in the Cameroonian society?**

In cases of tribalism a tribal group tries to class itself highly, at the expense of other groups. And as we all know, tribalism does exist in Cameroon. Tribalism is the rejection of the alien, or “the other”, by locals and it becomes a more serious problem when aliens prosper amidst the locals. And this is what we have to deal with in the Church.

**3. What effects has tribalism on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon?**

The effects are apparent in the frustrations that ultimately produce the conflicts we are experiencing right now.

**4. How did tribalism arise in the Church?**

What causes tribalism is the unfair “sharing of the cake”, especially when we know that those who began with the Church (the pioneers) are still there, while those who joined later have become the biggest beneficiaries of the fruits of the Church. So, as we used to say in popular

language: why is it that those who came “yesterday yesterday”<sup>63</sup> benefit the most and marginalize those who came first. This is what is at the root of tribalism in the Church.

**5. What can the Church do to address the issue of tribalism?**

To eradicate tribalism, the Church must be based on the Gospel, and nothing else.

**6. What is your opinion on the impact of the two missions (ELCA and NMS) on the question of tribalism in the Church?**

There I have a twofold response, that is to say: yes, there was an impact, and no, there was no impact. Yes, because when Gunderson arrived in Cameroon in 1923, he only selected one people, the Gbaya. He could have extended his field of evangelism to Bertoua where the pygmies live, the Ewondo, the Etong, but he only chose one tribe. This contributed to the development of tribalism. On the other side, the NMS also builds its mission stations only among certain peoples. And this too contributes to the development of tribalism. However, the fact that the two missions were merged to form one church implies that it was not their intention to divide us.

**7. I am exploring the possibility of using the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala* as a unifying factor that can be implemented in the Church. What is your understanding of that concept?**

I know that we, the Gbaya, have for *Mang-Djala* partners the Laka and Dii. In relation to the Laka it has been reported to us that during a migration one of our ancestors took a Laka woman for his wife and we became “uncles”. So when we connect with the Laka, we do not see tribal differences but instead we see the *Mang-Djala* that binds us. Moreover, the Dii have provided us with arrows and spears, so we also call them “uncle”. This link makes us forget our differences and, more importantly, any tribal dimensions. In the Church these three ethnic groups are like a family.

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project

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<sup>63</sup> This expression means the members of those ethnic groups who newly join the Church – the so called foreigners.

**Interview on the concept of *Mang-Djala* with his Majesty Mohamadou Mven, traditional ruler of Ngatti village by Paul Déouyo on March 27, 2011 (translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

**1. What is the origin of *Mang-Djala* as ethnic groups practice it?**

The concept of *Mang-Djala* originated with the Tikar who, during their migrations, met with resistance from the Voute in the region of Tibati, resulting in a war. The fighting lasted a few years without there being a winner. Thus, the warlords on both sides got together and concluded there had been enough fighting, and that they had to reach some consensus and end the warfare. This search for consensus led to the *Mang-Djala* pact. According to the *Mang-Djala* pact, a human sacrifice was made and the warriors from both sides crossed the body – jumping over the dead body seven times. Next, the body was divided into two and each side buried one half. Now, members of the Tikar and Voute tribes, are not allowed to create problems for each other. They have become brothers. We also have a *Mang-Djala* alliance with the Mbum, but that didn't involve a particular sacrifice.

**2. How does *Mang-Djala* operate in making peace between its members?**

In fact the *Mang-Djala* members live as brothers and sisters. No one should create any problem for the other.

**3. What is done to preserve the concept of *Mang-Djala* for the next generation?**

For decades, the relationship between Mbum and Tikar hardly survived. In 2001 I was commissioned by the senior leader of Bankim at Nganhah to renew these relationships with his Majesty Saliou Saoumboum. Later on, a large delegation of Tikar from Bankim travelled to Nganhah, headed by his Majesty Ibrahim, to re-establish the *Mang-Djala* relationship that has been so good for us in the past. We are also communicating with the Voute about organising a similar meeting to revive the alliance. With the old people dying, we see the practice more and more disappearing and if nothing is done it will be a great loss.

**4. What are the manifestations of *Mang-Djala*?**

A *Mang-Djala* alliance was contributed to by both participating sides and people would lead an existence of interdependence. What happens during funerals is a reminder of our warrior past.

**5. Which categories of people (men, women and children) are involved in *Mang-Djala*?**

The practice of *Mang-Djala* involves people of all ages and sexes. There is no distinction between categories of people when it comes to *Mang-Djala*.

**6. What is the bad side of *Mang-Djala*?**

I do not see a negative side to *Mang-Djala*.

**7. How is *Mang-Djala* applied nowadays?**

At certain events we can see the *Mang-Djala* in action. For example, at the time of my enthronement in 2002 at Ngatti village as “Mven-Ngatti”, that is to say a Prime Minister under the higher traditional ruler of Bankim, I had a Voute friend named Joseph. Just before I went on my way to the induction ceremony, he and another Voute occupied my coronation stool. He announced to the assembled crowd: “Here is the real leader of Ngatti seated on the throne. Whoever else there is, is a false leader. It is to me that you need to offer gifts”. And when I left the palace one of my “dougourou”<sup>64</sup> went to “chase” him from the sacred stool. This is traditional behaviour that is peculiar to the *Mang-Djala*, and that's how it happens usually between *Mang-Djala* partners.

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this project.

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<sup>64</sup> Traditional ruler body guard

**Interview M. André Hohi, Church elder in Ngaoundéré, by Paul Déouyo on January 26, 2012 (translated from French)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

**1. What is your understanding of the concept of *Mang-Djala* in your ethnic group?**

The *Mang-Djala* expresses the inter-dependence of its constituent members. Their lives are characterized by being in contact with each other. That is to say that, being aware that a particular person is your *Mang-Djala* partner, you can not pass this person by as if you don't know him or her. If you do so, that person will call out to you and when you turn back to greet him, he will ask you to bow down on your knees before greeting him because of your earlier insolence, but he will do so just to create a shared sense of good humour.

**2. In what circumstances is *Mang-Djala* applicable?**

Nowadays, it is especially during mourning that we see the *Mang-Djala* being very active. In a case of death, *Mang-Djala* partners attend and will create a situation that may seem bizarre to someone who doesn't know its purpose. They will for example complain that the deceased is not dressed as he deserves to be dressed: "Find him proper clothes, or you can't bury him". The family will be forced to choose different clothes to dress the body in. At the time of burial, one of the *Mang-Djala* partners will descend into the grave and demand that the body be "freed" before he will leave the tomb for the burial to take place. He makes the family beg him to leave the grave and they end up by giving him some money.

This money is used to buy food and drink and other necessities. While the mourning is in progress, the *Mang-Djala* will arrive, carrying the food and join in the crying to mourn the deceased. It must be said that they will generously double or even triple the amount of money they have received in order to produce a substantial meal. If it is for example a Mundang person who has come to mourn a Mbum, the Mundang will prepare their favourite dish of white beans to symbolize the presence of *Mang-Djala* partners.

### **3. How influential is the concept in such circumstances?**

It is on these occasions that those in mourning feel that they are not alone, but that they belong to a community in which they occupy a precious place.

### **4. What in your view are the benefits of *Mang-Djala*?**

The *Mang-Djala* intervenes whenever there are conflicts. This is especially important for our young people who may, through ignorance, tackle each other on the road. Older people then call them and say: "Listen, you are *Mang-Djala* partners. Our ancestors have done much fighting in their time and managed to reach a peace agreement. So for you fighting is prohibited; you are like brothers". Today, Christians think that God's word has taken the place of this practice and brought us the peace that we searched for so long in the past. But, when there are disturbances of any kind, let us remember how we have forgiven each other in the past.

### **5. How does *Mang-Djala* affect different categories of people (men, women, children)?**

The *Mang-Djala* makes no distinction. Women, men and children are treated the same. For example, when I see a Mundang child passing by, I call him and I tease him: "Go and tell your dad that a gentleman named Hohi said "*mouf*". At first he will laugh, and when he passes the message on to his dad, his dad will say: Next time, say "*mouf*" back. And so the child learns that the teasing represents a form of intimacy that unites him with the man who made him say "*mouf*" to his father.

### **6. What is the negative side of *Mang-Djala*?**

I do not see any negative side to *Mang-Djala*.

### **7. How could the concept be expanded to include other areas such as the church that experiences disunity among ethnic groups?**

I think that in the Church *Mang-Djala* is already practiced, although in an informal way. I thank those pastors who, at funerals, allow *Mang-Djala* to carry out their performances and entertain the public before the religious ceremonies. So I think that, at the level of the Church, the concept is already practiced. Perhaps we should think about formalizing it and making it official. That is to say that we could integrate *Mang-Djala* interventions in funeral programs. These entire *Mang-Djala* games take place at the home of the deceased or on the cemetery, but there should be no such performances in the church out of respect for the place of worship.

**8. How does the Christian canon continue to uphold this practice?**

As I said above, Christians are already practicing the *Mang-Djala*. What remains to be done is only that the Church should encourage them to continue in that way.

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project.

**Focus group discussion (with members of the Mbum, Pere, and Chamba ethnic groups) in Ngaoundéré by Paul Déouyo on January 27, 2012 (translated from French and Fulfulde)**

I am Rev. Paul Déouyo. As a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, I am researching on the topic: The concept of *Mang-Djala* with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC).

The objective of the research is to discover whether traditional values, for example the indigenous concept of *Mang-Djala*, could help resolve questions of ethnicity in the Church.

Therefore I have invited you, because you are tied to one another in *Mang-Djala* alliances. First of all, thank you for the time you are taking to answer my questions.

**1. What do you understand by *Mang-Djala*?**

For me, *Mang-Djala* implies a kind of relationship that parents have developed between two ethnic groups. It leads us to discover ourselves and we have fun among ourselves. And we are also ready to assist each other, because we cannot watch our *Mang-Djala* partner suffering without coming to his assistance. The principle means: living together, eating together and having fun together. This is what I have retained from seeing my parents' *Mang-Djala* behaviour. It is a form of ordered community life. (Hamadou Baba - Pere).

The origin of *Mang-Djala* is by us, the Chamba, seen as follows. The story of *Mang-Djala* among Chamba and Pere goes back to the beginning of humanity. It all started with marriage. Inter-marriage among Chamba and Pere led to the birth of nephews and nieces. And from that the notion of *Mang-Djala* was born which demands a good neighbourly relationship and peaceful cohabitation. (Yadji Mathias – Chamba). It is difficult to be more precise about the origin of the *Mang-Djala* but, presumably, interethnic marriages would have contributed to its development since, at the time of our ancestors, boundaries between peoples consisted sometimes of no more than small streams, or hills and this situation favoured interethnic marriages.

