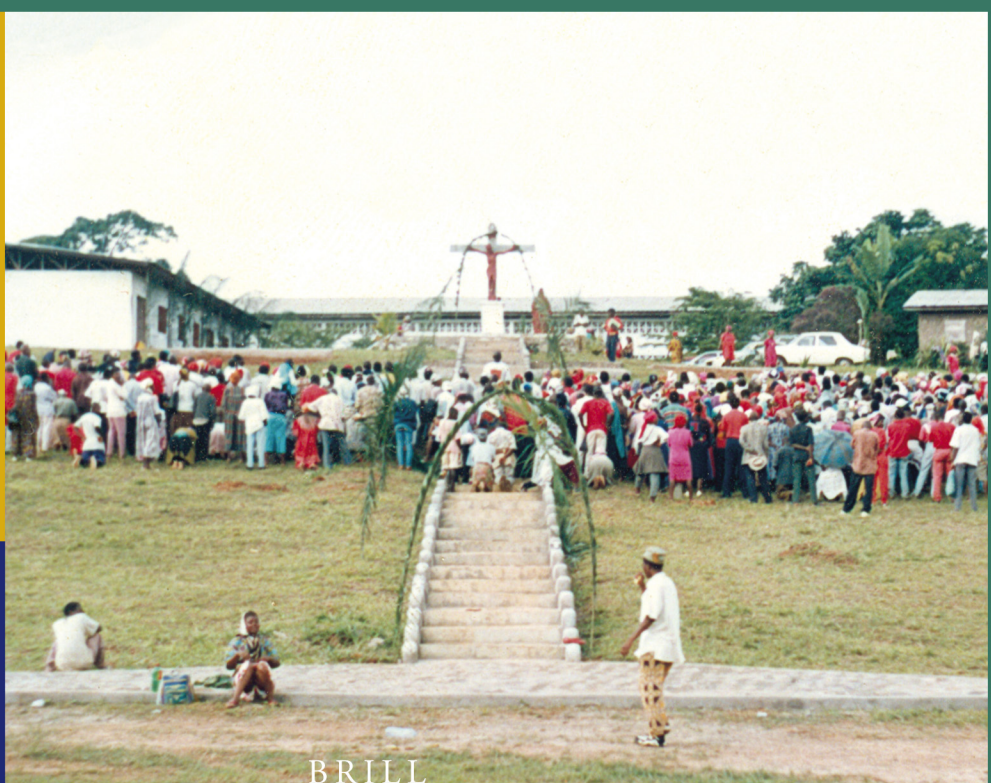
Catholic Pentecostalism and the Paradoxes of Africanization

Processes of Localization in a Catholic Charismatic Movement in Cameroon

Ludovic Lado

STUDIES OF RELIGION IN AFRICA [37]



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Studies of Religion in Africa

Supplements to the Journal of
Religion in Africa

Edited by

Paul Gifford

School of Oriental and African Studies, London

VOLUME 37

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2009

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lado, Ludovic, 1970-
Catholic Pentecostalism and the paradoxes of Africanization / by Ludovic Lado.
p. cm. -- (Studies of religion in Africa ; v. 37)
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
ISBN 978-90-04-16898-5 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Ephphata (Organization) 2. Hebga, Meinrad P. (Meinrad Pierre) 3. Pentecostalism--Cameroon. 4. Pentecostalism--Paris--France. 5. Pentecostalism--Catholic Church. I. Title. II. Series.

BX2350.57.L33 2009
282'.6711–dc22

2009000333

ISSN: 0169-9814
ISBN: 978 90 04 16898 5

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

To my beloved parents

Paul Lado & Victorine Goumtsop

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed to the making of this book in its various stages. It is a revised version of a doctoral thesis submitted to the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) of the University of Oxford. I thank the Institute for the exceptional quality of its academic environment and for the intellectual support which made my research experience fruitful and enjoyable. I am grateful to my mentor in anthropology, Prof Wendy James, for her inspiring guidance and unfailing support during my studies in Oxford.

I am most grateful to Campion Hall, the Jesuit Hall of the University of Oxford, for funding my studies. I thank all the members of the Hall with whom I shared the joys and struggles of academic life for the friendly and enriching companionship. I am grateful to the staff of the Hall for all their kind services which made it possible for me to concentrate on my research.

My gratitude also goes to the late Rev Dr Meinrad Hebga and to *Ephphata* members for their support during my fieldwork expeditions in Cameroon and in Paris. I owe special thanks to the late Rev Fr Richard Randolph and to Rev Dr Gerard J. Hughes for kindly and meticulously proofreading the manuscript at different stages of the writing process. Last, but not the least, I thank all those who in one way or another, have made the publication of this book possible.

Bafoussam, October 20, 2008.
L.L.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Researching Catholic Charismatic Christianity in Africa

Studies of new Christian movements in colonial and postcolonial Africa have mostly focused on 'African Independent Churches' (Sundkler 1948; Peel 1968; Martin 1975; Van Binsbergen 1981; Fernandez 1982; Comaroff 1985; Ranger 1986; Spear and Kimambo 1999) and independent Pentecostalism, including the new wave of Charismatic churches (Ojo 1988, Maxwell 1998; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Gifford 2004; Anderson 2004). But far less attention has been given to new religious movements within mission churches in Africa. This neglect is partly due to the fact that anthropologists have tended to view 'traditional religions' and 'African Independent Churches' as much more African (Ranger 1987: 31) than, for example, African Catholicism. Indeed in the anthropological study of Charismatic Christianity in Africa, the topic of its domestication in mission churches has been largely neglected. The most notable exceptions that I am aware of are the works of Johannes Fabian (1971), Ranger (1972), Ter Haar (1992), and Birgit Meyer (1994; 1999).

The object of Fabian's research was *Jamaa* (Kiswahili word for family), a movement founded in the late 1950s by Placid Tempels, a Belgian Franciscan missionary, among a group of miners settled near Kolwezi, an urban industrial centre in the Congo (former Zaïre) region of Katanga. Championing an earlier version of the 'Africanization' of Christianity, Tempels attempted to reformulate Christian doctrine "in terms of his discoveries of Bantu categories of thought and speech. The core of his message was the idea of the human dignity of adult and free Christians, symbolized in the concept of *Umuntu*" (Fabian 1971: 10). The movement quickly spread throughout the major cities of Congo and of neighbouring Rwanda. Fabian's study focuses on the origins, development, manipulation and impact of *Jamaa* doctrine as formulated by its Charismatic leader: "The study is written with the assumption that the master of the anomic situation is the prophetic-

charismatic leader with a vision of meaning in a world that has become meaningless" (ibid.: 3). He sees a charismatic leader as a prophet, as a 'formulator of meaning' (ibid.: 4). So, by linking "The doctrine of human dignity with the three basic aspirations of ancestors—life-force; fecundity/filiation, and union in love—Tempels also provided a sense of identity and continuity for his followers" (ibid.: 10). On the whole, Fabian argues that the emergence of a charismatic movement is a function of rapid sociocultural changes and its success depends on the ability of its leader to create new patterns of meaning for his followers.

Although, Meinrad Hebga, the founder of *Ephphata* (the movement under discussion in this book) will be portrayed as a 'formulator of meaning' in the ambiguous postcolonial situation of Cameroon, Ephphata is not 'charismatic' in the same sense as *Jamaa*. Indeed Fabian's use of the term 'charismatic' is much more Weberian than its use in the present book. The Weberian 'charismatic' is derived from 'charisma' thus defined:

> The term "charisma" will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a "leader" (Weber 1978: 241).

Such a leader is a bearer of charismatic authority as distinguished from traditional authority and from legal-rational authority. Although there is no doubt that Ephphata members believe in the charisma of its founder, Ephphata is not 'charismatic' in the Weberian sense but in the theological meaning of the term. In the latter sense, it is derived from 'charismata', gifts of the Holy Spirit, as spelled out, for example, in chapter twelve of the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians. A group in which these gifts are actively sought, as well as the member of such a group, are termed charismatic. Although the sociological meaning of the term 'charismatic' may have theological roots, it is worth distinguishing them.

Ranger (1972) gives a historical account of an attempt by Anglican missionaries to christianize local rites of initiation in Masasi (southern Tanzania) in the 1920s. The idea was to elaborate a Christian rite of initiation based on the main symbols of the local rite known as *Jando*. The initiative was promoted by the bishops in charge of the mission,

and Ranger quotes one of them as describing the resulting Christian *Jando* as follows:

> The whole ground on which the rite will take place … is blessed with litany and prayer and sprinkled with holy water, replacing the flour; the cross takes the place of the 'lupanda' tree and the invocation of the Saints of Christendom replaces the appealing to the great ones of the tribal past … As the period (of seclusion and instruction) draws to its end special efforts are made to move each boy to a true repentance for all sins and failures of the past, and on the day before the end each boy makes his confession, as he does also in the heathen rite. Heads are then shaved, new clothes brought and early in the morning of the last day all that belongs to the old life is set fire to and burnt and the boys come to the Church for the solemn Mass of Thanksgiving with a real determination to lead a new life. In the heathen rite they would be given a new name; but their new name in Christianity belongs to their baptism (Bishop Lucas Vincent quoted in Ranger 1972: 239).

Ranger further points out that the Christianisation of male initiation was more successful than that of female initiation. The experiment was "highly praised by missiologists and by British officials committed to indirect rule. It was criticised as immoral by many missionaries—and as impossible by some anthropologists" (Ranger 1972: 221). This is an interesting example of missionary adaptation promoted by a few Anglican missionaries in Africa during the colonial period. Similar examples from postcolonial African Catholicism will be critically analyzed in this book with a focus on the apparent tension between 'Pentecostalization' and 'Africanization' in relation to African cultures and religions.

Gerrie Ter Haar, who studies "the history and background of the conflict caused by Milingo's healing ministry when he was Archbishop of Lusaka" (1992: 4) locates her work within the academic discipline of the scientific study of religion. More will be said in the next chapter about the 'Milingo affair' since he was the first African Catholic bishop to involve himself publicly with Charismatic practices. Suffice it for now to note that Ter Haar's main interest is not ethnographic as such but historical. Her major aim is not to study the healing ministry of Milingo but to reconstruct "the events which constituted the Milingo affair" (ibid.: 6). In other words, Ter Haar's work on Milingo is a historical reconstruction of the "picture of conflict, or conflicts, which surrounded Milingo's healing ministry and which constitute the Milingo affair" (ibid.). Although, as we shall see, Hebga, the founder of Ephphata, has had his own share of conflicts with Church authorities because of his Charismatic practices, my focus in the present study is rather on the

ethnography of his healing ministry, its institutional framework and its ideological background.

Meyer (1999) is, as far as I know, the only major ethnographic study available on the appropriation of Pentecostalism within missionary Protestantism in Africa. It underlines the splintering effects of Pentecostalism on the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) among the Ewe in Ghana. The first splinter group, which came to be named The Lord's (Pentecostal) Church, first operated within the EPC as a Charismatic prayer group (of the name *Agbelengor*, meaning 'there is a life ahead') for some time before seceding in 1961, following conflicts with leaders of EPC and Methodist authorities. Their initial ritual apparatus and religious practice included drumming, dancing, clapping hands, fasting, tithing, speaking in tongues, removal of shoes before entering the prayer hall, taboos (exclusion of menstruating women, no sexual intercourse the night before the Sunday service), healing (prohibition of Western medicine; use of candles, oil, holy water, cross, etc. for exorcisms), etc. Meyer describes the main difference between the new prayer group and the EPC as follows:

> The use of these remedies reveals that the prayer group took evil spirits very seriously. Whereas the latter did not deal with evil spirits discursively or ritually, the prayer group offered special means by which to counter the forces of evil. This, as it turned out, was the main source of its attraction (1999: 113).