And for Chamba marrying Fulani, a peaceful system of coexistence needed to be found. But also tribal wars and the desire to cement a lasting peace between neighbouring tribes have led people to initiate a peace alliance. (Hohi André - Mbum). I grew up in the village and what I know is that, when there is no *Mang-Djala*, there is no life. From what my dad told me we have for *Mang-Djala* partners the Chamba and the Mbum. The Mbum are our partners



because, when they built their huts, they sealed them off and were unable to get inside. So they slept outside until the Pere taught them how to create doors. The *Mang-Djala* with the Chamba came about because, after there had been a war, we became reconciled. The good thing is that your *Mang-Djala* partner is the only one capable of telling you the truth, because a *Mang-Djala* is never afraid to tell the truth, or anything else, to his or her partners, as long as it is for their well-being (Bakari - Pere).

## **2. What brought about *Mang-Djala***

The *Mang-Djala* came about because of the common desire of neighbouring peoples to avoid hostilities and war by adopting a common lifestyle fostering peaceful coexistence. This allowed them to organize fieldwork communities who sustained one another. It essentially implied that different groups came together, combining their energy in order to secure good crops. The work was organized so as to cover all the acreage of those who were bound by the *Mang-Djala*. (Andre Hohi - Mbum)

## **3. What makes *Mang-Djala* relevant to your daily life?**

The occasions on which one feels that *Mang-Djala* is active are many. In principle, the *Mang-Djala* intervenes in the daily lives of its members. So, for me *Mang-Djala* is present in the fact of living together. For example, here in Ngaoundéré, we are on very good terms with our *Mang-Djala* partners. Whether in times of grief or joy, we are always together, we work together. This communal kind of life we can realise with our *Mang-Djala* here in Ngaoundéré. (Mrs. Esther Atta - Chamba).

I should add that in case of grief suffered by one of our *Mang-Djala* partners, we go there and nobody and nothing can prevent us from making jokes. Sometimes we tie up a deceased and, if we are not paid, we will not release the body for burial. The family is required to contribute a sum of money to the *Mang-Djala*. With this money, we go back and organize among us a special collection. Sometimes we get large amounts of money that we add to what is given to us. With this money, we prepare food and buy wine and beer that we carry back to deliver it to the bereaved family. (Mrs Elisabeth Salatou - Pere).

I would like to confirm what she has just said. I remember that, when Mr Baba who worked at radio Sawtu-Linjiila died, I bought different kinds of vegetables for the family. I was joking that on that very day; I would boil his skull with one of the vegetables, the next day the legs, and so on ... (laughs). But on the day of the funeral, we prepared a meal as is usual in the village to bring comfort to our bereaved *Mang-Djala* partners. We even prepare native

beer to remind ourselves of the history that unites us, because that is how things were done according to tradition. (Mrs. Anne Innoua - Pere). Sometimes we light the fire next to the corpse and we say: “He feels cold and he needs to warm up”. It is a way to minimize the impact of the shock that family members may have experienced and to bring a little joy. (Hamadou Baba - Pere). In cases of bereavement, as long as the *Mang-Djala* fails to act, “the tears will keep flowing from the eyes, because it is the *Mang-Djala* that soothes the pain of the heart” (Mrs Esther Atta - Chamba).

For me the *Mang-Djala* is a very good thing because, where there is sadness, once the *Mang-Djala* appears, he restores joy and cheerfulness. Even in the case of mourning, people at times forget that they are in mourning because of the *Mang-Djala*. And where there is joy, that joy will deepen. We must also mention that, in the case of conflict, when spirits become heated, one *Mang-Djala* will take it upon himself to blame everybody around He will yell at everyone, treat everybody as a fool and call them not civilized, because fighting is for animals. He thus manages to appease anger and to restore calm before he begins the process of creating reconciliation between the persons involved in the conflict (Ms. Esther Atta - Chamba).

*Mang-Djala* partners also defend their allies when they are attacked by others. Our grandparents told us about the history of the *Mang-Djala* alliance between the Chamba and the Pere that, during a war between the Pere and an enemy group, the Chamba sent reinforcements to support the Pere. (Mrs. Martine Sumu - Pere)

#### **4. How can *Mang-Djala* enhance your relationships now that you are Christians?**

I do not know whether I should say that the *Mang-Djala* strengthens or improves our relationships. But we must simply note that the story of *Mang-Djala* is very interesting. For example, if you are a smoker and you do inadvertently pierce your clothes with the fire of your cigarette, you no longer will wear those clothes because, if your *Mang-Djala* partner discovers the holes, he will tear your clothes to pieces as the principle of the *Mang-Djala* tells him to do. Always avoid making a mistake in front of your *Mang-Djala*, or of falling and hurting yourself in which case you will have to pay for your mistake or your mishap. The *Mang-Djala* creates and maintains a good mood and unites its members. What is curious is that you won't see anybody getting angry. Rather, correcting each other creates an atmosphere of joy and fun among *Mang-Djala* partners. (Hamadou Baba - Pere).

I remember that, when I was a little we used to receive foreigners: Pere from Nigeria. One day while I was about to complain about such visits, my mother told me: “This is the village of Chamba. They can come here all they want, you cannot stop them”. (Ms. Anne Innoua - Pere).

Obviously the *Mang-Djala* strengthens our awareness of the fact that we are Christians. As concerns that what happens at events such as funerals that we have discussed so intensively, we rather hope that the church ministers will encourage us by setting some time aside for us during the funeral and that they won't stop us completely. Maybe before the beginning of the funeral liturgy *Mang-Djala* could be given the opportunity to perform because it really unites us. (Andre Hohi - Mbum).

**5. What is the participation of women and children in the act of *Mang-Djala*?**

In the practice of *Mang-Djala* we don't know any discrimination. Everyone is equal (Bakari – Pere).

**6. How have young people been initiated into the practice of *Mang-Djala*?**

Transmission occurs in practice. Children learn by following the manner in which members live with the *Mang-Djala* practice. When I was young, I used to see my father share his daily life and make jokes with other people. When I asked him questions in relation to the jokes, he told me about our *Mang-Djala* partners. There is no formal procedure for introducing the youth to *Mang-Djala* practices (Andre Höhi - Mbum).

**7. How does *Mang-Djala* operate in making peace and effecting reconciliation between you?**

*Mang-Djala* operates in the maintenance of peace and in reconciliation because one ever sees the *Mang-Djala* participating in quarrelling and fighting. (Mathias Yadi - Chamba). Mostly, *Mang-Djala* members play mediator when a partner is in conflict with a person from a group not belonging to their *Mang-Djala* alliance (Hamadou Baba - Pere).

**8. Which event can you recall where *Mang-Djala* has been actively implemented?**

Currently the events left where we see *Mang-Djala* are funerals (Mrs. Esther Atta - Chamba).

**9. What are the aspects of *Mang-Djala* that are not significant for the building of healthy relationships?**

There is no aspect that is insignificant or negative in relation to building a healthy relationship of members of the *Mang-Djala* (common voices).

**10. How can we promote the practice of *Mang-Djala* in the Church?**

Pastors must help us to practice *Mang-Djala* because, really, you cannot see anything wrong with it. They should not stop us. I think that some pastors are already open to the benefits of *Mang-Djala* because we see it practised at funerals (Mrs. Anne Innoua - Pere, joined by other members).

Thanks so much for your time and your contribution to this project.

### **Appendix 3: Interviews French version**

#### **Interview avec l'évêque national l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun le 28 May 2011 à Ngaoundéré par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du Sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le thème:

#### **Le concept du Mang-Djala avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui aidera à résoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de répondre à mes questions.

Dans votre article sur la mission au Cameroun paru en 2001 dans LWF Documentation vous aviez dit: " l'EELC est caractérisée par un pluralisme tribal qui défie grandement le concept de communion au niveau pratique".

#### **1. Que vouliez-vous dire par ce propos?**

Lorsqu'on fait l'analyse du contexte social dans lequel l'EELC accomplit sa mission qui concerne les êtres humains, on voit leurs caractéristiques sociales et linguistiques. Dans ce contexte où l'Eglise a accompli et continue d'accomplir sa mission, vous remarquez la multiplicité d'ethnies. Cette multiplicité représente aussi bien une richesse qu'une pauvreté.

Richesse parce que quand vous prenez toutes les composantes ethniques ensemble qui se réunissent pour prier ensemble, vous voyez la bénédiction, la grâce, la grandeur, l'unité, et par anticipation l'image de l'Eglise universelle.

Pauvreté, quand ces différentes composantes tribales cessent de penser à l'unité par-delà les barrières, les frontières ethniques; quand elles commencent à penser uniquement à leur appartenance ethnique ou tribale, vous voyez la pauvreté de l'Eglise. Vous voyez une Eglise divisée, une Eglise émiettée, une Eglise qui représente des églises. Lorsque l'appartenance ethnique commence à prévaloir plus que l'appartenance ecclésiale, c'est chaque communauté ethnique qui se recroqueville dans son groupe ethnique et qui représente l'église même à partir de son groupe ethnique.

En 2007, lors du synode général à Garoua, j'ai dit quelque chose que les gens ont mal apprécié. J'avais dit ceci : L'idée de l'alliance entre deux groupes ethniques pour relancer la bataille ethnique au sein de l'église est une idée qui doit être combattue jusqu'à la dernière énergie parce qu'elle est exclusive et non biblique. L'unité que nous recherchons est une unité inclusive ; c'est une unité qui intègre tout le monde. C'est ce que stipule l'article 3 de la constitution de l'EELC en rapport avec le critère d'appartenance à l'Eglise. Quand on devient membre de l'Eglise, on devient membre du groupe ethnique de Jésus Christ qui n'a pas de distinction. Donc si un groupe ethnique se met ensemble pour mieux contrôler la vie de l'Eglise, il appartient aux responsables de les interpeller pour dire, qu'ici nous sommes en train de nous égarer, nous sommes en train de faire la volonté de l'être humain et non celle de Dieu. C'était dans ce sens que j'avais parlé au synode de Garoua et aujourd'hui je suis critiqué pour avoir dit cela.