The prayer group progressively shifted from "an indigenous local, Spiritual church to a Pentecostal church, part of a national, and even international movement" (ibid.: 117). Meyer further remarks that "The rise of churches like *Agbelengor* must be seen as a protest of the lower ranks of the church hierarchy and of women against the rule-centeredness of the EPC and its neglect of the Holy Spirit" (ibid.: 120).

In the 1970s another prayer group, named Bible Study and Prayer Group (BSPG), sprang up in the same EPC and quickly developed into a Pentecostal movement of the *Agbelengor* type. In 1989, it renamed itself Bible Study and Prayer Fellowship (BSPF): "The BSPF criticized the routines of the EPC and strove for transformation from within" (ibid.: 127). But, although opposed to Pentecostal practices, EPC authorities refrained from excommunicating the BSPF for fear of losing many more of their faithful. Around the same time, the Moderator of the EPC, Professor N.K. Dzobo, was busy promoting an idea of 'African theology' encapsulated by the local concept of *Meleagbe* (meaning 'I am alive'): "In order to implant the essence of Christianity in the

African context without unnecessarily taking over typically Western features, Dzobo advocates a synthesis of Christianity and the pre-Christian Ewe religion" (ibid.: 123). The BSPF radically opposed *Meleagbe* theology in which they saw an attempt to corrupt Christianity with what they saw as heathen diabolical practices. For them, as for many Pentecostals, Ewe religion was the realm of Satan. Consequently, the two new renewal approaches, 'Pentecostalization' on the one hand and 'Africanization' on the other hand eventually clashed, resulting in the secession of the BSPF which renamed itself 'EPC of Ghana'. By contrast, we shall see in this book that Hebga, the founder of Ephphata, has managed until now to hold 'Africanization' and 'Pentecostalization' together within the Catholic Church. Although Ephphata has much in common (especially the aspects of taking the Holy Spirit and the ritual containment of the Devil or witchcraft seriously) with African Independent Churches and with African independent Pentecostalism, it is not the chief purpose of this study to compare them (as Meyer 1999 fruitfully does in a Protestant context). Instead, I have chosen to make occasional comparisons between Ephphata and similar movements in the US, the birth place of Catholic Pentecostalism, because historically, it is from the latter (and not from similar movements in Africa) that Hebga was inspired to found Ephphata in Cameroon.

The book is based on multi-sited fieldwork undertaken intermitently in Cameroon and in Paris (where the oldest branch of the movement in the West is established) between 2004 and 2006 for academic purposes. In Cameroon my material on Ephphata was gathered mainly in Yaounde (urban) and Mangen (rural) because most of the ritual activities of the movement take place in these locations. More details on these fieldwork sites are provided in related chapters. I spent comparatively far less fieldwork time in Paris and this explains why only one major chapter deals with its material. Although the fieldwork sites are not disguised, I am rather discreet about most of the biographical data on my informants (especially patients) for obvious reasons of privacy.

My main fieldwork language was French for the simple reason that French is the main ritual language in Ephphata, including in London where the prayer group is until now located in the francophone parish of the city. This means that all the direct quotes from field notes are my English translation of the French original. There are a number of reasons for the predominance of French within Ephphata. The most obvious one would be the fact that in the last sixty years French and English have become the dominant schooling languages in Cameroon following

the colonial encounter. They are indeed the official languages of post-colonial Cameroon. This means that most francophone Cameroonians below fifty are more or less fluent in colloquial French. The literacy rate in Cameroon is relatively high (about 65 % of the population).

But, besides French and English, Cameroon is one of the most multilingual countries of Africa, with about twenty-four major linguistic groups which encompass about 270 local languages. The obvious consequence of this is that in multiethnic urban centres such as Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda, etc. French and English (including Pidgin English) are the main languages of communication across ethnic barriers. In this sense, the politics of the use of French in Ephphata simply reflects the politics of the use of French in the wider society. In the urban context of Yaounde as well as in Paris and London, Ephphata is multiethnic, with only a slight predominance of membership from Hebga's ethnic group (Basaa).

This multi-ethnicity is best expressed during prayer sessions in the way the various translations of the term Ephphata are used as a device to draw people's attention. The leader of the session will say Ephphata five times and each time the assembly will respond with one of its translations in this order: French (*Ouvre-toi!*); Bassa (*Yibla!*); Ewondo (*Yaaban!*); Bamileke (*Hi tim tsu!*); English (*be opened!*). The singing is also multilingual as this is the practice in most of the multiethnic urban Catholic parishes in Cameroon. So, in Yaounde and in other major urban areas where Ephphata is established, French is the most common language used within the movement for the practical reason that it is the most shared language across ethnic barriers. Ephphata magazine, *le Paraclet*, is issued only in French; even Hebga addresses assemblies mainly in French. During major gatherings, his speeches are occasionally translated in Basaa or Ewondo (two of the major ethnic groups highly represented in Ephphata) for the sake of the elderly who cannot cope with French. Obviously, as I witnessed once, when he is visiting a group in his native area, he will address them directly in Basaa in which he is very fluent. In Paris and London, French is used within Ephphata for the simple reason that most of its members are originally French-speaking Cameroonians.

The use of French in such a multiethnic context entails multiple levels of translation, especially with regard to the description of elusive phenomena such as witchcraft beliefs and practices. For example, most of my informants will use the French term *Sorcellerie* as a blanket word to refer to a variety of witchcraft practices which cut across ethnic groups.

Only occasionally will some of them specify them in terms of their popular names *famla* (Bamileke), *evú* (Beti), *ékon* (Duala), *nson* (Basaa), *rose-croix or franc-maçonnerie* (France), etc. Where these terms appear in illness narratives quoted in the book, I usually provide a brief account of related beliefs. Most often, the use of these terms does not presuppose any systematic knowledge of the related beliefs and practices. Hebga must have been one of the first West African intellectuals to attempt a systematic account of witchcraft beliefs and practices (Hebga 1979). Since such literature is generally not accessible to the wider public for a variety of reasons, Hebga has used the Ephphata magazine, *Le Paraclet*, to popularize some of these systematic accounts.

African Catholicism has its own share of internal plurality and, indeed, one of the main points made in this study is that it is far from being a monolithic structure. I am not a member of Ephphata and in that respect I studied it as an outsider. Still both Ephphata and I are located within the Catholic Church, and, in that respect, I am an insider. About researching African religious movements, Adogame and Weissköppel write:

> An important [methodological] question is how researchers cope with their own religio-cultural orientations and identity in the course of doing fieldwork. What kind of problems, opportunities and limitations emerge either as an "insider" or an "outsider" of a religious group under investigation? What are the consequences for data production, evaluation and analysis, and not less important, for representation? (2005: 9).

Besides 'doing anthropology at home', I am a Catholic priest researching on a Catholic movement. Charlotte Davies rightly writes that "issues of reflexivity are particularly salient for ethnographic research in which the involvement of the researcher in the society and culture of those being studied is particularly close" (1999: 4). In such a situation, as Chitando puts it, "it is crucial that the researcher should always be clear of which role she or he is playing and when" (2005: 90).

In general, anthropologists working on religion or belief systems are expected to bracket their value judgments on their object of research; this has been termed methodological agnosticism or methodological atheism. But Hufford forcefully argues that impartiality in religious studies is limited because "spiritual beliefs lie at the heart of many central human questions" (1999: 297). He adds:

> That being the case, the tendency to count disbelief as the "objective" stance is a serious systematic bias that runs through most academic studies of spiritual belief. … If impartiality in belief studies cannot consist of

> having no personal beliefs, then impartiality must be a methodological stance in which one acknowledges one's personal beliefs but sets them aside for scholarly purposes. Recognizing that each of us has a personal voice, for research purposes we choose to speak instead with our scholarly voice (ibid.: 297–298).

Of course, "to be methodologically agnostic hardly means that one is personally agnostic" (McCutcheon 1999: 8). Indeed my own research experience has left me with the impression that the bracketing of one's personal beliefs can only be done to some extent. I am in a way revisiting here a debate initiated by Evans-Pritchard when he remarked in a 1959 lecture that "social anthropology has been the product of minds which, with very few exceptions, regarded all religion as outmoded superstition…" (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 44). So, "When they discussed it they tried to explain it away by some theory of psychological or sociological causation…" (ibid: 35). The difference with an anthropologist studying his own religion is that he or she would tend, even unconsciously, to resist the dominant tendency to explain it away. Still, I think that when studying and writing about "beliefs that we personally share we can do so as scholars and still gain some insight from our intimate familiarity with the tradition and what it is like to be within it—just as non-believers can gain insight from their "outsider" perspective" (Hufford 1999: 300).

The book provides an overall picture of Ephphata as a charismatic movement in postcolonial African Catholicism, but the main focus is on the agency of its founder who figures in this book at least in two capacities: first as founder and leader of a religious movement which makes him an ethnographic object of study; secondly as a scholar who happens to have studied social sciences, including anthropology, and whose writings include sound ethnography of the phenomena in which I am interested. Whereas the first seven chapters of the book deal with Hebga and Ephphata as ethnographic objects of study, the last two chapters are more a critical engagement with him as a postcolonial scholar.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM NORTH AMERICA TO CAMEROON

This chapter considers the historical background of the emergence and institutionalization of Ephphata within Cameroonian Catholicism. The roots of Ephphata can be traced back to North America, the birth place of Catholic Pentecostalism. I argue that the coming to be of Ephphata is a function of Hebga's creative agency mediated by the Catholic Church as a major player on the global scene. Mediation here first means opportunity: it is through the Catholic Church that from a small village in colonial Cameroon Hebga accessed the international scene on which he ended up consuming a North American religious product: the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. But mediation also means constraints: when Hebga finally decided to experiment with this new product in Cameroon by creating Ephphata, he was confronted with a dynamic tension between Charismatic agency and the institutional power of the local Catholic leadership. Furthermore, I briefly elaborate on the internal politics of Ephphata showing how the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church directly legitimates the asymmetric distribution of power between Hebga and his lay aides within the movement. In other words, there is also a dynamic, but potentially strained, interplay between the macro-politics of the Catholic Church as a global agent and the micro-politics of Ephphata as a local Catholic movement.

The Advent of Christianity in Southern Cameroon

Upon reaching the banks of the river Wuri in Douala, sometime back in the 16th century, Portuguese explorers were so struck by its richness in prawns that they named it 'rio dos camaroes', which means, 'river of prawns'. Indeed the name *Cameroon* is derived from *camarão*, the Portuguese word for prawn. After the Portuguese, other Western powers scrambled for the control and exploitation of the region over a period of about four centuries: the Dutch organized the slave trade on the Cameroonian coast during the 17th and 18th centuries; the

French followed in their steps in the 19th century. But following a treaty between some paramount chiefs of the coastal area of Douala and Germans in 1884, the French and the British were ousted from Cameroon. The Cameroonian historian Chem-Langhëë (1995: 17) summarizes these developments as follows:

> Before 1884, the region which later became the Protectorate of Kamerun comprised many independent indigenous polities varying in size and administrative system. Between 1884 and 1914, the Germans colonized and began to administer the region as a single polity and thus laid the groundwork for a subsequent Kamerun identity and citizenship.

But, after the defeat of the Germans in 1916, Cameroon was formally divided between the French and the British and remained under their control until the early 1960s when French Cameroon and British Cameroon reunited to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, which then became the United Republic of Cameroon in 1972 and the Republic of Cameroon since 1984. Located between the West and Central regions of Africa, the Republic of Cameroon has an area of about 183, 567 sq. miles and a population (est. 2005) of ca. 16 millions.

In Cameroon Christian missions preceded colonization. I am aware of the ambiguity of such a formulation since some critiques have forcefully argued that, structurally speaking, Christian missions were a form of colonization (Eboussi 1981; Beidelman 1982). Although they have a point, I think that it would be simplistic to collapse the difference between the two enterprises. When I speak of precedence here, I mean that Christianity reached Cameroon several decades before the latter formally came under German administration in 1884.