Ce sont les Américains et les Norvégiens qui nous ont aidés à fonder cette Eglise. Ils ont utilisé les lettrés de l'époque parmi lesquels il y avait les Boulou, les Bafia, les Bamilékés, quelques Bamouns et Tikar qui sont venus ici à Ngaoundéré, à Mbé, à Meiganga, et qui ont été utilisés comme des enseignants, et des catéchistes dans les tout premiers temps de l'Eglise. Et aujourd'hui lorsqu'un de ceux-là se présente à nous comme Chrétien luthérien qu'est-ce que nous disons ? Est-ce que nous l'acceptons et l'intégrons ou alors nous croyons simplement que le luthéranisme au Cameroun nous appartient à nous les tribus historiques de l'Eglise ?

C'est à tout ceci que j'ai pensé lorsque j'écrivais cette phrase en 2001 et l'histoire de ce dernier temps me donne raison. Donc vivre la réalité de la diversité ethnique de cette Eglise implique que nous devons transcender cette réalité de la diversité pour voir la où les diversités se rencontrent au pied de la croix de Jésus Christ.

## **2. Comment le tribalisme affecte-t-il l'Eglise?**

Le tribalisme affecte vraiment l'Eglise et vous pouvez le constater dans ce que je viens de vous relater plus tôt. Mais aussi il y a eu quelques incidents liés au tribalisme tels que celui qui a eu lieu à Bertoua en 1999 lors du synode général que j'ai présidé. La manifestation du tribalisme a été très visible. Nous avons assisté mais impuissant à l'élection du Secrétaire général de l'Eglise. Le synode avait à l'époque suspendu les travaux pour rediscuter la question de candidature avant de reprendre. A l'époque, les deux grands groupes ethniques étaient sur le point de se cravater.

Ensuite pendant la présidence du pasteur Barya, on a vu son attachement à la congrégation de Bethel II, et on a aussi vu ce que cet attachement a créé en termes de relation entre Bethel I et Bethel II. Ensuite, au synode général de Touboro, à cause d'une déclaration d'un des candidats aux élections, les gens qui étaient déjà gagnés à sa cause se sont retirés parce qu'il avait mal parlé d'une institution qui se trouvait dans leur localité.

On sait aussi qu'il y a des gens qui se prennent pour les propriétaires de l'Eglise et quand ils ne sont pas associés à une activité, c'est de la grogne partout. Donc le tribalisme existe bel et bien, mais nous croyons que ça va changer si nous regardons plus loin.

Il y a une autre situation dont on n'a pas souvent la possibilité d'en parler. C'est celle de la région nord-ouest entre les Dowayo et les Chamba. Leur cohabitation a toujours difficile même dans l'Eglise. Et même dans la région sud-ouest il n'y a pas une bonne relation entre le Gbaya originaires et les *Voutés*. Ici au niveau de Ngaoundéré on peut identifier des foyers permanents de tensions latentes.

### **3. Quelle est votre opinion sur les mémorandums relatifs au tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Les manifestations de certains groupes ethniques à travers les mémorandums me rappellent qu'il faut prendre au sérieux ces mémorandums, les exploiter. Prendre au sérieux les questions pertinentes qu'ils posent et travailler dans la prière et le dialogue pour voir ce qui peut être fait pour résoudre les problèmes que posent ces mémorandums, bien qu'il ne sera jamais question de répondre à toutes les sollicitations qu'ils contiennent.

### **4. Quelles sont les actions qui ont été entreprises pour adresser la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Nous avons essayé de faire une certaine planification en ce qui concerne l'octroi des bourses durant les trois dernières années. Il y a eu au total treize bénéficiaires des bourses de la Fédération Luthérienne Mondiale (2008-2011) parmi lesquels : quatre Dii, trois Gbaya, un Mbum, un Tikar, un Bafia, un Ewondo, un Toupouri, un Mambila. Ce qui est assez diversifié.

### **5. Comment pensez-vous réconcilier ceux qui pensent qu'ils sont victimes du tribalisme?**

La réconciliation est un don de Dieu, et ce don est toujours là parce que c'est Dieu nous l'a déjà donné et l'élément visible est sa parole. Cette parole n'est pas une parole de division, mais d'unité et de réconciliation. Il y a aussi le sacrement de Baptême et de Sainte-Cène. Les

barrières de division tombent lorsqu'on se rencontre pour méditer la parole de Dieu et prier ensemble ou chanter ensemble.

#### **6. Quel est votre opinion sur l'influence des deux missions (ELCA, NMS) sur cette question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

L'influence des missions dans la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise est complexe. Mais d'après mon analyse, la Sudan Mission a encouragé l'établissement du principe de la tribalité où on amène un groupe tribal ou ethnique à être fier de son appartenance tribale ou ethnique. Il n'y a rien de négatif en cela parce que c'est un don de Dieu. Mais là où le bât blesse, c'est que la Sudan Mission dans son approche de la question de la tribalité a fait comme si aucune autre tribu n'existait à côté de celle qu'elle a encouragée. Elle a agi comme si la foi Chrétienne n'était destinée qu'à celle qu'elle a encouragée. C'est cela mon regard.

La NMS quant à elle, a globalement encouragé les diversités, les cohabitations des différentes ethnies, sans problème. C'est pourquoi elle n'a pas choisi le Dii, ni le Père, ni le Tikar, comme langue à vulgariser. Elle a plutôt choisi le Mbum au départ. Mais lorsqu'elle a vu que les Mbum ne s'intéressaient pas beaucoup à l'Evangile, elle a choisi le Fulfuldé. Les premiers missionnaires ont appris le Mbum, mais ceux qui sont venus après ont appris le Fulfuldé qui est une langue populaire, et parlée un peu partout.

C'est pourquoi dans la situation de notre Eglise aujourd'hui, la question que nous discutons se pose avec moins d'acuité dans les régions de la NMS. Tandis que les régions où la Sudan Mission a travaillé, le problème se pose avec beaucoup d'acuité, à la différence de la région Est qui bien qu'étant une zone de la Sudan Mission a été influencée par la politique d'approche de la NMS.

Mais dans les régions telles que le Mbéré, et l'Est, vous trouverez les traces et les marques de la Sudan Mission. Il y a des années où les missionnaires de la Sudan Mission donnaient des études bibliques en Gbaya et se faisaient traduire en Français. Ce qui est bien parce que cela montre l'intégration profonde de ceux-ci dans cette société, mais cette intégration est utilisée aujourd'hui d'une manière négative. Quelqu'un m'a dit : « les Chrétiens de chez moi aimeraient avoir un président qui leur parle dans leur propre langue ». Hors il y a des gens doués qui peuvent parler plusieurs langues et des gens non doués comme moi qui peut à peine parler le Français, l'Anglais, le Fulfuldé et même ma propre langue.



**7. Je suis en train d'explorer le concept indigène de *Mang-Djala* comme étant un facteur unificateur qui pourrait être appliqué dans l'Eglise. Que connaissez-vous de ce concept ?**

A propos du concept de *Mang-Djala*, j'ai des petites idées. Je suis d'accord que ce concept dans le contexte théologique peut aider à partir d'en bas et faciliter l'unité de l'Eglise que nous recherchons tant. A partir d'en bas parce que c'est un concept social. C'est une donnée qui existe, alors que l'unité que nous recherchons vient d'en haut et c'est un don de Dieu. Mais ce qui est en bas peut aller à la rencontre de ce qui vient d'en haut et cette rencontre peut permettre une consolidation de l'unité telle que nous voulons.

**8. Quels sont les groupes ethniques qui sont liés par le *Mang-Djala* dans l'Eglise?**

La société des Tikar, nous connaissons que nous sommes les *Mang-Djala* avec les *Vouté*. Au départ, il y a eu une alliance entre les *Vouté* et les Tikar, et les conditions de cette alliances ont été fixées, pas par écrit puisque c'était un monde de l'oralité. Si un *Vouté* est attaqué, le Tikar va à sa défense et vice versa et les deux ne doivent jamais se faire la guerre. Cette alliance existe entre les Dii et les Gbaya et les conditionnalités que j'ai énumérées sont les mêmes. Je vais vous livrer un secret que j'ai appris ici. Les Gbaya ont eu à faire deux guerres avec les Peuls en 1991 et 1992. Et ce que j'ai appris ici, c'est que les Dii s'apprêtaient déjà à s'organiser pour aller à la défense des Gbaya. Heureusement ces guerres se sont arrêtées. Ce sont là des idées si elles sont utilisées théologiquement, elles peuvent éclairer le concept de l'unité et peuvent amener un renforcement de cette unité. Au sein de l'Eglise, pendant des enterrements, nous voyons toujours cette complicité entre les Dii et les Gbaya. Est-ce qu'on peut développer cela plus loin et dire que entre les Dii et les Gbaya il y a une unité solide et que cette unité doit être utilisée en faveur de l'Eglise ? Si les Mbum, les Tikar, les *Vouté*, les Bamoun se mettent ensemble, les Tikar et les Mambila se mettent ensemble autour de ce concept, à quoi assisterait-t-on ?

**9. Comment les désunions ethniques affectent-elles ceux qui sont liés par *Mang-Djala* et qui sont membres de l'Eglise?**

Je n'y ai pas réfléchi, mais je ne pense pas que cela les affecte tellement au point ou parfois ce lien qui n'est plus très fort et visible comme par le passé, semble ne pas fonctionner face à certaine situation où les émotions priment sur ce lien. Mais il faut tout de même reconnaître

que le concept reste une force qui peut permettre de pacifier plus facilement ceux qui sont liés ensemble lorsqu'il y a un problème.

### **10. Comment le *Mang-Djala* peut-il être utilisé comme un facteur unificateur dans l'Eglise?**

Nous savons aussi qu'une grande partie de tous ces groupes sont membres de l'EELC, cela va former un socle et les velléités de la division que nous vivons maintenant ne peuvent pas se manifester. Il vous faut donc mener plusieurs interviews pour comprendre ce que les gens pensent de cette question-là.

Il y a une histoire païenne que je vais vous raconter. Un grand commerçant Tikar qui vivait au milieu des Vouté et qui a permis le développement du village Yoko est tombé malade. Dans la pratique de la sorcellerie Vouté, on pense que ce sont les Etong qui sont venus du sud pour prendre l'âme du Tikar. Et les Vouté donc suivent dans la sorcellerie le chemin par lequel les Etong passent avec l'âme du Tikar. Ils vont intercepter le cortège au sommet d'une montagne qui se trouve sur la route entre Yoko et Ntui. La bataille va s'engager, Vouté contre Etong visant à libérer le Tikar qui est le *Mang-Djala* des Vouté. Les Vouté vont remporter la victoire et reviennent avec leur *Mang-Djala* qui retrouve sa santé. Il faut insister sur le fait ceci se passe dans le monde mystique.

Mais c'est une illustration pour élucider ce que nous sommes en train de dire ici, que les peuples qui sont engagés dans ce système s'auto-protègent. Ils veillent les uns sur les autres et il y a des actes qu'ils ne doivent pas poser. Et dans le cadre de l'Eglise, s'il y a des actes que nous ne devons pas poser ce sera bien. Une étude comme celle-ci qui concerne le peuple doit être bien menée et des interviews doivent être menés ici et là pour aller jusqu'en profondeur. Je vous encourage pour cette étude.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

**Interview avec l'assistant à l'évêque national de l'Eglise Evangélique luthérienne au Cameroun par Paul Déouyo le 18 Juin 2011 à Ngaoundéré**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du Sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le thème:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui aidera à résoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de répondre à mes questions.

**1. Que pensez-vous du propos de l'évêque national paru en 2001 sur la mission au Cameroun dans LWF Documentation ou il a déclaré: « l'EELC est caractérisée par un pluralisme tribal qui défie grandement le concept de communion au niveau pratique » ?**

Je crois que l'évêque national dans ce propos reconnaît que dans l'Eglise, il y a plusieurs groupes ethniques. Et lorsqu'il y a plusieurs groupes ethniques qui se retrouvent, ce n'est jamais facile. Il faut beaucoup travailler pour qu'il ait une communion.

**2. Comment le tribalisme affecte-t-il l'Eglise ?**

Par rapport au tribalisme, il faut déjà reconnaître que nous avons plusieurs tribus dans notre Eglise ; et que chaque groupe s'identifie à lui-même. Ceci favorise beaucoup de rassemblement par groupe tribal. Et lorsqu'il y a de grands défis tels le choix des leaders de l'Eglise ou le choix pour un poste quelconque, on voit les groupes se réunir pour voir comment réussir dans ce projet.

**3. Quel est votre point de vue sur les mémorandums relatifs au tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Pour moi il faut dire que le tribalisme se manifeste sous plusieurs formes. Et l'une de ces manifestations est aussi le fait de se rassembler en groupe tribal pour réagir à un soi-disant tribalisme dont ils ont été victimes. Mais le côté positif de cette réaction est que le groupe, lorsqu'il se retrouve essaie de voir ensemble un certain nombre d'injustice dont il est victime. Mais le négatif c'est qu'on oublie qu'il y a aussi d'autres groupes qui peuvent être associés

parce que subissant le même traitement. Il y a aussi le fait que les groupes majoritaires piétinent et lèsent les autres groupes minoritaires.

#### **4. Quelles actions ont été entreprises pour adresser la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Au niveau de l'Eglise, le projet '*un dans le monde*' avait été mis sur pied pour rencontrer certains groupes ethniques et parler avec eux dans le but de les unir. Cela avait bien marché pour un temps. Mais après le projet s'est arrêté. Il y a eu une accalmie en ce temps-là, mais malheureusement aujourd'hui le problème ressurgit avec plus de force que par le passé.

Les incidents liés au tribalisme ! Il y a des incidents extérieurs et intérieurs. Extérieurs, je pense aux conflits qui ont opposé les Gbaya et les Fulbes à Meiganga. Ça, c'était vraiment une manifestation du tribalisme. Mais au niveau de l'Eglise, c'est surtout lors des élections ou lorsqu'il y a des postes à pourvoir que chaque groupe essaie de tout faire pour occuper le poste ; et lorsqu'il ne réussit pas cela devient des problèmes.

#### **5. Comment pensez-vous réconcilier ceux qui pensent qu'ils sont victimes du tribalisme?**

Jusqu'ici nous avons essayé de nous rapprocher de ceux qui pensent qu'ils sont victimes du tribalisme pour discuter avec eux. Le constat général est qu'après avoir écouté chaque groupe, vous vous rendez compte que tous les groupes aimeraient avoir les mêmes avantages. Souvent d'autres ne réagissent pas parce qu'ils sont minoritaires, mais les groupes majoritaires pensent qu'ils ont le droit de s'imposer.

Le cas le plus récent de la manifestation du tribalisme est celui que nous traversons actuellement, ou c'est l'Eglise qui à travers son synode général a décidé de changer le système de gouvernement de l'Eglise, et un groupe ethnique trouve qu'il est plus important et qu'il doit s'imposer pour que le tout premier évêque vienne de chez lui. Malheureusement, ils n'ont pas réussi et ils trouvent qu'il faut créer du désordre.

#### **6. Quel est votre opinion sur l'influence des deux missions (ELCA, NMS) sur la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise ?**

Les deux partenaires (missions) nous ont beaucoup aidés dans l'évangélisation, mais les approches diffèrent un peu dans les deux camps. La Sudan Mission qui s'est installée parmi les Gabya a traduit la Bible en langue Gbaya et a mis beaucoup d'accent là-dessus. Alors que du côté norvégien on a trouvé que les missionnaires ne se sont pas basés sur une ethnie

précise, mais a plutôt pense qu'il fallait utiliser la langue officielle pour travailler. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont choisi le Mbum et le Fulfuldé. Le Mbum n'a pas marché et ils ont finalement adopté le Français et le Fulfuldé.

**7. Je suis en train d'explorer le concept indigène de *Mang-Djala* comme étant un facteur unificateur qui pourrait être appliqué dans l'Eglise. Que connaissez-vous de ce concept ?**

En grandissant, nous avons écouté ce terme dans plusieurs milieux. Parmi les Dii et les Gbaya, les Mbum et les Mundang etc... Mais ce qui est plus intéressant, c'est que ces groupes qui sont des différents groupes ethniques vivent ensemble, s'amusent ensemble, et surtout trouvent facilement une solution a un problème qui semble difficile et complexe. Donc le *Mang-Djala*, c'est deux ou trois groupes ethniques liés par des pactes qui ont été scellés par des parents dans le passé lointain, et qui leur ont permis de vivre ensemble. Une des forces de ce concept est qu'il a la force de changer l'ambiance. Surtout il a la force de changer une ambiance de colère et de tristesse en joie et sérénité.

**8. Quels sont les groupes ethniques qui sont liés par le *Mang-Djala* dans l'Eglise ?**

Il y en a plusieurs, mais ceux que je connais, ce sont les Dii et les Gbaya, les Mbum et les Moundang

**9. Comment les désunions ethniques affectent-elles ceux qui sont liés par *Mang-Djala* et qui sont membres de l'Eglise?**

Il faut dire que dans l'Eglise, il arrive que les gens oublient, surtout en cas de problème l'existence de ce concept, jusqu'au moment où quelqu'un se rappelle et se rend compte que les parties en conflit sont liés par le *Mang-Djala* et tout change subitement. Donc je crois que le tribalisme n'a pas beaucoup affecté la pratique de ce concept. Donc dans le cas actuel toutes les parties peuvent s'oublier un peu et regarder vers ce concept, cela nous aiderait beaucoup.

**10. Comment le *Mang-Djala* peut-il être utilisé comme un facteur unificateur dans l'Eglise ?**

Déjà pour moi il faut dire qu'il existe le côté positif et négatif du concept. Le côté positif est qu'effectivement, même quand deux groupes sont en colère, l'introduction de l'idée de ce

concept vient simplement apaiser les tensions et la solution au problème vient simplement et la réconciliation se passe sans trop de peine.

Le cote négatif c'est qu'il y a beaucoup de groupe ethnique dans l'Eglise et lorsque c'est simplement quelque deux ou trois groupes qui sont concernés, puisque tous les membres de l'Eglise ne pratiquent pas le *Mang-Djala*, ceux-là qui ne s'y connaissent pas et se sentiront lésés. Mais à cause du *Mang-Djala*, les occasions de deuil deviennent des temps de réconciliation pour les *Mang-Djala* qui s'étaient peut être querellés.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

**Interview avec Mme Jeannette Maina Directrice Nationale des Femmes pour Christ de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun le 14 Avril 2011 à Ngaoundéré par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

**1. Comment le tribalisme affecte-t-il l'Eglise ?**

L'Eglise existe dans la société et est influencée par cette société qui l'environne. Et donc si le tribalisme existe dans la société, forcément nous le retrouverons dans l'Eglise. Elle est donc à l'origine de plusieurs cas de conflits que nous avons connus dans l'Eglise. Le tribalisme affecte notre Eglise en ce que nous connaissons qu'il y a des cultes en langue vernaculaires, pas parce que ceux-là ne comprennent pas d'autres langues, mais simplement parce qu'ils veulent se retrouver entre eux. Et c'est donc cela qui apporte beaucoup de problèmes, de divisions et de luttes dans l'Eglise.

Dans notre mouvement des femmes pour Christ, nous ne nous réunissons pas par groupe ethnique, mais nos réunions regroupent les femmes de toutes les ethnies. Nous essayons au mieux d'utiliser une langue comprise par toutes les femmes. Et même pendant nos conférences, nous essayons d'adopter le même principe malgré notre diversité ethnique.

**2. Quel est votre point de vue sur les mémorandums relatifs au tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Parfois les mémorandums sont justifiés, mais en majorité ce sont des réclamations individualistes et égoïstes. Parce qu'un mémorandum qui réclame qu'un peuple est majoritaire dans l'Eglise, cela démontre de l'égoïsme. C'est vrai qu'il y a eu ceux par qui l'Evangile est entré, mais cela ne leur accorde pas un statut particulier. Et puis l'Evangile a atteint plusieurs autres groupes ethniques à travers le Cameroun.

**3. Quelles actions ont été entreprises pour adresser la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

L'Eglise n'a pas une politique réelle pour adresser la question de l'ethnicité et ceci constitue une faiblesse. Cela fait en sorte que les ethnies dites minoritaires se sont mises ensemble pour s'opposer à celles dites majoritaires.

**4. Comment pensez-vous réconcilier ceux qui pensent qu'ils sont victimes du tribalisme?**

Je n'ai pas une solution immédiate à proposer.

**5. Quel est votre opinion sur l'influence des deux missions (ELCA, NMS) sur la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise ?**

Les missionnaires ont une part de responsabilité dans cette question, mais il revient aux Chrétiens Camerounais de voir que cela pose un véritable problème de communion et de chercher à y remédier.

**6. Je suis en train d'explorer le concept indigène de *Mang-Djala* comme étant un facteur unificateur qui pourrait être appliqué dans l'Eglise. Que connaissez-vous de ce concept ?**

Le concept du *Mang-Djala* ne m'est pas étranger. C'est un peu une sorte de jeu qui se passe entre deux ou trois ethnies et qui crée non seulement l'amour, mais surtout l'enthousiasme lorsque ces différentes ethnies se rencontrent.