The first Christian missionaries to arrive in Cameroon were sent from two different Baptist missionary societies: the Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society (JBMS) which from 1841 to 1852 sent several hundred missionaries to Cameroon (Messina and van Slageren 2005: 27); and the London-based Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) of which the first missionaries to Cameroon were Joseph Merrick, of Jamaican descent, and the Englishman Alfred Saker. It is worth mentioning that most of these early missionaries were former black slaves from Jamaïca. Comparatively, this makes the Cameroonian missionary case quite peculiar in the sense that early Christianity in Cameroon was not as such 'imposed' by white missionaries but introduced by Black Jamaicans. The JBMS ended its mission in Cameroon in 1852 partly because of a hostile natural environment. The BMS continued the enterprise under the influential leadership of Alfred Saker. The mis-

sionary policy during this early period consisted mainly of learning local languages, translating the Bible and training local converts for the spread of the Gospel. Of all these early missionaries, Alfred Saker is the most famous and is still remembered today among Cameroonian Baptists as a great pioneer and a zealous humanist. In the framework of evangelization, Saker strongly opposed the slave trade (Bureau 1996: 22) and built schools which became new channels of social emancipation, especially for people from the lower rungs of the social ladder. Social promotion soon became a function of one's level of literacy and education. The new religion was thus upsetting existing social hierarchies and their means of reproduction. Of course, the school curriculum included the study of the Bible and the making of Christians. Saker departed from Cameroon in 1876 leaving behind a thriving missionary work.

Protestant Christianity was therefore well established among the Duala before the colonial period of the history of Cameroon was initiated by the Germans in 1884. At the conference of Berlin in 1885, Cameroon was formally placed under the protection of Germany. The arrival of Germans obliged British Protestant missionaries to review their mode of presence in Cameroon:

> The German authorities threatened, as any other power would have, to banish all foreigners—missionaries and traders—if they sided in any way with those hostile to German authorities. Missionary residences began to be screened and some mission stations were destroyed, while loaded pistols and rifles were pointed at some missionaries by German soldiers …This attitude began to encourage the feeling among BMS circles that their days in Cameroon were numbered (Verkijika 1989: 81).

Indeed, the BMS soon ended its presence in Cameroon and handed over its stations to Swiss and German missionaries in 1888. The few native pastors and elders were not happy with this new arrangement and refused to work under the newcomers. They parted ways with the Germans and went on to found their own Baptist churches and to conduct parallel missionary activities. One of the earliest was the *Native Baptist Church* started by one of the first indigenous Baptist pastors in the early 1890s. Many other native Protestant churches were to emerge alongside German, Swiss, American, and French missions. Progressively Protestantism spread from the coast to the interior of southern Cameroon. Today, Cameroonian Protestantism is as diverse as anywhere else in Africa, with its own share of African Independent Churches and the new Charismatic churches, a number of which have

been imported from neighboring Nigeria and from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The German Pallotines (*societas apostolatus catholici*) were the first Catholic missionaries to arrive in Cameroon in 1890 following the German occupation in 1888. The German colonial administration expected Christian missionaries to participate in their colonial project, since for Bismark Christianization meant nothing else than civilization, the popularization of German culture (Messina and Slaggeren 2005: 137–138; Cf. also Ngongo 1982). The Pallotines settled in a village on the banks of the river Sanaga that they renamed Marienberg. From there, they evangelized other areas of Cameroon including the neighboring Edea where a station was established as early as 1891, 37 years before the birth of Hebga, the founder of the movement studied in this book. The Pallotines began work in Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon, in 1901. Their missionary policy included the creation of schools, the formation of native catechists, and the translation of the Bible, catechisms and prayer books from German into local languages. The Pallotines evangelized Cameroon until 1916 when they were forced to depart following the ousting of Germany from Cameroon by France and England. They were then replaced by English and French missionaries whose societies are still active in Cameroon today, with many of them having opened themselves to local vocations. This sketch shows how the European macro-politics conditioned missionary activity in Cameroon at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century. The Catholic Church in Cameroon today has a membership of about four million people, roughly 25 % of the total population. It is divided into 23 dioceses which are now almost all headed by Cameroonian bishops, an indication of the predominance of the local clergy. Its growth is steady and it is now one of the main social actors in Cameroon, especially in the areas of education and health care.

Concerning the particular issue of healing, which is a major theme in this book, it has been shown that, almost everywhere in Africa, early missionaries in collaboration with colonial establishments sought to replace African traditional systems of healing with Western ones. Cameroon was no exception. Their approach was predominantly ethnocentric (Messina et Slageren 2005: 146). Although much has been done to 'indigenize' the Catholic liturgy (especially music and vestments) in Africa since the end of Vatican II in 1965, the Catholic Church has not changed its overall negative attitudes towards what remains of African traditional healing rituals. But neither Catholic sacraments nor Western

medicine have been able to fill the ritual void created by the displacement of local rituals (Bureau 1996: 40). Today in Africa, the Catholic clergy is still faced with the challenge of containing complaints and accusations of witchcraft among the faithful. Among African Catholics, believers in the existence and action of witchcraft still outnumber skeptics. As Godfrey Lienhardt (1964: 123) rightly put it,

> The effects attributed to witchcraft or sorcery—sickness, misfortune, death—are as real to believers in witchcraft as to sceptics. The "effects" in themselves raise no anthropological problem. But the causes to which such effects are attributed, and the form of argument by which they are identified as results of witchcraft, do create a problem of interpretation for those who deny the validity of witchcraft belief.

Attempts by the sceptics to translate disabling phenomena, traditionally explained in terms of witchcraft or spirit possession, into the language of psychopathology are still very marginal. For example, Eric de Rosny (2001), a French Catholic missionary who has done extensive research on traditional healing in Cameroon, remarks that in the year 2000 there were only two psychotherapists in the whole urban area of Douala for a population of about one and a half million.

In the face of this ritual void, a potential source of existential insecurity, many Christian converts have developed ways of adapting to the new situation. Their loyalty is often shared between the three dominant systems of reference (traditional, Christian and modern). These different resources are looked at as complementary: after all, what generally matters to people is to have their health restored. In other words, although many Cameroonians have happily embraced Christianity, a number of the converts are not yet ready to give up completely their religious traditions (Bureau 1996: 44). Similar situations of multiple religious loyalties have been observed elsewhere in Africa (Hutchinson 1996: 325; James 1999: 247; Zeitlyn 1994: 15). This selective recourse to tradition, a clandestine subversion of official Catholicism, has gradually forced the Catholic clergy to review its methods of evangelization and to seek ways of initiating a 'dialogue' between African traditions and Christian traditions. I will revisit this issue in chapter seven which discusses attempts to Africanize Catholicism.

It is roughly estimated that 40 % of Cameroonians are Christians, 20 % Muslims, 35 % adepts of indigenous religions, and 5 % followers of other religions. Obviously, as we shall see, given the fluidity of boundaries between these religious groups, the reality of religious belonging and practice in Cameroon is much more complex than these

clear cut statistical figures tend to suggest. Cameroonian Christianity is today as plural as anywhere else in Africa. Although missionary churches, both Catholic and Protestant, are still dominant, they are now facing a fierce competition from recent waves of Charismatic (or neo-Pentecostal) churches. The latter have much in common with the Catholic Charismatic movement that I am exploring in this book.

North American Roots of Pentecostalism

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement has Pentecostal roots. It is the result of the recent influence of neo-Pentecostalism on Catholicism (O'Connor 1971: 23–27; Laurentin 1974; McGuire 1982: 4–5; Csordas 1997: 4; Ugeux 2002: 28). The term 'Pentecostalism' obviously echoes the New Testament event of Pentecost during which the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit promised them by their master Jesus before his ascension to heaven (Acts 2, 1–4). The account underlines the transformative and the empowering effects of Holy Spirit on the disciples. Pentecostalism is a blanket word for thousands of autonomous Christian denominations who all trace their roots back to a revival movement which started in North America in the early years of the 20th century. Most historians of classical Pentecostalism agree that the pioneers of this movement are undoubtedly the Caucasian American Charles Parham (1873–1929) and the African American William Joseph Seymour (1870–1922) who had both been influenced by the 19th century American Holiness movement which emerged from the Wesleyan tradition. Charles Parham was the first to suggest that the normative proof (or initial evidence) of the baptism of the spirit is the speaking in tongues, a doctrine now fundamental to most Pentecostal denominations. Influenced by Parham's doctrine Seymour began to experiment with it from 1906 in a Church (Azuza Street Mission) in Los Angeles from where what is known today as Pentecostalism spread to the world. Because of the enduring legacy of Seymour, Hollenweger (1997: 4) acknowledges the 'black root' of Pentecostalism as follows:

> The most important root of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements is a revival in a Black church on Azuza Street in Los Angeles under the leadership of the Black ecumenist W.J. Seymour… Behavior there was sometimes very enthusiastic, sometimes also with physical phenomena like weeping, speaking in tongues, falling about, vision and so on. The journalists of the time described these 'crazy niggers' in sensational

> reports, since they did not know what had really happened. … For the first time in the history of the USA, White church leaders (sometimes from the racist South) were ready to have hands laid on them in a community led by Blacks in order to achieve spiritual breakthrough.

In less than a century Pentecostalism has become a global phenomenon. It is described by David Martin (2002: 1) as "The most dramatic development of Christianity in the century recently concluded" and "the most widespread form of non-Roman Catholic Christianity". It is also by far the fastest growing Christian movement worldwide, especially in Third World countries (Dempster et Al. 1999). Although "Doctrinally, Pentecostalism is not a consistent whole" (Hollenweger 1977: 18), all Pentecostal denominations adhere to the centrality of the 'baptism of the Spirit' as an *empowering experience* following conversion. Also, of all the gifts of the Spirit (also known as charisms) listed in the New Testament (1 Cor 12, 4–11), they all tend to emphasize 'speaking in tongues' and 'healing'.

From the end of the 1950s, elements of the Pentecostal experience, especially the baptism of the Spirit (with the speaking in tongues) by the laying on of hands, began to rip through mainline churches leading to the establishment of Charismatic groups (Charismatic Renewal) within them. This phase of the Pentecostal revival is described today as 'neo-Pentecostalism'. On the beginnings of Catholic Pentecostalism, Csordas (1997: 4) writes:

> The year commonly accepted as the beginning of the movement is 1967. During a retreat at Duquesne University (the "Duquesne Weekend"), a group of students and young faculty members experienced the spiritual awakening of Baptism in the Holy Spirit through the influence of Protestant Pentecostals. They soon shared their experience with like-minded students at Notre Dame and Michigan State universities. … The new "Catholic Pentecostals" claimed to offer a unique spiritual experience to individuals and promised a dramatic renewal of Church life based on a born-again spirituality of "personal relationship" with Jesus and direct access to divine power and inspiration through a variety of "spiritual gifts," or "charisms."

In the early years of Catholic Pentecostalism, prayer groups which emerged from the movement relied on the help of classical Pentecostals. This collaboration was in itself a novelty from the grassroots for "By and large, the Pentecostal churches had been deeply hostile to Catholicism, which in their eyes was the epitome of that formalism and organization which suffocate the Spirit. … On the other hand, most Catholics either had not taken Pentecostals seriously, or had recoiled from the

emotionalism and fanaticism associated with them" (O'Connor 1971: 27). The fast-spreading newly born lay movement took the authorities of the Catholic Church by surprise and many of them were simply at a loss as to how to respond. But on the whole, the Catholic hierarchy has been 'cautiously supportive' of the movement, "urging participants to continue 'renewing' Church life while warning them against theological and behavioural 'excess'" (Csordas 1997:7). Although, Catholic Pentecostalism began from the early 1970s to attract a number of priests, nuns and bishops, it has remained predominantly a lay movement with lay leadership. At the beginning, Catholic Charismatic prayer groups and communities encouraged ecumenical membership. But with the passage of time this inter-denominational dimension has been progressively stifled by its monitored domestication within the Catholic Church.