**7. Quels sont les groupes ethniques qui sont liés par le *Mang-Djala* dans l'Eglise ?**

Il y en a quelques-unes que je connais : les Dii, les Gbaya et les Laka. Les Tikar, les *Voutés* et les Mbum.

**8. Comment les désunions ethniques affectent-elles ceux qui sont liés par *Mang-Djala* et qui sont membres de l'Eglise?**

Parfois ces désunions font oublier à certaines personnes qu'elles sont liées par le *Mang-Djala* avec celui ou celle avec qui elles ont des problèmes. Il faudrait en ce moment-là qu'une tierce personne leur rappelle qu'ils sont des *Mang-Djala* pour qu'ils reprennent leur bon sens.



**9. Comment le *Mang-Djala* peut-il être utilisé comme un facteur unificateur dans l'Eglise ?**

Dans le cas actuel de notre Eglise, si on avait un peu eu l'ouverture d'esprit pour faire appliquer le concept de *Mang-Djala*, on serait déjà parvenu à une réconciliation. Le conflit actuel est soutenu par l'ethnie Gbaya qui a pour *Mang-Djala* l'ethnie Dii et l'ethnie Laka. Si les Dii et les Laka s'étaient adressés à leur *Mang-Djala*, dans le langage du *Mang-Djala* qui est très profond, on serait déjà arrivé à une solution pacifique du conflit.

Ce qui est dans la culture n'est pas toujours mauvais. On peut donc prendre ce qui est dans la culture tel que ce concept et le mettre au profit de l'Eglise, parce que le concept du *Mang-Djala* véhicule l'amour, la paix, la joie, et tout ce qui peut renforcer la fraternité et l'amitié.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

**Interview avec Mme Atta Djoulde sur le concept du *Mang-Djala* le 22 Juin 2011 à Ngaoundéré par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

**1. Quelle est votre compréhension du *Mang-Djala* dans votre ethnie ?**

Concernant le concept de *Mang-Djala*, nous ne connaissons pas tous les détails parce que nous avons trouvé cette pratique dès notre naissance. Nos parents nous présentaient simplement nos partenaires *Mang-Djala*. Ceux qui sont réellement nos *Mang-Djala* nous les Mbum Ndal, sont les Vouté, les Mundang, les Mbéré.

**2. Quelle est l'origine du concept *Mang-Djala* selon votre histoire ?**

Comme je l'ai dit, Lorsque nous sommes nés nous avons trouvé la pratique. Et puis nous les enfants à cette époque, et de surcroit fille, n'étions pas assez curieuses pour demander aux parents ce que c'est que le *Mang-Djala*. Mais nous le pratiquions simplement. Mais c'est aux Tikar qu'on a expliqué l'origine du *Mang-Djala*. Mais ce que je peux dire est que la vie entre les *Mang-Djala* est une vie de blague. Il y a une journée dans l'année qui est décrétée journée des *Mang-Djala*. Pendant ce jour, chaque *Mang-Djala* cherche là où se trouve son partenaire *Mang-Djala* pour arrêter afin qu'il lui paie tribut. C'est comme des blagues que Dieu a accordées aux gens.

En ce jour-là, même les chefs traditionnels de premier degré ne sont pas épargnés. Le *Mang-Djala* du chef va déposer une petite corde à l'entrée de la chefferie ; ainsi le chef saura que son *Mang-Djala* était de passage demander son tribut.

**3. Quels sont les circonstances/événements/contextes durant lesquels le *Mang-Djala* peut être applicable**

Il y a des événements durant lesquels les *Mang-Djala* interviennent. C'est le cas par exemple du deuil ou ils peuvent intervenir. N'est-ce pas vous êtes pasteurs ! Et pendant certains

enterrements vous assistez à ce que font les *Mang-Djala* au tombeau lorsque les *Mang-Djala* empêchent l'enterrement pour exiger qu'on leur paie? Dans le temps ancien, lorsqu'on leur paie, eux à leur tour vont cotiser aussi de l'argent et vont payer beaucoup de vin, préparer assez de nourriture. Après ils reviennent avec tout cela pour assister leur *Mang-Djala* endeuillés. Durant tout le temps que dure le deuil, ils ne dorment pas et s'activent à s'occuper de tout ce qui est nécessaire pour assister leur *Mang-Djala*. Je crois que ceci se pratique jusqu'à présent.

Dans le temps ancien, les *Mang-Djala* intervenaient dans tous les événements pour se supporter les uns les autres, mais de nos jours, il n'y a que lors des deuils qu'on peut voir les *Mang-Djala* en action.

#### **4. Quelle capacité d'influence ce concept a-t-il lors de ces circonstances?**

Je vais vous raconter une histoire vraie que j'ai vécue personnellement : Je vous ai dit plus tôt que les Mbéré étaient nos *Mang-Djala*. Voici l'histoire : Un homme Mbéré avait eu des problèmes avec les enfants de son grand frère – ses neveux; et juste quelques instant après, nous sommes arrivées dans le village avec ma tante. En effet le monsieur vivait dans un village autre que son grand frère, mais il était venu dans le village de celui-ci pour lui rendre visite. Et lorsque le problème s'est produit, il s'est fâché et il est rentré dans son village. A notre arrivée, nous avons été informées de l'évènement et ma tante m'a fait comprendre que nous ne pouvions pas laisser ce problème pendant et repartir. Il nous faut suivre le petit frère dans son village pour écouter ce qui s'est passé.

Nous avons donc pris avec nous un des neveux et sommes allées avec lui chez son oncle paternel. Lorsque nous sommes arrivés, il nous a reçus, et nous a donné une natte pour nous asseoir. Nous nous sommes salués et nous lui avons fait connaître le but de notre visite, qui faisait suite à leur querelle avec ses neveux. Nous lui avons dit qu'arrivées au village, nous avons appris qu'il était chez son grand frère et se serait fâché suite à une querelle avec son neveu et serait reparti sans même dire aurevoir, et nous, sommes venues nous enquérir de ce qui s'est passé.

Prenant la parole, il nous a dit : « je ne peux pas ne pas vous dire ce qui s'est passé parce que vous êtes mes *Mang-Djala* et vous vous êtes uniquement déplacées pour cette affaire. Mais si c'était d'autres personnes, je n'allais même pas me faire cette peine, mais à cause de vous, je suis obligé de vous raconter ce qui s'est passé ». Lorsqu'il a fini de nous raconter le problème, nous nous sommes rendu compte que le neveu était fautif. Ma tante qui voulait plaider pour l'enfant s'est couchée devant lui pour demander pardon à la faveur de l'enfant.

Ayant vu cela, le monsieur s'est levé précipitamment pour soulever ma tante en lui adressant cette parole : « qui t'a dit de te coucher devant moi ? Moi non plus je n'ai pas le droit de me coucher devant toi pour te demander pardon quelle que soit la gravité du tort que l'un aura causé à l'autre. Maintenant que tu t'es couchée devant moi, ce village va se déguerpir parce que le *Mang-Djala* s'est couché sur son sol pour demander pardon. Prochainement ne fais plus jamais cela si tu vas dans un autre village de tes *Mang-Djala*. Pour moi c'est déjà gâté car je sais que le village va se disloquer ».

Ce que le vieil homme a prédit s'est réellement passé car après quelques années le village s'est entièrement disloqué et les habitants se sont dispersés dans d'autres villages voisins. C'est là que j'ai vu que le *Mang-Djala* n'est pas une petite affaire. Si en ce temps j'avais su, j'aurais pu m'informer auprès de lui, mais je n'ai pas pu le faire et nous sommes rentrés.

### **5. Quels sont les bénéfices du *Mang-Djala* ?**

L'avantage du *Mang-Djala* dans le cas du deuil par exemple, c'est qu'il apporte une véritable consolation à la famille endeuillée. A travers leurs actions, les *Mang-Djala* parviennent à calmer les pleurs. Et puis le bien fondé du *Mang-Djala* est qu'on ne doit pas se fâcher avec son partenaire. Et le *Mang-Djala* a l'obligation d'intervenir en cas de conflit pour réconcilier les parties en conflit comme ce que je vous ai raconté.

### **6. Comment le *Mang-Djala* affecte-t-il les différentes catégories de personne (hommes, femmes et enfants) ?**

Le *Mang-Djala* ne fait acception de personne. Les hommes, les femmes et les enfants ont une même considération.

### **7. Quel est la côté négative du *Mang-Djala*?**

Personnellement, je ne vois pas le mauvais côté de la pratique du *Mang-Djala*. Peut-être que d'autres arrivent à discerner, mais personnellement, je vois que le *Mang-Djala* est bien et très bénéfique. Et d'ailleurs pasteur tu as suscité en moi le désir de mener des recherches pour l'origine du *Mang-Djala* mais surtout comprendre ses multiples pratiques du passé.

### **8. Comment ce concept peut-il s'étendre dans d'autres domaines tels que l'Eglise où il existe désunion entre les groupes ethniques ?**

Il revient à vous les pasteurs de réfléchir sur comment mettre à profit le *Mang-Djala* au sein de l'Eglise parce que plusieurs chrétiens le pratiquent déjà. Et le plus courant c'est le cas du deuil.

**9. Comment les Chrétiens peuvent-ils continuer à maintenir cette pratique?**

Il faut les y encourager si l'Eglise trouve que c'est nécessaire.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

**Interview l'évêque regional Rev. Jean Baiguele le 24 Juin 2011 Yaoundé par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

**1. Quels sont les groupes ethniques qui sont membres de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun ?**

Il est difficile de dire avec précision le nombre de groupes ethnique dans l'Eglise, mais je crois que nous sommes au moins vingt groupes ethniques.

**2. Que pensez-vous du tribalisme dans la société Camerounaise?**

Je pense que le tribalisme se vit dans la structure sociale du pays et cela se ressent dans les ministères, parce qu'une fois que quelqu'un est nommé ministre, au moins 80% de ses proches collaborateurs sont du même groupe ethnique que lui. La tendance est de repartir les postes ministériels selon les tribus. On ne tient pas compte de la formation professionnelle de ceux à qui on confie les responsabilités. Exemple : les professeurs de l'enseignement général à qui on confie les postes de délégués départementaux de l'environnement et des forets, ou des postes et télécommunications alors qu'ils ne sont pas des techniciens dans le domaine.

**3. Quels sont les problèmes liés au tribalisme au Cameroun?**

Les problèmes liés au tribalisme dans notre pays, c'est qu'on valorise l'ethnie ou la tribu au détriment de l'intérêt social.