Faces of African Pentecostalism

The worldwide spread of Pentecostalism has in its own way contributed to the insertion of Africa into the networks of religious globalization. Here I distinguish four main variants of African Pentecostalism: African Independent Churches with Pentecostal features (also called spiritual churches), the classic Pentecostal churches (dependent or independent), the neo-Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic movements within Catholic or Protestant churches.

African Independent Churches with Pentecostal features are the oldest variant on the continent. Its earliest establishments are in South Africa, where the missionary activity of the American Pentecostalist John G. Lake from 1908 to 1912 resulted in churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission (the White branch) and Zion Christian Church (the Black branch). It was from this missionary root that South African Zionism (Sunkler 1948) sprang; it is a mixture of Pentecostal elements and others adopted from African religions. It is by now well established in Southern Africa, particularly among the most disadvantaged Black populations (Comaroff 1985). There are grounds for enlarging this Pentecostal category to include well known African Independent Churches that date from the colonial period, such as Kimbanguism (1921), the Aladura churches from Nigeria (1930s), Alice Lenshina's Lumpa Church in Zambia (1955), etc. The prophet-founders of these churches were undoubtedly charismatic figures, and almost all of them

claimed to have been inspired by God or the Holy Spirit to carry out a very precise mission, particularly healing and leading a crusade against witchcraft and other traditional practices. Several of these indigenous churches of Pentecostal bent assign a revelatory function to dreams (or visions), and the prophetic usage of trance in their gatherings is somewhat reminiscent of the ritual expressions of some local possession cults. Some among them make use in their therapeutic proceedings of ritual objects such as holy water, holy oils, and candles. This mixture of ritual forms is not always well viewed by classic Pentecostalists who accuse these churches of flirting with paganism and idolatry.

Classic Pentecostals churches include first of all those churches that, as mentioned above, originated in North America in the course of the first decades of the last century under the influence of the pioneers of Pentecostal revival (C. Parham and W.J. Seymour) and then spread to other continents, naturally including Africa. The Assemblies of God, for example, founded in the USA in 1914 and by now the largest Pentecostal denomination in the world, began its missionary activities in Africa in the 1920s through foundations in English-speaking countries, which then became turntables for their expansion into French-speaking ones. In most Pentecostal churches, tensions and divergences easily turn into outright breaks and the formation of new churches. So, having learned at the feet of American or British Pentecostalists during the first half of the last century, some Africans were quick to form their own churches. There is, for example, the Ghanaian Peter Amin, who founded the Christ Apostolic Church in Ghana in 1939. The largest Pentecostal Church in Ghana today is the Church of Pentecost, founded there in 1953 by the Scottish Pastor James McKeown. Today, however, it is entirely led by Ghanaians and has outposts not only in other African countries but also in the West and in Asia within the African Diaspora.

Neo-Pentecostal churches are the fruit of the most recent Pentecostal revival of the 1960s and 1970s. Today they are enjoying some success on the African continent (Gifford 2003). Although they share the essence of classic Pentecostal teaching, they are distinguished from it in certain ways: the centrality of the theology of material prosperity, display of the pastors' wealth, obligation to pay tithes, investment in the media as a means of evangelizing, hyper-emphasis on public healing rituals, etc. They are counted in hundreds on the African continent today. A typical example of the neo-Pentecostal churches is Win-

ners' Chapel. Founded in Lagos in 1983, it has several branches today, both in Africa and in the West. Its theology of material prosperity as a sign of divine blessing attracts both entrepreneurs and young people in search of opportunities. According to this theology, the life of abundance that flows from Jesus' victory over sin and death is not concerned only with the next life but also with this one; it is demonstrated by wealth, health, prestige and prosperity. The obligation to pay tithes operating in these structures obeys a prevailing logic by which those who give generously to the Church (or the pastor) will be generously rewarded by God in return (ibid.: 99). So the rich give generously in the hope of seeing their business prosper; the poor, for their part, deprive themselves of the little they have in the hope of receiving a hundredfold. This religious ideology of prosperity is bitterly criticized both by missionary Christianity and classic Pentecostals mainly because it has led to the rapid enrichment of the pastors of these new Pentecostal structures without resolving the poverty of their thousands of members.

Charismatic movements within mission churches, considered in the next section, make up the fourth variety of Pentecostalism in Africa. In the general introduction, I briefly reviewed Meyer's study of a case of Pentecostal influence on a Protestant mission Church in Ghana (Meyer 1999). I focus in the following section on Pentecostal influence on African Catholicism.

Archbishop Milingo's Saga

Charismatic Christianity began to gain a foothold in West Africa in the early 1970s, soon indeed after its emergence in North America, beginning with English-speaking countries such as Nigeria and Ghana and then spreading to neighbouring French-speaking countries through the movement of people and pastors across national boundaries (Maynargue 2004). In Nigeria, according to Ojo (1988), it started on university campuses among students and university graduates by relying on existing interdenominational students' organizations. It was much later that Charismatic forms of devotion found their way into mainline churches, forcing some of the initially interdenominational Charismatic organisations to develop into fully-fledged churches. In the last two decades, Charismatic Christianity has flourished tremendously on the African continent where it is now a major player alongside mainline churches

(Gifford 1994; 2003). The response of the latter, which have indeed lost many of their faithful to these newcomers, has been to open up, somehow reluctantly, to Charismatic prayer groups.

About the mode of spread of Catholic Charismatic Renewal to the Third World in general, Csordas is right when he writes: "Evidence suggests that the typical pattern for the movement's introduction in a third world region is as follows: a missionary priest visits the United States, is exposed to Baptism of the Holy Spirit, organizes a prayer group on his return…" (1997: 28). This is true of Hebga and the founding of Ephphata with which I am concerned in this chapter. But before dwelling on the circumstances of the emergence of Ephphata, it is worth mentioning Archbishop Milingo's story because he was the very first high-ranking Catholic cleric in Africa to affiliate with the Charismatic movement.

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal only became popular in Zambia when the controversial figure of Emmanuel Milingo, Archbishop of Lusaka from 1969 to 1983, appeared on the Charismatic scene in 1973, claiming to have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal. This was the first time in the history of the Catholic Church in Africa that a bishop was claiming the Charismatic experience and was openly involving himself in public rituals of faith healing. He subsequently founded a Charismatic group (*Divine Providence Community*) in the urban setting of Lusaka and established strong links with other Charismatic movements in the West. This is what Milingo (1984: 14–15) writes about the discovery of his healing gifts:

> There was a woman who had suffered for five months. … She was treated in a mental hospital, but to no avail. … On 2 April 1973 she came to my office and explained her problem. I told her that we should pray together. She came back a few days later and once again told me her full story. I brought her to my residence where I heard her Confession, then we celebrated Mass. But in spite of all this the voices continued and she still feared her own child. At that time I did not know how Satan behaves when he is in possession of someone. I contemplated various ways of helping the woman when suddenly an idea glowed in my mind: 'Look three times intently into her eyes and ask her to look three times intently into yours. Tell her to close her eyes the third time and order her to sleep. Then speak to her soul after signing her with the sign of the cross.'
>
> I carried out this instruction systematically. The woman was overshadowed by the power of the Lord, and she relaxed and became calm so that I was able to reach her soul. … We can thank the Lord that this woman

> has remained well to this day. … I can remember a great deal that happened in the month of May 1973. I knew that the Lord was leading me to the healing of the disease of which many of my fellow-Zambians are victims—*mashawe*. This disease cannot be treated in a hospital. During the whole of May I thought out the different ways by which I could help my sick brothers and sisters.

In terms of cultural translation, Bishop Milingo attempted to deal with *mashawe* (ancestral 'spirits' possessing mainly women and traditionally treated in the framework of cults of affliction) by demonizing them, that is by imposing on them a Christian category.

But his healing practices were to meet a fierce opposition from most of his fellow clerics, predominantly Irish missionaries, who felt that this ministry was not compatible with his duties as an archbishop and was not in conformity with the doctrine of the Church (Ter Haar & Ellis 1988: 189). His attempts to adapt ritual healing to local needs, especially the deliverance from *mashawe*, was seen by his detractors as a breach of orthodoxy, as an accommodation of paganism in the Catholic Church. He was also accused of using auto-suggestion and hypnotism as healing methods. Denounced to Rome, he was subsequently asked to stop holding his public healing sessions. A decade of accusations coupled with Milingo's obstinacy culminated in his removal from office as Archbishop of Lusaka in 1983. He was recalled to Rome where he was given a posting. He was allowed to continue his healing practices and rapidly became popular among Charismatics in Italy and beyond. It has to be said, however, that his recent flirtation with the Unification Church (Moonism) has not served the image of Charismatic renewal in Africa well. Since the 25th of September 2006 Archbishop Milingo is excommunicated from the Catholic Church, not because of his charismatic practices, but for challenging the rule of priestly celibacy by consecrating married men as bishops without the permission of Vatican authorities.

Milingo's saga already shows the tension between charisma and institutional power which is characteristic of the ongoing domestication of Charismatic Renewal within mainline Churches. Following a brief account of Milingo's creative ministry of healing in Zambia, Csordas remarks: "To date, this sketchy outline is as far as ethnological scholarship can go in documenting the adaptation and transformation of the Charismatic healing system to a culture different from the Euro-American one in which it originated" (Csordas 1997: 33). Indeed, apart from Gerrie Ter Haar's work (1992) on Archbishop Milingo, there is

very little ethnography on Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Africa. As we shall see, a major difference between Archbishop Milingo and Hebga is that, whereas the former started faith healing before connecting with the international network of Charismatics, the latter first experienced the Charismatic movement in the USA before going on to found his own prayer group in Cameroon.

Hebga and the Founding Ephphata

Meinrad Pierre Hebga was born in 1928 in Edea, now a small city in southern Cameroon predominantly inhabited by the Basaa ethnic group. In 1928, the French colonial enterprise was flourishing in this part of Cameroon. The colonial administration, aided by Catholic missionaries, was busy fulfilling the 'mission of civilization': roads, schools, hospitals, etc. Born of staunch Catholic parents (his father was a catechist), Hebga attended the Catholic primary school of Edea from 1934 to 1938. From 1938 to 1946 he attended boarding junior seminaries where he excelled in humanities and classics. In 1947 he began his training for the priesthood in a major seminary in Yaounde. A year later he was sent to Rome to continue his training at the Pontifical Gregorian University. There he was ordained to the priesthood in 1951 and went on to complete a master's degree in theology in 1952. He then returned to Cameroon for pastoral ministry in his home diocese. According to his autobiographical notes (Hebga 1982: 20–22), it is during these early years of his pastoral ministry that, as a priest, he was challenged by the issue of witchcraft beliefs and practices. At the time, the clergy was still predominantly white and for most Western missionaries witchcraft beliefs were irrational superstitions not worthy of any serious consideration. But on the ground, witchcraft was still an issue not only for the so-called pagans but also for the new converts. As a young priest serving in a remote village, Hebga was led by challenging cases of human despair in the face of witchcraft beliefs to explore the possibility of a Christian response.

He recalls the case of a pregnant woman in her thirties (mother of six) who came to the parish house one morning to say goodbye to them, claiming that a sorcerer's oracle (*Likagi* in the Basaa language) had sealed her fate; she had been told that she would not survive the process of delivery. Hebga felt sorry for her and decided to try something (ibid.: 20). He asked the woman to follow him to the Chapel where he read

over her prayers provided by the Roman Ritual for situations of difficult pregnancies. He also recited a formula for exorcism used at that time on the occasion of the baptism of adults. The lady prayed with him. Hebga reassured her that having confided in Jesus, she would deliver without any problem. Indeed, all went well and the lady did not die. This was the first time, Hebga claims, that he was using prayer for the sake of protecting somebody from the threat of witchcraft. Besides, Hebga recalls that in the villages where he worked as a young priest, he had the reputation of restoring to their health the sick to whom he administered the last sacraments. But, unlike in the case of Milingo, these isolated facts did not immediately lead him to believe that he had the gift of healing. Consequently, he did not think of establishing healing rituals to deal with the issue of witchcraft. Furthermore, the missionary environment was not favourable to such an initiative and his training had not prepared him for such a move (ibid: 22). On the other hand, Hebga was not convinced by the sweeping discredit of witchcraft beliefs by missionaries partly because it failed to address the real problem of human suffering, rightly or wrongly associated with them. He therefore took up the challenge of studying these beliefs closely for the purpose both of intellectual satisfaction and a proper Christian response.

In 1957, Hebga left his diocese to join the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), which meant a change of institutional belonging within the Catholic Church. He alludes to the reasons behind this change when he describes his early years of ministry in the company of Western missionaries as times of unsettling trials (Hebga 1995: 174). He joined the Society of Jesus in search for a new beginning in his spiritual and pastoral journey. After a two-year novitiate in France, he did further studies in philosophy at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) where he received a master's degree in 1965. Three years later, he completed a doctorate (*Doctorat 3ème cycle*) in philosophy at the University of Rennes on the following topic: *Le Concept de Métamorphoses d'Hommes en Animaux chez les Bantu du Sud-Cameroun*. This was his first major academic attempt to explore the rationality of African beliefs about witchcraft from a philosophical point of view: has reason got anything to do with African witchcraft beliefs? Although primarily a philosopher and theologian, Hebga has always favoured a multidisciplinary approach to the issue of witchcraft. Besides philosophy and theology, he draws on psychopathology, social sciences (including anthropology), parapsychology, physics, mathematics, disciplines in which he received some training during his studies in

Paris between 1960 and 1968. In 1986, he completed a second doctoral thesis (*Doctorat unique*) at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) entitled *La Rationalité d'un Discours Africain sur les Phénomènes Paranormaux*. From it he recently published a book (Hebga 1998) bearing the same title.

Hebga has had a long and multifaceted international teaching career. At the secondary level, he taught Latin, Greek and Western philosophy in a high school (*Collège Libermann*) run by Jesuits in Douala (Cameroon) between 1964 and 1974. For higher education, he taught philosophy in the Catholic Institute of Abidjan (Ivory Coast) from 1971 to 1984, and during this period was also visiting professor to a few Jesuit Universities in North America: John Carroll University in Cleveland in 1972 (where he first came into contact with Charismatic Catholicism); Loyola University (Chicago) in 1975; Weston Jesuit School of Theology (Cambridge) in 1976. He also taught philosophy for a year (1977–1978) at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome) before being kicked out following the publication of a controversial book entitled *Emancipation d'Églises Sous-tutelle*. The book was a fierce critique of missionary Christianity in Africa and a strong affirmation of the right of African Christians to fashion an authentic African Christianity drawing on the resources of African cultures. So, unwanted in Rome, Hebga returned to Abidjan where he continued to teach in a Catholic institution until 1984. In 1985, after spending a few months at John Carroll University in Cleveland as visiting professor, he settled in Cameroon and took up a teaching position at the University of Yaounde (public institution) that he held until his retirement in 1999. He has remained active on the academic scene in Cameroon and is widely respected as one of the pioneers of African philosophy and African theology. In fact during my fieldwork in Cameroon in 2005, I attended a series of workshops organized by the *Société Camerounaise de Philosophie* on the works of four Cameroonian scholars considered to be the pioneers of Cameroonian philosophy; and Hebga was listed as one of them. As already alluded to Hebga has focused his research not only on the rationality of African systems of thought but also on the ways in which Christianity can concretely respond to the challenge of witchcraft and related human suffering. It is against this background that his involvement with Charismatic Renewal and his healing ministry within Ephphata should be viewed.

As briefly mentioned earlier, Hebga first came into contact with Charismatic Catholicism at John Carroll University in Cleveland (Ohio) when teaching a course there in the summer of 1972, barely five years after the Duquesne foundational event. Invited by a student

to attend a Charismatic prayer session within this university, he was more than puzzled by what he witnessed (Hebga 1982: 23). Hebga went on to read more about this new movement and became interested in it. During another stay in the USA in 1975 he renewed contacts with Charismatics. In 1975, there also took place, for the first time in Rome, the international gathering of Charismatics during which Pope Paul VI addressed the participants and spoke of the Charismatic Renewal as a great opportunity for the Catholic Church. This was a clear official endorsement of the new movement in the Catholic Church. On returning to Africa from the USA, Hebga solicited the baptism of the Spirit which he received on the 6th of June 1976 (Pentecost feast) in a Pentecostal Church (*Assemblées de Dieu*) in Abidjan (Ivory Coast). Laying their hands on him, two American pastors, their spouses and a few other lay members of this Church invoked the Holy Spirit in an atmosphere of heightened spiritual fervour. In those days, one had to be bold to take such a step: a Catholic priest receiving the baptism of the Spirit in a Pentecostal Church, this in itself was a revolutionary event in the history of African Catholicism.

Hebga describes the experience of the baptism of the Spirit as a decisive moment of spiritual growth. Besides speaking in tongues, he claims to have experienced other fruits of the Spirit: greater thirst for the word of God, spiritual consolations and inner healing in relation to past debilitating experiences. Hebga particularly mentions healing from bitter memories of racism he suffered at the hands of some Western missionaries during the colonial period (Hebga 1995: 175). This racism coupled with condescending paternalism left the sensitive Hebga with enduring feelings of resentment which were to be further reinforced during his first years of priestly ministry in his home diocese (ibid.: 176). During the preparation for the baptism of the Spirit Hebga begged Jesus to heal these inner wounds. He claims that after the event he progressively found the power to forgive those that frustrations and rancour were keeping captive in his heart. Hebga also remarks that it is after the baptism of the Spirit that his healing ministry began to take some shape.

On the 30th of September 1976, he founded a Charismatic prayer group in Yaounde (capital city of Cameroon) which came to be named Ephphata (a biblical word meaning 'open up' and used by Jesus in the gospel of Mark [7: 34] to heal a dumb man). Ephphata started with five people; then membership oscillated between twenty to forty people until 1978 when it began to attract hundreds of people from all over

the city. Hebga was laying hands on the sick and his reputation as an efficacious healer began to spread all over the country. Within its three decades of existence, Ephaphta has grown to become a structured organization. The movement is hierarchically subdivided in various administrative bodies: General Council, National Bureau, Executive Bureau, Circle of National Shepherds, Special Financial Committee, Diocesan committee, Regional delegations, Inspections and Sectors, Prayer groups and cells. Ephphata also has a youth branch called *Ephphata-jeunesse*. Hebga bears the title of *Aumônier Géneral* (General Chaplain). In this book, I do not discuss the details of the task of each individual committee as spelled out in the statutes of the movement. Suffice it to mention that although the General Council is the supreme governing body of the movement, in practice Hebga takes most of the major decisions and has the power to overrule any decision taken in any of the above mentioned bodies.

In its statutes, the latest version of which was approved by a local bishop in 2004, Ephphata defines itself as a Charismatic Renewal movement within the Catholic Church with the following objectives: a) spiritual fulfillment of its members through praise in a climate of joy, enthusiasm, spontaneity and discipline; b) fostering of brotherhood and solidarity among its members; c) development of an ecumenical spirit between different Christian churches; d) collaboration with other Christian movements; e) exercise of Christian charity; f) spread of the movement in Cameroon (and beyond) where permission is granted by administrative and ecclesiastical authorities.

Regarding membership, the statutes of Ephphata distinguish three categories: a) the core group of active members also known as '*effusés*' (those who have received the baptism of the Spirit); b) the group of those soliciting the baptism of the Spirit; c) the group of well-wishers (*sympathisants*), meaning those who without belonging to Ephphata as such support it in one way or another. Article 7 of the statutes further specifies the conditions for access to full membership (*membres actifs*) as follows: he or she must be a practising Christian, must have been baptized in the Spirit, must attend prayer sessions and participate in the activities of the movement regularly and must abide by the rules of the statutes. The usual mode of joining Ephphata is by seeking membership in one of its cells at the parish level.

That full members of the movement are also known as *effusés* shows the crucial importance of the experience of the baptism of the Spirit. In its rules and regulations (*réglement intérieur*), the latest version of which

was also approved in 2004, Ephphata sees the baptism of the Spirit (*effusion de l'Esprit* or *Baptême dans l'Esprit Saint*) as a spiritual or mystical experience. It is not a sacrament in the Catholic sense of the term and does not replace one. It is an experience which revives (*réveille*) or reactualizes (*réactualise*) the gifts received on the occasion of one's baptism for the service of the community. Only those who have belonged to one of Ephphata prayer groups for at least a year can apply for the baptism of the Spirit. They are selected, according to current rules and regulations, on the basis of their commitment to the spirit of the movement and of their willingness to abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church and lead exemplary Christian lives (Hebga 2005: 11). The compulsory preparation for the baptism of the Spirit consists of seven sessions of teachings (*enseignements*) on the basic tenets of the Catholic faith in general and on the spirituality of Charismatic Renewal in particular. These teachings usually take place on Saturday afternoons and are spread over seven weeks. During my fieldwork, topics for these teachings included: the origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the history of Ephphata, Ephphata's style of prayer, baptism in the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, sacraments, conversion, etc. They are geared towards the integration of the neophytes into the movement and are given by some senior members of Ephphata together with a few invited priests. They ensure the social reproduction of the movement. The end of the period of preparation generally coincides with the celebration of the feast of Pentecost which is not only the patron feast of the movement but also the preferred occasion for the ritual of the baptism of the Spirit.

Ephphata members usually celebrate the feast of Pentecost at the headquarters of the movement, a spiritual centre it owns in a village called Mangen. More will be said about this centre in chapter five of the book. Suffice it to say for now that this centre hosts most of the major events of the movement including the ceremony of the baptism of the Spirit. During my fieldwork, I attended one of these ceremonies. Its ritual is described as follows in a booklet recently published by Hebga (2005):

a) *Roll call of candidates*: names of the candidates to the baptism of the Spirit are called out by one of the senior members of the Ephphata; they moved forward and lined up in front of the altar or the assembly. They are all dressed in the red uniform of the movement.

b) *Prayer of candidates*: it consists of a dialogue with the celebrant in which the candidates pledge to surrender their whole being to the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit.

c) *Confirming the disposition of the candidates*: it consists of the following dialogue between the celebrant and candidates:

Celebrant: Do you renounce Satan and his works?
Candidate: I do.
Celebrant: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died to give us new life?
Candidate: I do.
Celebrant: do you want to follow Jesus as your Savior and Master?
Candidate: I do.

d) *Prayer of the candidates*: the candidates pray together to renounce sin, to surrender their lives to the Holy Spirit whose gifts they ask, especially the gift of speaking in tongues which is explicitly mentioned.

The above four items seem to constitute the core elements of the ritual, although Hebga does mention in his presentation that, if necessary, a special prayer may be made to ask for the gift of tongues. But the text of this prayer is immediately followed by a suggestive word of caution that I render in English as follows:

> The gift of tongues is not given to all…for God grants as he wills and to whom he wills. It is therefore absurd to order people to speak in tongues. It is a superstitious masquerade. On the contrary, any one can solicit this divine gift, for the prayer in tongues is sometimes the way to quiet meditative prayer. When the Lord grants you that favour, you do not have to make any effort. All you need is to surrender your heart and your lips to the Lord as a little child who is learning to babble. The Lord himself will provide sounds, syllables and words which may or may not be intelligible (Hebga 2005: 15).