**4. Quels effets le tribalisme a-t-il apporte au sein de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun ?**

Dans l'Eglise on voit la copie de la société camerounaise. Il y a toute une confusion entre l'identité Chrétienne et le rôle qu'on a à jouer. Et on retrouve cette coquille dans la structure de l'Eglise.

### **5. Qu'est qui a apporté ce tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Ce qui a apporté le tribalisme dans l'Eglise, c'est la lutte acharnée pour une représentation ethnique massive. On a aujourd'hui de la peine à revenir sur les bases de l'Eglise qui ne sont pas liées aux considérations ethniques ou tribales.

### **6. Comment est-ce que l'Eglise à votre avis peut faire face à ce tribalisme ?**

Pour faire face à ce problème, l'Eglise doit commencer par bannir le langage de majorité, minorité, ou encore étranger, et traiter tout le monde sans voir derrière celui-là son influence tribale.

### **7. Quel est votre opinion sur l'influence des deux missions (ELCA, NMS) sur la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise ?**

Dans l'Eglise le tribalisme a en partie à voir avec nos deux missions parce que la partie Américaine a fait croire au peuple Gbaya que : « l'Eglise c'est vous » et par conséquent « vous devez constituer les personnes clés de l'Eglise ». Les Norvégiens eux ont travaillé avec beaucoup de peuples mais là aussi, il y a eu beaucoup de penchant pour les Dii par rapport aux autres. Les missionnaires accordent beaucoup plus d'attention aux pasteurs Dii qu'à ceux qui ne sont pas Dii.

### **8. Que pensez-vous que la Direction de l'Eglise doit faire pour éviter le tribalisme?**

Pour combattre le tribalisme, le leadership de l'Eglise doit commencer à vivre la vérité et éviter à voir derrière un individu un groupe suppose majoritaire, minoritaire ou étranger.

### **9. Je suis en train d'explorer le concept indigène de *Mang-Djala* comme étant un facteur unificateur qui pourrait être appliqué dans l'Eglise. Que connaissez-vous de ce concept ?**

C'est un concept qui vise à éradiquer ou à faire taire les conflits ethniques ou les guerres tribales. C'est un concept qui mérite une attention particulière parce qu'en le vivant, on ne considère pas l'autre comme autrui, mais le prochain est celui qui fait partie de ma vie, c'est quelqu'un que je dois accueillir et embrasser sans réserve parce qu'avec son *Mang-Djala* on ne craint rien. On peut jouer en ayant une lance ou un couteau en main sans crainte.

### **10. Quelle est l'origine du concept *Mang-Djala* selon votre histoire ?**

Par le passé, les peuples voisins se combattaient, se tuaient et se méfiaient les uns des autres. L'invention du concept a constitué un pilier d'unité, de rencontre et de réconciliation. Pour moi le *Mang-Djala* est le fait de tuer un mal à la racine ; c'est-à-dire de bannir ce qui peut porter préjudice à la vie humaine. Moi je crois que ceux qui ont été à l'origine de ce concept ont reçu une inspiration divine parce que ce concept a permis de bannir les guerres inter-villages, intertribales et favoriser l'acceptation de l'autre. C'est beaucoup plus une question d'humanisme prise sous une autre forme.

### **11. Quels sont les circonstances durant lesquels le *Mang-Djala* peut être applicable**

Le *Mang-Djala* est appliqué lors des circonstances tels que les deuils, les guerres, les conflits. En fait lors de ces circonstances, le *Mang-Djala* vient banaliser une situation très tendue, douloureuse, ou une situation qui pouvait diviser les peuples. C'est un concept qui n'est pas seulement pour l'unité, mais qui apporte une considération à la vie humaine. Pour le cas du deuil, le *Mang-Djala* joue un rôle thérapeutique. Souvent les *Mang-Djala* viennent imiter la personne décédée en essayant de s'habiller comme elle, imiter ses gestes. Et pendant ce temps au lieu de pleurer les gens commencent à rire et se libèrent en oubliant leur douleur. Ce qui constitue une guérison psychologique et morale.

### **12. Quel est le côté négatif du *Mang-Djala*?**

Le côté négatif du concept c'est l'inconsidération parfois de la réalité. Par exemple, il y a une situation qui doit être traitée à fond parce que c'est un mal, mais au nom du *Mang-Djala*, on passe l'éponge dessus. Ça veut dire qu'on refuse de punir un mal au nom du *Mang-Djala*. Et en le faisant, on n'aide pas celui qui a commis la faute en ce qu'il ne va pas s'amender et répéter la même bêtise avec une autre personne qui pourrait ne pas être son *Mang-Djala*. Et là il va subir de lourdes conséquences. Hors si la personne avait été punie lorsqu'elle avait posé cet acte contre son *Mang-Djala*, cela lui aurait épargné de connaître le sort subi la deuxième fois.

### **13. Comment ce concept peut-il s'étendre dans d'autres domaines tels que l'Eglise où il existe désunion entre les groupes ethniques ?**

Dans l'Eglise, Christ est notre paix et si par transposition on peut dire que Christ est notre *Mang-Djala*, on ne se retrouverait pas en train de se battre. Christ devient le *Mang-Djala* qui



unit toutes les tribus de l'Eglise contre les considérations égoïstes et ethniques. Aussi le signe visible du *Mang-Djala*, c'est qu'il faut s'asseoir et manger ensemble dans le même plat. Ne peut-on pas faire un rapprochement avec la sainte-cène ? Nous aurons ainsi un pré-acquis pour comprendre l'œuvre du Christ qui vient unir son Eglise. Nous savons par exemple que Noël n'était pas une fête Chrétienne. Donc Dieu prend ce qui est païen, le sanctifie et s'en approprie pour le bien être de son peuple. Donc si le *Mang-Djala* a un contenu porteur de lumière sur la vie, sur la considération de la vie humaine, on peut à la lumière de l'Evangile le transposer dans la pratique de l'Eglise. Cette racine païenne peut nous aider à vivre notre foi Chrétienne.

#### **14. Comment les Chrétiens peuvent-ils continuer à maintenir cette pratique?**

Les Chrétiens doivent véhiculer ce concept aux générations futures, mais à la lumière de l'Evangile.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

## **Interview avec Rev. Michel Doko le 06 Mai 2011 à Ngaoubéla par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

### **Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

#### **1. Quels sont les groupes ethniques qui sont membres de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun ?**

Il est difficile de dire avec précision les groupes ethniques qui constituent les membres de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun en ce jour. On sait que le Cameroun a plus de 250 groupes ethniques. Ce qui veut dire que les membres de l'Eglise pourraient être constitués d'autant de groupes ethniques rencontrés dans le pays.

#### **2. Que pensez-vous du tribalisme dans la société Camerounaise?**

Par tribalisme, un groupe tribal tente de se valoriser au détriment des autres groupes. Et comme nous le savons tous, le tribalisme existe bel et bien au Cameroun. Le tribalisme consiste au rejet des allogènes par les autochtones, et il devient grave lorsque les allogènes prospèrent parmi les autochtones. Et c'est ainsi que nous le retrouvons même au sein de l'Eglise.

#### **3. Quels effets le tribalisme a-t-il apporte au sein de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun ?**

Les effets que le tribalisme apporte dans l'Eglise sont les frustrations qui à terme produisent ces conflits que nous traversons en ce moment.

#### **4. Qu'est qui a apporté ce tribalisme dans l'Eglise?**

Ce qui provoque le tribalisme, c'est le mauvais partage « du gâteau » ; surtout quand on sait que ceux qui ont commencé avec l'Eglise sont là et que ceux qui sont venus se greffer deviennent les gros bénéficiaires du fruit de l'Eglise. Alors comme on a l'habitude de le dire

dans un langage populaire, pourquoi est-ce que ceux qui sont venus « hier hier » viennent bénéficier ou marginaliser les premiers. C'est ce qui est à l'origine du tribalisme dans l'Eglise.

**5. Comment est-ce que l'Eglise a votre avis peut faire face à ce tribalisme ?**

Pour éradiquer le tribalisme, l'Eglise doit se fonder sur l'Evangile, et rien d'autre.

**6. Quel est votre opinion sur l'influence des deux missions (ELCA, NMS) sur la question du tribalisme dans l'Eglise ?**

Là, j'ai une réponse à double volet ; c'est-à-dire oui et non. Oui parce que lorsque Gunderson est arrivé au Cameroun en 1923, il a seulement choisi un peuple. Or il pouvait étendre son champ d'évangélisation jusqu'à Bertoua où vivent les pygmées, les Ewondo, les Etong, Mais il a seulement choisi une tribu. Comme conséquence, cela a contribué au développement du tribalisme.

De l'autre côté, la NMS a construit ses stations missionnaires seulement parmi certains peuples. Et donc elle a aussi contribué au développement du tribalisme.

Mais aussi non dans le sens où les deux missions ont fusionné pour former une Eglise. C'est dire qu'elles n'avaient aucune intention de nous diviser.

**7. Je suis en train d'explorer le concept indigène de *Mang-Djala* comme étant un facteur unificateur qui pourrait être appliqué dans l'Eglise. Que connaissez-vous de ce concept ?**

Je sais que nous les Gbaya nous avons pour *Mang-Djala* les Laka et les Dii. Avec les Laka il nous a été rapporté que lors des migrations un de nos ancêtres a pris une femme Laka et nous sommes devenus des oncles. Donc avec les Laka nous ne voyons pas le côté tribal, mais plutôt le *Mang-Djala* qui nous lie.

Par ailleurs les Dii eux nous ont fourni les flèches et les lances et nous les appelons aussi oncle. Il faut dire que ce lien nous fait oublier nos différences, mais surtout le côté tribal. Dans l'Eglise avec ces deux ethnies, nous sommes comme une famille.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

**Interview sur le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec sa Majesté Mohamadou Mven, chef traditionnel du village Ngatti le 27 Mars 2011 par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

**1. Quelle est l'origine du *Mang-Djala* que nous pratiquons entre nos groupes ethniques ?**

En ce qui concerne le concept du *Mang-Djala*, les Tikar dans leur mouvement de migration ont rencontré la résistance des Vouté dans la région de Tibati, avec qui ils ont combattu. Le combat a duré quelques années sans avoir de vainqueur. C'est ainsi que les chefs de guerre des deux camps se sont retrouvés pour dire que le combat était assez et qu'il fallait bien qu'ils trouvent un consensus pour y mettre un terme. Le consensus a donc abouti au pacte dit *Mang-Djala*.