The above paragraph spells out Hebga's understanding of the gift of tongues in the Charismatic experience. Although he sees it as a legitimate expectation on the part of a candidate for baptism of the Spirit, he departs from mainstream Pentecostal teaching on the subject by not making it the 'initial sign' (Hollenweger 1997: 222) or normative proof of a successful baptism of the Spirit. This cautious attitude of Hebga would be representative of mainstream Catholic teaching on charisms which tends to give equal importance to all the gifts of the Spirit (McGuire 1982: 79). Moreover, unlike some Pentecostals, Catholics do not consider this baptism of the Spirit, however helpful it may be,

necessary for salvation (O'Connor 1971: 132). In fact, during my fieldwork, I did not come across a single instance of speaking in tongues within Ephphata, neither during the weekly prayer sessions nor during the annual ceremony of the baptism of the Spirit in Mangen. This is not because it is explicitly forbidden but because, unlike in a number of other Catholic Charismatic groups, it is not particularly encouraged in Ephphata. Hebga has managed to marginalize this central Charismatic ritual expression in his movement most probably for fear of abuse and misunderstanding, as "Of all the charisms, the gift of tongues most frightens people and is the most scoffed at" (ibid.: 123). This effort to keep the ritual expression of legitimate charisms under control has been a major aspect of the domestication of Charismatic Renewal within the Catholic Church. Indeed,

> Unlike their Protestant counterparts, Catholic pentecostals discourage displays of extreme emotionalism, especially in public. … They are interested in convincing church authorities that there is nothing irregular about their charismatic practices, so they need to make sure that elements of their prayer meetings would not give the hierarchy cause for forbidding or limiting their movement (McGuire 1982: 93).

In other words, although in theory the expression of charisms is spontaneous and free, in practice it is controlled. This control is understandable especially in a hierarchical institution like the Roman Catholic Church for which a certain freedom of the Spirit would be potentially disruptive of the established order of power. Because in fact access to a charism is ultimately access to power, be it the power to serve the community.

We have seen that Ephphata, unlike its US model, does not emphasize glossolalia as a ritual practice. Another practice I witnessed during the ceremony of the baptism of the Spirit in Ephphata is the laying on of hands, a ritual gesture which symbolizes the transmission of the power of the Holy Spirit. What happens is that the priests present at the ceremony, together with a few senior members of the movement, lay hands in turn on each of the candidates while the congregation invokes the Holy Spirit with a song. After the imposition of hands a final song of thanksgiving is taken to conclude the rite. It is recommended that the baptism of the Spirit takes place during Mass or at least during a Charismatic prayer session. At the experiential level, the *effusés* of Ephphata tend to describe the baptism in the Spirit as a transforming event, as a turning point in their lives. Csordas (1994; 2002) has helpfully attempted a phenomenology of embodiment in the Charismatic

experience among Catholics in North America. Charismatic ritual life is indeed an embodied experience, as the body is seen as the locus of manifestation of the sacred, be it good or evil.

I have already alluded to Hebga's own account of the experience of the baptism of the Spirit. Here follow two other testimonies from lay members of the movement. J.A. is a married woman in her 50s. She joined Ephphata in 1984, was baptized in the Spirit in 1994 and was for many years the national leader of the movement before falling out of grace (because of alleged financial mismanagement). She tells how, thanks to Hebga, the Holy Spirit rescued her from a lukewarm Christian life by rekindling in her the fire of love for the service of others within Ephphata. A section of her testimony which appeared in one of the issues of *Le Paraclet* (September 2002), the magazine of Ephphata, reads:

> I was first baptized in the Spirit in 1994… Fr Hebga then put me in charge of the choir of the movement. That was the turning point in my journey in Ephphata. I renewed my baptism in the Spirit (*réeffusion*) a few years latter. On that occasion the Lord made me feel an intense guilt for my sinful past. My life changed. I began to see things differently (*Je ne voyais plus les choses avec les yeux d'autrefois*.). … My practice of sacraments was intensely renewed. I was then called to serve the movement in many capacities (inspector, coordinator of inspectors, general treasurer, National shepherd of the movement, etc). Faced with these challenges I simply had to mature…

As her testimony suggests, the baptism of the Spirit can be renewed several times. She seems not to have experienced anything special on the occasion of her first *effusion*; only after the second one (*réeffusion*) did she begin to see a radical change in her life. Her whole testimony is an interpretation of her life, especially her unexpected rise to power in the movement, as the unfolding of God's hidden plan. She was indeed, for about a decade, the iron lady of the movement until damaging allegations of mismanagement brought her down in 2002. Hebga was utterly disappointed that she had betrayed his trust and, as we shall see later, this bitter experience has in a way remained stuck in his throat. She died a sudden death in December 2002 without bringing the matter to a closure.

The second testimony comes from a man (M.T.) in his early sixties. He joined Ephphata soon after its creation, was baptized in the Spirit in 1978, has served the movement in many capacities (General delegate of Yaounde, intercessor, coordinator of teachings, etc.) and is now the

most senior member of the movement. He describes his experience of the baptism of the Spirit as a joyful and transforming event. But more importantly he talks about his collaboration with Hebga in the ministry of healing: 'I can't tell why after my baptism in the Spirit, Hebga picked me to help him in the healing ministry. I accompanied him during many of his pastoral tours of various dioceses in Cameroon. I assisted him in the purification of many haunted places, in many sessions of exorcism…' His understanding is that the baptism of the Spirit brought to light his charism of healing. He is presently the most senior active member of the team of intercessors (lay members of the movement allowed to pray over the sick). The following account, I recorded during an interview with M.T. in October 2004, is what he recalls as the most memorable healing sessions in which he ever took part:

> It was in 1992. A girl was sent to us from Toulouse [France]. She was the niece of a priest serving in Douala [Cameroon]. She was brought to us because they could not help her in France. His uncle priest first tried to deliver her, but it did not work. He therefore brought her to Fr Hebga. He told us that as he took her every morning to the mass, she started showing symptoms of possession. We prayed over her for two months; she was reacting in a way that was difficult to characterize. It was later on that we realized that she was possessed by a demon called *Asmodée*. The day we diagnosed it is the same day it was finally cast out. This last session was terrifying. Fr Hebga had just had an accident and his arm was still hurting. *Asmodée* was very violent; the girl was shouting, pushing down chairs; she even pushed down a nun who was with us and wanted to break her leg. One priest who was with us was so terrified…He had never seen such a thing. He was hiding behind me and I was saying to him: 'do not be afraid! If you are afraid, the demon will defeat you!' This was a powerful session of exorcism. And the moment the demon was leaving the girl the building in which we were shook as if there was an earthquake.

The mention of a fearful priest in the above account is a statement about how some lay people in Ephphata believe they are more experienced in the ministry of healing (especially in dealing with demons) than many priests; there is some truth in it. It is only recently that some bishops started inviting Hebga to run workshops on the ministry of healing for their priests, as this is not part of the curriculum in seminaries where they are trained. Also, the fact that Hebga allows lay Catholics to perform ritual healing with the laying on of hands is criticized by a number of clerics, who feel that it is something only priests should do. For this reason, Charismatics are not welcome in some parishes or dioceses.

Fig. 1. Fr Hebga surrounded by some senior leaders of the movement

It is unusual to come across a senior member of Ephphata who, like the above informant, has been in the movement since its early years. Almost all the founding members ended up leaving the movement, most of the time over disagreements with Hebga on the running of the movement. In a move that can rightly be seen as the first major schism within the movement, one of the close lay associates of Hebga broke away in the early 1990s to create, with the support of a few clerics, a new movement that he named *Ephphata de l'Immaculée Conception*. I asked M.T., the preceding informant, what was the main reason behind this break. He replied:

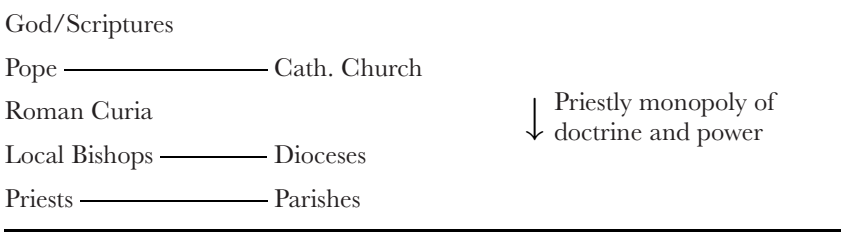
> It was tribalism. He felt that they were natives [the *Beti* ethnic group] of the place [Yaounde area] and that we were strangers. He was not happy with the ascendance of the *Basaa* [Fr Hebga's ethnic group and that of the informant too] over the group. So, having acquired enough experience he decided to leave Ephphata and create a group that will be mainly *Ewondo* or *Beti*. It is sad. He had been Fr Hebga's most loved acolyte!

It is true that the Basaa and the Beti are the dominant ethnic groups in this multiethnic movement. But my fieldwork did not give me the

impression that Hebga particularly favours one ethnic group over others, as in principle and in reality the movement is open to everybody. Cameroonians are quite familiar with the native (*autochtone*)/stranger (*allogènes*) divide, which is part of their daily politics of belonging (Geschiere and Nyamjoh 2000). It is not uncommon to hear those who consider themselves natives of a particular area complain about being invaded by strangers from other regions of the country. The Catholic Church in Cameroon has its own share of this politics of belonging as in the past bishops moved from their native regions to head a diocese in another region have often been told that they were not welcome in the latter. Ethnicity is indeed among the dominant lenses through which social life in general is interpreted in Cameroon. I went on to ask the above informant how Hebga reacted in the face of the break up. He answered: "He took it as an act of betrayal. It happens, you know! Even among the twelve, there was Judas Iscariot."

Charisma and Catholic hierarchy

The Catholic Church under the authority of the Pope is divided into administrative units called dioceses. These are headed by bishops appointed by the Pope. Dioceses are in turn divided in smaller units called parishes. These are headed by priests ordained by bishops after a due process of training. So, priests are accountable to bishops who are accountable to the Pope. Hebga belongs to a Catholic religious congregation (Jesuits) headed by a superior who resides in Rome and who is directly accountable to the Pope. But according to the law of the Catholic Church, members of religious congregations cannot operate in a diocese without the permission (or at least the knowledge) of the local bishop. So, Hebga's movement cannot function within a diocese without the permission of its bishop or in a parish without the permission of the parish priest. This hierarchical structure can be schematized as follows:



The vertical arrow indicates the source and direction of the communication of doctrinal truth and power: it moves from God to the laity through the clerics. This has to do with the relationship between religious power and religious truth. In the Catholic Church, it is the case that the production of doctrinal truth is a function of one's position in the hierarchy. As Asad (1993: 44) puts it,

> The connection between religious theory and practice is fundamentally a matter of intervention—of constructing religion in the world (not in the mind) through definitional discourses, interpreting true meanings, excluding some utterances and practices and including others. Hence my repeated question: …how does power create religion?

Hebga is a priest, which means that the legitimacy of his pastoral practice is subject to the authority of a bishop. The first statutes of the movement were approved in 1988 by a bishop who was supportive of Hebga's ministry. With regard to the laity, Hebga is definitely in a position of authority. Every two weeks, on the occasion of Charismatic weekends at the headquarters of Ephphata in Mangen, Hebga meets with his senior aides to discuss some issues concerning the movement. The following account of one of those meetings shows how the survival of Ephphata is a function of an asymmetric interplay of agencies. In other words, its struggle for survival as a legitimate movement within the local Catholic Church has also been a power struggle.

The meeting session of 17th September 2004: after a short prayer led by Hebga, he went on to brief his aides on a number of issues, beginning as follows:

> With patients, I now insist on catechism because many of them are only interested in having hands laid upon them. After that they disappear from the scene. The Archbishop asked us to insist on sacraments and not only on blessed water, salt and oil.

Hebga was referring here to instructions they had received the week before from the newly appointed archbishop of Yaounde during his

first official meeting with Ephphata. At that meeting the movement was represented by Hebga and a few of his senior lay aides. The meeting was important because in the past Hebga had had difficult relationships with this particular bishop about Ephphata in the first diocese he headed before being transferred to Yaounde. During the meeting the bishop urged Ephphata leadership to balance the consumption of sacramentals (blessed water, salt, oil, etc) with sound spiritual formation. For many years Ephphata had as its ecclesiastical tutor J.B. Ntep, the bishop of the diocese of Eseka within which are located the headquarters of the movement, the spiritual centre of Mangen. This bishop was rather sympathetic to the movement and presided over a number of its major events. But he was also recently transferred to a different diocese. During my fieldwork time Hebga was still trying to set up a meeting with the new bishop of Eseka in order to discuss the terms of their relationships. Given the nature of the office of the bishop in the Catholic Church, these terms are bound to vary from one bishop to another. Some of them are not at all sympathetic to the Charismatic movement which they see as potentially disruptive and misleading. This distribution of power makes the existence of Ephphata groups in dioceses and parishes very precarious.

Hebga's speech at the meeting of September 2004 continues as follows:

> There is this priest, Fr M.C., who used to help us during our spiritual gatherings. I hear that he has been transferred [his aides express their regret] to another diocese. He will leave next month and we will miss him. There is another young priest in Yaounde, Fr P.A., who offered to help us. He is even one of us; he was a member of the youth branch of Ephphata some years ago. When I started Ephphata, he was a young boy; he was my mass servant, but today we concelebrate as fellow priests (laughter). But he has a problem: I have had to defend him against his uncle who is threatening to kill him. His uncle told him that he will not rest until he sees him in a coffin. But he is a very devoted priest and he is willing to help us in Yaounde. He is the assistant to a parish priest which means that he does not have the final word. But he told me that he will see how he can make himself available on Wednesday afternoons to help us in Yaounde. There is also another young priest, who is a student at the Catholic University, who belongs to the Diocese of Douala and who is willing to work with us. The chaplain of the Student parish, Fr B.T., is also willing to give us some spiritual teachings (*enseignements*). One of you should try to get in touch with them.

All the priests mentioned in the above section were living at the time in the area of Yaounde and are young clerics interested in the work of Hebga. They occasionally assist him in the healing ministry but on a very informal basis, since he has no formal authority over them. Given the overwhelming demand, Hebga generally welcomes their help as long as they conform to his tune. He continues:

> I am working on the last draft of the statutes of Ephphata, so that Ephphata can be legally registered by the divisional officer of Eseka [The administrative unit in which spiritual centre of Mangen is located]. I would like this to be done as soon as possible because on it depend our legal entitlement to the lands we own here and there. God is truly good because it is not raining too much now and work on our new building site in Nkol-Bisson is progressing well. But the builders are lazy; sometimes it does not rain but they do not show up.

Hebga is well aware that if Ephphata has so far survived the storms which came its way, it is partly thanks to his strong Charismatic leadership and to his ability to confront unsympathetic bishops and fellow clerics. He is now old and cannot but worry about the future of Ephphata after him. The constant struggle for power among his close associates gives the impression that the movement is likely to fall apart after him. What will become of its property? Ephphata owns a few pieces of land given by well-wishers. On them it hopes to make some profitable investment for the economic survival of the movement. The spiritual centre of Mangen was built on one of these lands and there is building work underway on a second one located in the outskirts of Yaounde. During my fieldwork Hebga and his legal team were busy working towards a legal registration of Ephphata by the Cameroonian state. This was rather a strange move for Church movements do not generally seek state recognition as their legitimacy is ensured by the encompassing umbrella of the Catholic Church. My guess is that this legal procedure was a way for Hebga to ensure the survival of the movement and its property beyond himself. The following diatribe of Hebga against unsympathetic priests further confirms the vulnerability of Ephphata:

> We need to organize better our intercession prayers for the sick. There are priests who are not happy with me involving lay people in it. But the other day, I visited one Ephphata group in Mvog-Ada, the parish priest there was very good to us. He even made a special collection for our new building site. The parish priest from whom he took over never wanted to see me there. I have always told them that parishes belong to lay people not to priests. … In the face of this kind of hostility, be

> patient! The other day, we went to a parish and there the parish priest does not allow lay people to lay hands on people. He is wrong; he does not know the doctrine of the Church. It is mere ignorance! Pope John Paul II has indicated in one of his books which blessings can be used by lay people. Who then is a small parish priest to contradict the Pope? (At this point, he becomes nervous and raises his voice) … It is the Pope who is the head of the Catholic Church and not a miserable parish priest. I am writing a book on prayers of deliverance in which I am very harsh on ignorant but arrogant priests and bishops. They do not have the right to forbid what is allowed by the Pope.

We can see Hebga appealing to the authority of the Pope to defend the legitimacy of the empowerment of the laity in the healing ministry. But although he can easily handle the hostility of a fellow priest, it is far more risky to get into trouble with a bishop:

> Once, a bishop told me that I do not have the right to bless oil and that it is the prerogative of a bishop. He was obviously wrong. … There are stupid bishops who do not follow up doctrinal developments in the Church. But I told them that I will continue to bless oil. Of course, if a bishop asks me not to bless oil in his diocese, I will obey. He will not be bishop for ever and after him the blessing of oil will continue. I have said it to several bishops including J.Z. who was archbishop of Yaounde. … I told him that I was only fulfilling a mission entrusted to me by God and that he will answer to Jesus Christ if he tries to prevent me from doing my job. He got frightened and told me that he was not against my ministry …You must know that parishes belong to you (and not to priests) and while remaining obedient to them you must defend your rights by reminding them that some of their claims have no basis in the teaching of the Church.

But as I mentioned earlier, a number of clerics including bishops are sympathetic to Hebga's ministry and he encourages his lay aides to work with these:

> A few months ago a priest was sent to me from Gabon (the neighbouring country) by his bishop to be initiated to the ministry of the sick. He spent a week with me. … Not all bishops are against us. … There are also many priests who are not hostile to our ministry. You must identify those and work with them. So be obedient to Church authorities in your respective parishes and dioceses and avoid the snares of politics and tribalism. With Jesus Christ, it is the reign of truth. If anyone of you wishes to ask a question, he can do so now.

It is worth mentioning that this struggle for survival is not peculiar to Ephphata. It tends to be the fate of most Charismatic movements in African Catholicism. For example, about *Jamaa*, an innovative movement

founded in the Democratic Republic of Congo by the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels in the early 1950s, Fabian (1994: 259) remarks:

> At first, the Jamaa was acclaimed as a genuinely African form of Catholicism. Yet, as it elaborated and consolidated its own distinctive identity, a confrontation with the hierarchy and clergy (then still largely expatriate) became inevitable. The tensions came to the surface as early as in 1967 in Lubumbashi and 1970 in Kolwezi, after years of internal conflicts among factions in the clergy. By chance…I was in Shaba in 1972–1974 when a Jamaa, weakened by dissent from within, with little support from the clergy (the founder was still alive but had returned to Belgium in 1962, where he was under ecclesiastical censure in a convent) and afflicted by self-doubt and a kind of fatigue, was given an ultimatum by the Zaïrean conference of bishops: either to abjure in a public ritual its doctrinal errors and practices considered deviant, or to be excommunicated.

There is a strong indication that these conflicts are a function of the tension resulting from the sudden rise and exercise of personal charisma within a highly hierarchical institution like the Catholic Church. Although Ephphata has had its own share of accusations and tribulations, there has never been a move on the part of the hierarchy to suppress the movement. On the contrary, the bishops' conference occasionally invited Hebga to speak to them about the ministry of healing and the Charismatic movement in general.

Lay leadership in Ephphata is real and active. But it is subjected to that of Hebga. According to the latter there are about 200 Ephphata prayer groups established within Cameroon and beyond. The size of groups varies from a few dozen members to a thousand or more. Each Ephphata group is run by a committee (five to six lay people) of which the chairperson is called *berger* (shepherd). Besides overseeing the weekly prayer sessions, the shepherd serves as the link between the group at the parish level and the central administrative structure of Ephphata. More will be said about the active agency of the laity in Ephphata in other chapters. Suffice it now to say that lay leadership in the movement has been marred by a number of problems of which I have already mentioned tribalism and mismanagement. During the meeting I referred to in the preceding section, a question was put to Hebga about a court case opposing Ephphata to its former financial administrator who allegedly colluded with the above-mentioned deceased lady (J.A.) to embezzle the funds of the movement. Fr Hebga responded:

> Yes, you mean the case of X who mismanaged our money with that other witch [*sorcière*, which in this context simply means a bad person] who is already dead. Before that ugly witch [*laide sorcière*] died, she wrote a letter in which she said that she was not playing around with the money of Ephphata. I have the letter with me and I will make photocopies for you to see how a dying person can lie. She thinks she can play games with God; she died three days later. They stole millions from us. Mr X., at least, confessed having done it. So I took the case to court and he was tried last week. He tried as much as he could to bribe judges but failed. He was given a suspended prison sentence of seven month for three years. And he was ordered by the judge to pay us back the millions. I do not care if he appeals, we will fight back. Our lawyer told me that he has ten days to appeal.

Again, the tone of the above intervention shows the annoyance of Hebga in relation to issues of mismanagement within Ephphata. He trusted Mr X and Mrs J.A. more than anybody else. The lady died without standing for trial and the disappointed Hebga often refers to her in public as a dishonest person stricken by God. Since the disappointment, he has become very distrustful of his aides on financial matters. What is at stake here is the integrity of the senior members of Ephphata: do they join the movement only for spiritual reasons as they often claim? In the course of the three decades history of Ephphata, Hebga has had to dismiss a number of his close associates accused of exploiting their status in the movement or their ties with him for economic gains. For example, since it is not easy to meet Hebga personally, some of his associates have used his name to extort money from patients seeking to have access to him by claiming falsely that they were acting in his name. A number of anthropologists have written illuminatingly on the ability of people to instrumentalize or manipulate religious affiliation (or conversion) for pragmatic ends (Droz 2002: 99; see also Peel 2000).

Moreover, the struggle for power among lay leaders within Ephphata is endemic and results in the frequent practice of informing. For example, a few weeks before I left the field in 2005, Hebga had just sacked his *délégué général* in charge of the area of Yaounde (a major position) together with a few others on the financial committee. Those unhappy with the sacking were claiming that it was the result of a vindictive coup fomented by others. This gives an idea of the dirty politics that goes on all the time among Hebga's senior aides: mutual suspicions, informing, enmities, quarrels, accusations, etc. Under the surface of the religious superstructure of Ephphata, its political infrastructure undermined by

the struggle for power and prestige constantly threatens the stability of the movement. This makes Hebga all the more concerned about the future of the movement, although he continues to voice his confidence that Ephphata will continue to flourish beyond him. I return to the issue of the future of Ephphata in the general conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

MISFORTUNE NARRATIVES IN EPHPHATA

Suffering is an intrinsic dimension the human condition and there seems to be a close link between suffering and religion. As Bowker puts it,

> It is because suffering, in one form or another, is a common experience that religions give to suffering a place of central importance or consideration—indeed, it is often said that suffering is an important *cause* of religion, since the promises held out by religion represent a way in which men can feel reassured in the face of catastrophe and death (Bowker 1970: 1).