Dans le pacte *Mang-Djala*, on a fait un sacrifice humain et les guerriers de chaque camp ont traversé le corps sept fois. Ensuite le corps a été divisé en deux et chaque camp a pris une partie pour aller enterrer. Désormais entre Tikar et Vouté, personne ne doit plus jamais créer un problème à l'autre. Ils sont devenus des frères.

Nous avons aussi un *Mang-Djala* avec les Mbum, mais celui-là n'a pas fait l'objet d'un sacrifice particulier.

**2. Comment le *Mang-Djala* s'opère-t-il dans le maintien de la paix et la réconciliation parmi ses membres?**

En fait dans le *Mang-Djala*, les membres vivent comme des frères et sœurs. Personne ne doit créer de problème à l'autre.

**3. Quelles mesures ont été prises pour préserver le concept de *Mang-Djala* pour les générations futures?**

Depuis plusieurs décennies, les liens entre les Mbum et les Tikar n'existaient plus. Et en 2001, j'ai été commissionné par le chef supérieur de Bankim à Nganhah pour renouveler ces

relations avec sa majesté Saliou Saoumboum. Par la suite, il y a eu une grande délégation Tikar de Bankim qui s'est déplacée à Nganhah ayant à sa tête sa majesté Ibrahim pour renouer avec cette tradition qui nous a fait tant de bien par le passé.

Nous sommes aussi en train de nous préparer avec les Vouté pour une telle rencontre, afin de renouer avec ces relations.

Tous les vieux sont en train de mourir et nous voyons aussi que cette pratique est en train de disparaître. Et si rien n'est fait ce sera une très grande perte.

#### **4. Quelles sont les manifestations du *Mang-Djala* ?**

Le *Mang-Djala* est une contribution de part et d'autre, où les gens mènent une vie d'interdépendance. Ce qui se passe lors des deuils est un rappel de notre passé guerrier.

#### **5. Comment les différentes catégories de personne ou alors, (hommes, femmes et enfants) sont-ils impliqués dans le *Mang-Djala*?**

La pratique du *Mang-Djala* implique les gens de tout âge et de tout sexe

#### **6. Quel est le côté négatif du *Mang-Djala*?**

Moi je ne vois pas le côté négatif du *Mang-Djala*.

#### **7. Comment le *Mang-Djala* est-il appliqué aujourd'hui ?**

Lors de certains événements, on peut voir le *Mang-Djala* agir. Par exemple, lors de mon intronisation en 2002 à Ngatti comme *Mven Ngatti* c'est-à-dire premier ministre du chef supérieur de Bankim, j'avais un camarade Vouté, donc mon *Mang-Djala*, du nom de Joseph. Juste avant que je ne sorte pour la cérémonie d'intronisation, il est allé avec un autre Vouté occuper mon tabouret sacré. Il disait à la foule réunie : « voici le vrai chef de Ngatti assis sur le trône. Celui qui est là-dedans n'est qu'un faux chef. C'est à moi que vous devez faire des cadeaux ». Et lorsque je sortais du palais un de mes doungourou est allé le 'chasser' du tabouret sacré. Ceci est un genre de vie qui est propre au *Mang-Djala*, et c'est comme cela que ça se passe ordinairement entre les *Mang-Djala*.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

## **Interview M. Andre Hohi le 26 Janvier 2012 à Ngaoundéré par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

### **Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

#### **1. Quelle est votre compréhension du *Mang-Djala* dans votre ethnie ?**

Le *Mang-Djala* est une forme d'expression quotidienne de la vie d'interdépendance entre les membres qui le constituent. C'est une vie de contact. C'est-à-dire que vous ne pouvez jamais passer sachant que tel est votre *Mang-Djala* et vous le traversez comme si vous ne le connaissiez pas. Si vous le faite malheureusement cette personne va vous interpellé et lorsque vous revenez pour le saluer, elle va vous demander de vous mettre à genou avant de le saluer pour votre insolence à son endroit, juste pour créer un climat de bon humeur.

#### **2. Quels sont les circonstances durant lesquels le *Mang-Djala* peut être applicable**

De nos jours, c'est surtout lors des deuils que nous voyons les *Mang-Djala* très actifs. Ça veut dire que lorsqu'il y a un cas de décès, les partenaires *Mang-Djala*, lorsqu'ils arrivent pour assister, vont créer une situation qui va sembler un peu bizarre pour un étranger. Ils vont par exemple dire que ce mort là vous ne l'avez pas habillé comme il le mérite. Trouvez lui des bon habits, ou alors vous n'irez pas l'enterrer. La famille sera donc obligée d'aller chercher des bons habits pour venir lui mettre.

Au moment de l'enterrement, un des partenaires *Mang-Djala* va descendre dans le tombeau et exiger que le corps soit libérer avant qu'il ne sorte pour laisser place à l'enterrement. Il va se faire supplier, et par cette même occasion, la famille va cotiser un peu d'argent pour lui remettre.

Cet argent va servir à acheter le repas et la boisson et autre chose. Pendant qu'on est à la place du deuil, les *Mang-Djala* vont venir avec un grand défilé, portant la nourriture pour venir pleurer le deuil de leur confrère. Il faut dire que cet argent qu'ils prennent, ils vont cotiser à leur niveau parfois le double ou le triple pour faire un repas bien consistant. Si c'est

par exemple les Mundang qui viennent au deuil d'un Mbum, Ils vont préparer un met spécial de haricot blanc qui est une nourriture favori du peuple Mundang pour signifier la présence des *Mang-Djala* Mundang.

### **3. Quelle capacité d'influence ce concept a-t-il lors de ces circonstances?**

C'est lors de ces occasions que ceux qui sont dans le deuil sentent qu'ils ne sont pas seuls, mais qu'ils sont membres d'une communauté au sein de laquelle ils occupent place de choix.

### **4. Quels sont les bénéfices du *Mang-Djala*?**

Le *Mang-Djala* intervient déjà lorsqu'il y a un quelconque conflit. Surtout parmi nos jeunes qui par ignorance peuvent se tacler en route. Et là les vieux les interpellent pour leur dire : écoutez, vous êtes des *Mang-Djala*. Nos aïeux avaient déjà beaucoup lutté dans le temps et sont parvenus à un accord de paix. Donc pour vous la bagarre est interdite. Par ailleurs ils sont comme des frères.

Aujourd'hui les Chrétiens pensent que la parole de Dieu a déjà pris la place de cette pratique pour nous ramener cette paix que nous avons tant cherchée par le passé. Mais maintenant quand il y a des troubles de ce genre, rappelons-nous de la manière dont on s'était pardonné par le passé.

### **5. Comment le *Mang-Djala* affecte-t-il les différentes catégories de personne (hommes, femmes et enfants) ?**

Le *Mang-Djala* ne fait pas distinction. Les femmes, les hommes et les enfants sont traités au même pied d'égalité. Par exemple lorsque je vois un petit Mundang passer, je l'appelle et je lui dis : va dire à ton papa que un monsieur nommé Hohi lui dit « *mouf* » (une sorte d'injure). Il va d'abord rire ; et lorsqu'il va dire à son papa ce que je lui ai dit, son papa va lui dire : prochainement s'il te dit « *mouf* », dis-lui aussi « *mouf* ». Et ainsi l'enfant saura que c'est une forme d'intimité qui l'unit au vieux qui l'avait envoyé dire « *mouf* » à son père.

### **6. Quel est le côté négatif du *Mang-Djala*?**

Je ne vois pas le côté négatif du *Mang-Djala*

### **7. Comment ce concept peut-il s'étendre dans d'autres domaines tels que l'Eglise où il existe désunion entre les groupes ethniques ?**

Moi je pense que déjà au sein de l'Eglise le *Mang-Djala* se pratique, bien que de façon informelle. Moi je remercie certains pasteurs qui lors des enterrements permettent aux *Mang-Djala* de faire leur jeu de *Mang-Djala* pour amuser le public avant les cérémonies religieuses. Donc moi je pense qu'au niveau de l'Eglise cela se pratique déjà. Il faut peut-être penser le formaliser et le rendre officiel. C'est-à-dire qu'on intègre l'intervention des *Mang-Djala* dans le programme funèbre. Tous ces jeux se passent uniquement au domicile du défunt ou au cimetière, mais pas à l'Eglise par respect pour le lieu de culte.

#### **8. Comment les Chrétiens peuvent-ils continuer a maintenir cette pratique?**

Comme je l'ai dit plus haut, les Chrétiens pratiquent déjà le *Mang-Djala*. Il reste que l'Eglise les y encourage.

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.



**Discussion avec les groupes ethniques cibles (Mbum, Pere, Chamba) sur le concept du *Mang-Djala* le 27 Janvier 2012 à Ngaoundéré par Paul Déouyo**

Je suis Rev. Paul Déouyo. Je suis étudiant en doctorat à l'université du KwaZulu-Natal en Afrique du sud. Je conduis des recherches sur le theme:

**Le concept du *Mang-Djala* avec référence à l'unité de l'Eglise dans un contexte de diversité ethnique: le cas de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne au Cameroun (EELC)**

L'objectif est de trouver une valeur traditionnelle telle que le concept indigène du *Mang-Djala* qui peut aider a resoudre la question de l'ethnicité au sein de l'Eglise.

Mais déjà, merci d'avoir accepté de repondre a mes questions.

**1. Quelle est votre compréhension du *Mang-Djala*?**

Pour moi, le *Mang-Djala* est une sorte de relation que les parents ont cultive entre deux ethnies. Ceci nous amène à nous découvrir, et nous nous amusons entre nous. Et on est prêt aussi à nous secourir parce qu'on ne peut pas voir son *Mang-Djala* entrain de souffrir et on ne lui vient pas en aide. C'est le fait de vivre ensemble, manger ensemble et s'amuser ensemble. C'est ce que j'ai retenu avoir vu mes parents faire. C'est une forme de vie communautaire bien organisée. (Hamadou Baba – Pere).

Voici l'origine du *Mang-Djala* chez nous les Chamba. L'histoire du *Mang-Djala* entre Chamba et Péré remonte aux origines de l'humanité. Tout est parti des liens du mariage. Les mariages interethniques entre Chamba et Péré ont abouti à la naissance des neveux et des nièces. Et c'est de ceux-ci qu'est venue la notion du *Mang-Djala* qui est une relation de bon voisinage et de cohabitation. (Yadji Mathias – Chamba).

Il est difficile de dire avec exactitude l'origine du *Mang-Djala*. Mais vraisemblablement, les mariages interethniques aurait contribué à son élaboration puisqu'à l'époque de nos ancêtres, les frontières entre les peuples étaient parfois des petits cours d'eau, ou des collines ; ce qui favorisaient les mariages interethniques. Et pour ces peuples, il fallait bien trouver un système de cohabitation pacifique. Mais il faut aussi dire les guerres tribales, et le désir de sceller une paix durable entre ces tribus voisines ont amené ces peuples à initier cette alliance qui est une alliance de paix. (Hohi Andre – Mbum).

Moi j'ai grandi au village et ce que je sais c'est que lorsqu'il n'y a pas de *Mang-Djala* il n'y a pas la vie. Et d'après ce que mon papa m'a dit, nous avons pour *Mang-Djala* les Chamba et

les Mbum. Avec les Mbum parce qu'ils ont construit leurs huttes de façon hermétiques, sans porte ; et ne pouvant entrer à l'intérieur, ils ont dormi à l'extérieur de ces cases et ce sont les Péré qui leur ont montré comment créer les portes. Avec les Chamba parce que nous avons eu à faire la guerre et sommes parvenus à une réconciliation. Et ce qui est bien c'est qu'il n'y a que votre *Mang-Djala* pour vous dire la vérité parce un *Mang-Djala* n'a jamais peur de dire la vérité ou quoi que ce soit à son partenaire aussi longtemps que cela est pour son bien-être. (Bakari – Péré)

## **2. Qu'est ce qui a apporté le *Mang-Djala*?**

Le *Mang-Djala* est né de la volonté commune des peuples voisins d'éviter des hostilités et des guerres en adoptant un style de vie commune, pouvant favoriser la cohabitation pacifique. Ce qui leur permettait d'organiser des travaux champêtres communautaires. Il était question de se mettre ensemble, unir les énergies dans les travaux de champ, afin d'avoir des bonnes récoltes. Et ces travaux étaient organisés de façon à couvrir toutes les surfaces cultivées de ceux qui étaient liés par le *Mang-Djala*. (Hohi andre – Mbum)

## **3. Qu'est ce qui rend le *Mang-Djala* utile dans votre vie quotidienne?**

Les circonstances durant lesquelles on sent le *Mang-Djala* agir sont multiples. En principe, le *Mang-Djala* intervient dans le vécu quotidien de ses membres. Donc pour moi, le *Mang-Djala* c'est le fait vivre ensemble. Par exemple ici à Ngaoundéré, nous vivons dans de très bons termes avec nos *Mang-Djala*. Que ce soit pendant les temps de peine ou de joie, nous sommes toujours ensemble, nous travaillons ensemble. C'est une vie en communauté que nous menons avec nos *Mang-Djala* ici à Ngaoundéré. (Mme Atta Esther – Chamba).

Je dois ajouter pour dire qu'en cas de deuil d'un de nos *Mang-Djala*, lorsque nous nous y rendons, personne et rien ne peut nous empêcher de faire des blagues. Parfois nous ligotons la dépouille pour dire que si nous ne sommes pas payés, nous n'allons pas libérer le corps pour l'enterrement. La famille est donc obligée de cotiser une somme d'argent pour donner aux *Mang-Djala*. Avec cette somme d'argent, nous repartons, et organisons à notre niveau une collecte spéciale. Parfois nous obtenons des sommes importantes que nous ajoutons sur ce qui nous est remis. Avec cet argent, nous préparons de la nourriture et achetons du vin et de la bière que nous portons pour remettre à la famille endeuillée. (Mme Salatou Elisabeth – Père). Je voudrai confirmer ce qu'elle vient de dire. Il me souvient que lorsque M. Baba qui travaillait à la radio Sawtu-Linjiila était décédé, j'ai acheté différentes sorte de légumes que j'ai apporté, et je blaguais disant que ce jour-là j'allais bouillir son crane avec une des

espèces de légumes, puis le prochain jour les jambes et ainsi de suite ... (rires). Mais le jour des funérailles, nous nous sommes préparés comme au village pour apporter de la consolation à nos *Mang-Djala* endeuillés. Nous avons même préparé de la bière indigène pour nous rappeler de l'histoire qui nous unit, parce que c'est ainsi que ça se passait d'après la tradition. (Mme Innoua Anne – Pere). Parfois on allume le feu à côté du cadavre pour dire qu'il sent froid et qu'il a besoin de se réchauffer. C'est une manière de minimiser l'impact du choc que certains membres de la famille peuvent subir, en ramenant un peu de joie. (Hamadou Baba – Péré). Dans les cas de deuil, aussi longtemps que les *Mang-Djala* n'arrivent pas les larmes ne sèchent pas des yeux parce que ce sont les *Mang-Djala* qui apaisent la douleur du cœur (Mme Atta Esther – Chamba).

Pour moi le *Mang-Djala* est une très bonne chose, parce que là où il y a de la tristesse, une fois que le *Mang-Djala* apparaît il restaure la joie et la gaieté. Même dans le cas du deuil, les gens par moment oublient qu'ils sont en deuil à cause du *Mang-Djala*. Et là où il y a de la joie, cette joie prend une plus grande ampleur. Il faut aussi dire que dans les cas de conflit, lorsqu'un des partenaires apparaît alors que les esprits sont surchauffés, il s'en prend à tout le monde, engueule tout le monde, traite tout le monde d'insensé et de non civilisé, parce que la bagarre, dira-il est faite pour les animaux. Ainsi il parvient à apaiser les colères et à restaurer le calme avant de commencer le processus de réconciliation entre les personnes en conflit (Mme Atta Esther – Chamba).

Aussi les *Mang-Djala* agissent pour défendre leur allies en cas d'attaque par une autre personne. Dans l'histoire du *Mang-Djala* entre nous et les Péré nos grands parents nous ont raconté que lors d'une guerre entre les Péré et un groupe ennemi, les Chamba sont allés en renfort pour soutenir les Péré. (Mme Soumou Martine – Péré)

#### **4. Comment le *Mang-Djala* peut améliorer votre relation en dépit du fait que vous êtes Chrétiens?**

Je ne sais pas s'il faut dire que le *Mang-Djala* renforce ou améliore notre relation. Mais il faut simplement remarquer que l'histoire du *Mang-Djala* est très intéressante. Par exemple si tu es fumeur et que par mégarde tu te fais trouer l'habit avec le feu de ta cigarette, cet habit la, tu ne le porteras plus parce que si ton *Mang-Djala* le découvre il va l'arracher parce que le principe du *Mang-Djala* le stipule ainsi. Il faut toujours éviter de commettre une erreur en face de son *Mang-Djala* ou de te heurter et tomber ; auquel cas tu dois payer pour avoir commis l'erreur ou être tombe. Le *Mang-Djala* permet de créer et de maintenir le bonne humeur et unit ses membres. Ce qu'il y a de très curieux, c'est que vous n'allez voir personne

se fâcher. Plutôt ça crée une ambiance de joie et de blague parmi ces acteurs. (Hamadou Baba – Péré).

Je me rappelle lorsque j'étais toute petite, on avait l'habitude de recevoir les étrangers Péré venant du Nigeria. Un jour, alors que j'étais en train de me plaindre, ma mère m'a dit : mais ici c'est le village des Chamba, ils peuvent venir ici autant qu'ils veulent ; tu ne peux pas les en empêcher. (Mme Innoua Anne – Péré).

Evidemment le *Mang-Djala* renforce nos liens en plus du fait que nous sommes Chrétiens. Tel que ça se passe lors de certains événements tels que les deuils dont nous avons si longuement évoqués, nous souhaitons plutôt que les ministres de culte nous y encourage, en nous accordant un peu de temps durant les funérailles et ne pas nous en empêcher complètement. Peut-être avant le début de la liturgie funèbre les *Mang-Djala* peuvent intervenir parce que cela nous unit vraiment (Hohi André – Mbum).

### **5. Quelle est la participation des femmes et des enfants dans la pratique du *Mang-Djala*?**

Dans la pratique du *Mang-Djala*, on ne connaît pas une telle discrimination. Tout le monde est égal (Bakari – Péré)

### **6. Comment les jeunes sont-ils initiés dans la pratique du *Mang-Djala*?**

La transmission se fait dans la pratique. Les enfants s'initient en suivant la manière dont les membres vivent avec leur *Mang-Djala*. Moi quand j'étais jeune, j'avais l'habitude de voir mon père vivaient avec certaines personnes qu'il me disait être nos *Mang-Djala* lorsque je lui posais des questions par rapport à leur blague. Il n'existe pas une procédure formelle de transmission du *Mang-Djala* aux jeunes. (Hohi André – Mbum).

### **7. Comment le *Mang-Djala* s'opère-t-il dans le maintien de la paix et la réconciliation parmi vous?**

Le *Mang-Djala* opère dans le maintien de la paix et de la réconciliation parce que c'est difficile de voir les *Mang-Djala* se quereller ou bagarrer. (Yadji Mathias – Chamba). Le plus souvent le *Mang-Djala* joue au médiateur lorsque son partenaire est en conflit avec une autre personne qui n'est pas de leur groupe de *Mang-Djala* (Hamadou Baba – Péré).

### **8. Quels événements pouvez-vous vous rappeler où le *Mang-Djala* a été activement appliqué?**

Actuellement les événements qui nous restent, et durant lesquels on voit les *Mang-Djala* en activité ce sont les cas de deuils. (Mme Atta Esther – Chamba).

**9. Quels sont les aspects du *Mang-Djala* qui ne sont pas favorables dans la construction d'une relation saine des membres du *Mang-Djala*?**

Non il n'existe pas d'aspect défavorable dans la construction d'une relation saine des membres du *Mang-Djala*.

**10. Comment pouvons-nous promouvoir la pratique du *Mang-Djala* dans l'Eglise?**

Il faut que les Pasteurs nous aident à pratiquer le *Mang-Djala* parce qu'en réalité on n'y voit rien de mauvais. Il ne faut pas qu'ils nous empêchent. Moi je crois déjà que certains pasteurs sont ouverts au *Mang-Djala* parce qu'on le voit lors des obsèques (Mme Innoua Anne – Péré).

Merci beaucoup pour votre temps et votre contribution à ce projet.

## Appendix 4

### Ethical Clearance letter



5 July 2013

Reverend Paul Déouyo 210522770  
School of Religion & Theology  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Protocol Reference Number: HSS/1482/0100

New Project Title: The concept of Mang-Djala with reference to church unity in a context to Ethnic Diversity: The case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC)

Dear Reverend Déouyo

#### Approval and change of Project title

I wish to confirm that your application in connection with the above mentioned project has been approved.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor T Balcom  
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis  
cc School Administrator: Mrs Catherine Muzgen

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