But, "There is no single way to suffer" (Kleinman and Kleinman 1998: 2). As the analysis of misfortune narratives in this chapter will confirm, people perceive and express suffering in different ways. In other words, 'languages of distress' vary not only from one culture to another but also from one individual to another within the same culture. What are the cultural resources upon which patients draw to describe their suffering in the religious context of Ephphata? I highlight especially the syncretic dimension of patients' misfortune narratives to argue against the essentialist reading of contemporary African societies and to exemplify the workings of africanization at the grassroots.

Stewart defines syncretism as "The combination of elements from two or more different religious traditions within a specified framework" (1995: 36). Syncretism is approached here more as an ongoing process than as an end product, with an emphasis on the creative aspect of human agency in the face of constraining existential situations like suffering or the threat of death (Droogers 1995: 39–40). Suffering, especially when coupled with the fear of an imminent death, tends to put some extra pressure on human agency because of the need to act quickly and efficiently. For this reason, it is very conducive to syncretic innovations (Massé 2002: 8).

Recent medical anthropology (Young 1982; Kleinman 1988; Helman 1994) has helpfully differentiated concepts of 'disease', 'illness' and 'sickness' in an attempt to distinguish the objective, subjective and social dimensions of human ailments. By analysing misfortune narratives, my

approach focuses on "how the sick person and the members of the family or wider social network perceive, live with, and respond" (Kleinman 1988: 4) not only to sickness, but to misfortunes in general. Indeed, in the context of Ephphata, as it will soon become clear, illness is just one of the many reported misfortunes which are often all simply ascribed to the same cause: witchcraft. The other common denominator of these misfortunes is that they all result in human suffering, leading victims or their relatives to seek the help of a practitioner.

Writing on medical pluralism in Lower Zaire, Janzen is right to remark that "It is difficult to get an overall view of the interrelatedness of therapy practices…by looking at the specialists who perform them. The interrelatedness of alternate therapies is most accessible by observing how they are evaluated and used by their clientele" (1978: 4). Narratives examined in this chapter are a few of hundreds of letters written each year to Hebga by patients wishing to benefit from his services. I selected them on the basis of the broad range of adversities they addressed. I have found useful for my argument Kleinman's concept of explanatory models (EMs): "Explanatory models are notions about an episode of sickness and its treatment that are employed by all those engaged in the clinical process … The interaction between the EMs of patients and practitioners is a central component of health care" (Kleinman 1980: 105). This chapter focuses on patient's (or their relatives') EMs. Obviously these are not free from the influence of the practitioners' health ideologies since people often draw from health beliefs surrounding them, including those popularized by practitioners, to express their distress.

In every issue of the periodical of Ephphata entitled *Le Paraclet*, one usually finds the following indications about the steps to follow in order to get to meet Hebga:

> Making an appointment with Fr Hebga: 1) Write a letter to Fr Hebga describing your problem and what treatments you have attempted so far; 2) put your letter in an envelope and deposit it in the box at the entrance of the Catholic Student Centre located in the neighbourhood of the military academy (EMIA); 3) come back a few days later to pick up the response from where you deposited the letter. You will find there on an envelope bearing your name the date, the hour and the place of the appointment; 4) be on time on the appointment day.

Hebga lives in a Jesuit community which shares the same premises with the Catholic Students Centre where Jesuits work as chaplains.

Fig. 2. Patients waiting at the entrance
of Fr Hebga's residence in Yaounde

At the entrance of the Jesuit house there is a locked boxed in which people seeking Hebga's services deposit their letters. The above insert specifies two questions that patients' EMs should address: first the nature of the problem and second the treatments already attempted. Kleinman (1980: 105) writes that,

> Structurally, we can distinguish five major questions that EMs seek to explain for illness episodes. These are (1) etiology; (2) time and mode of onset of symptoms; (3) pathophysiology; (4) course of sickness (including both degree of severity and type of sick role—acute, chronic, impaired, etc.); and (5) treatment. EMs differ to the extent to which they attempt to answer some or all of these concerns.

Indeed, in the narratives I examine here patients differ in the number of questions they address. For each narrative, I attempt to specify the various cultural resources upon which its author draws categories to build his or her EM.

Languages of Distress (N = narrative)

N1: Car accident (The patient is a man in his forties)

> Dear Father, K…and Family kindly requests your spiritual assistance for M… who is gravely sick. Since his car accident a few months ago he has not recovered in spite of all the intensive care he has been receiving. He is now in a coma in the hospital. That is why we are now calling upon Jesus Christ to help him out of this trial. Thanks in advance!

The author of this narrative, a member of the family of the patient explains the problem, mentions the failure of the hospital to solve the problem, and expects Hebga to support the patient spiritually in the name of Jesus Christ. It is a family explanatory model which draws on the following semantic networks:

– *Biomedicine*: car accident, coma, hospital;
– *Christianity*: Father, spiritual assistance, Jesus Christ.

No explicit reference is made here to the possibility of bewitchment. But it is generally implied in the mention of the failure of the hospital to cure the patient.

N2: Persistent hernia (A man in his twenties)

> Dear Father, please kindly advice me on the following problem disturbing my junior brother: he has been operated upon several times for the same hernia. It keeps on coming back. We do not know what else to do? Because we suspect there is more to it than a simple hernia. Thanks in advance! And may the name of Jesus Christ be blessed!

Here the problem is described by the patient's brother, the failure of the hospital mentioned, the suspicion of a mysterious cause voiced and Hebga's advice expected. As to the semantic networks of this narrative we have:

– *Biomedicine*: operated upon, hernia;
– *Christianity*: Father, Jesus Christ, blessed;
– *Traditional* (implied): 'it keeps coming back' and 'we suspect there is more to it than a simple hernia'.

N3: Multiple adversities (A woman in her early thirties)

> Dear Reverend Hebga, I thank the almighty Lord for giving me the strength and courage to enlist and present my problems to you today. I know that you can help me. Please, my problems are as follows: suffering from nerves, ears, and eyes problems, not married, no children, lots of misunderstandings with my family. I wish to receive a favourable response from you. I remain yours; your child H.

This narrative simply emphasizes the fact that its author has all sorts of problems; the listing approach is meant to emphasize the seriousness of the case and to solicit a global solution.

- *Biomedicine*: nerves, ears and eyes problems
- *Christianity*: Reverend, almighty Lord;
- *Traditional*: not married, no children, misunderstandings in my family

N4: Cancer

> Dear Father, our 11 months old baby was recently diagnosed with liver cancer. We, her parents, are completely devastated. The doctors told us that they can not help, that there is no medicine that can cure it. That is why we are writing to you for help, hoping that prayers and masses may heal her and console us. May God bless our baby and all those who will intercede for her!

This is a family EM for an eleven months old baby suffering from cancer:

- *Biomedicine*: liver cancer, doctor, medicine;
- *Christianity*: Father, God, prayers, masses, intercede;

Again, in this case, there is no explicit mention of witchcraft. But I remember that when this case was made public during a prayer assembly, the reaction of the participants did suggest that they suspected a mysterious cause. One could hear people wondering spontaneously: "How can an eleven month child have cancer. It is supposed to be an adult disease. Somebody must have spoiled the blood of that child. Poor little baby!" Here the family EM is supplemented by various other EMs fusing from participants during the prayer session.

N5: HIV AIDS (A girl in her late twenties)

> Father, I have AIDS and evil spirits which are troubling me; I have an evil spirit which makes me lose my mind. It disturbs me all the times: my feet are swelling, my tongue is soaring. My whole body is aching. I am always sick. People advised me to see you because they think I am persecuted by evil spirits. Please, help me! I do not know what else to do. I hope the Lord will have mercy on me for I am a sinner. Thank you for your understanding.

She seems to make a link between AIDS and evil spirits. Witchcraft-related interpretations of cases of AIDS are not uncommon in Cameroon. In the above narrative, the patient claims that the causal link between her troubles and evil spirits was suggested to her by 'people', a vague category which in such a context could mean anybody from a close relative to a diviner. During my fieldwork, I heard Hebga, sometimes in front of thousands of people, mention cases of people allegedly healed from HIV AIDS by prayers. Such testimonies quickly spread and are taken by many distressed patients at face value. Because there is still a strong stigma attached to AIDS in Cameroon, some patients tend to cope with it by repackaging its cause in terms of evil spirits.

N6: Night rapes (couches de nuit) *or having meals in dreams* (repas de nuits)

> *6.1.* (A lady in her early forties): Father, I am writing to request moral and spiritual assistance; I have many problems: frequent quarrels with my male and female friends, lack of harmony in my family and social relationships, unemployment, no boy friend, frequent erotic dreams, eating in dreams, bad dreams, … I look forward to getting your solutions to my problems.
>
> 6.2. (A lady in her early thirties): Father, I am in the midst of terrible suffering. Nothing in my life is working (*Je suis bloquée en tout*), erotic dreams are disturbing me a lot and many other illnesses. I will tell you more about it when I meet you in person. Father, please do not abandon me; help me for I do not know what else to do.
>
> 6.3. (A man in his early thirties): Father, it is three years now that malevolent spirits have been turning my nights into hell. Every night I have nightmares which end with sperm flowing from my penis. Other nights these spirits instead give me something to eat in dreams, like meat for instance. Before turning to you, servants of God, I had consulted 4 diviners (*marabouts*) but they did not solve my problems. I am overwhelmed … please help me!

Many women in the southern part of Cameroon frequently complain of the above symptoms often associated with fertility and menstruating problems, and even involuntary abortions. There is a widespread belief in Cameroon that through these night rapes and feeding, witches or sorcerers poison their victims and damage (or incapacitate) their reproductive systems. For example, about witchcraft beliefs among the Bangwa people of West Cameroon, Robert Brain writes: "Adults do, however, confess to supernatural sexuality: women admit to mystical union with bush-pigs; young men to the possession of a 'night-penis' by which they have intercourse with other men's wives in the witch-bush" (1970: 172). These phenomena are associated with themes of 'dreams' and 'night' which in many parts of Africa refer to the witchcraft world. The Beti of south Cameroon also believe that owners of *evú* witchcraft (men as well as women) have the ability to rape or feed women in the night to make them sterile or unsuccessful in life (Laburthe-Tolra 1985). The EMs of the above narratives are predominantly traditional (erotic dreams, eating in dreams, malevolent spirits, diviners, nightmares, quarrels, etc.). Obviously, terms such as 'servants of God', 'spirits' and 'hell' come from Christianity. But in the last of these narratives, the category of 'spirit' appears to be ambivalent for it is not clear whether its author is referring here to Christian 'evil spirits' or to a category of local malevolent spirits. Regarding the nature of EMs, Kleinman (1980: 109) rightly remarks that "Since EMs involve tacit knowledge, they are not coherent and unambiguous" (1980: 109).

N7: Untypical behaviour of a son

> My dear Fr Hebga, aware of the power of your charisma received from Jesus Christ, I entrust to you my son whose behaviour has become unbearable. He hangs out with bad guys, skips classes and obeys neither me nor his mother. I entrust him to you so that you can exorcise him for I think he is possessed by evil spirits…

This explanatory model is predominantly Christian (charisma, Jesus Christ, exorcise, evil spirits) and is more explicit about the diagnosis and the treatment expected: the father alleges that his son is possessed by evil spirits and should be exorcised. He also acknowledges the 'power' of Hebga as a successful healer.

N8: Fertility problems

> 8.1. Fr Hebga, I am honoured by this opportunity I have to explain my problems and those of my family to you. I am a 36 year old Bamileke girl living with a 46 years old man. We have been together for the last 11 years but we have no child. Tests in the hospital revealed that I have problems with my fallopian tubes. My man also has problems with the secretion of sperm…I look forward to receiving your help
>
> 8.2. (A woman in her early forties) Father, I have now been sick for a year. Just after my marriage in 2003 I started suffering from night poisoning (meals in dreams) and night rapes (in dreams). In April 2004, at 8pm, as I was reading my Bible, I fell asleep and felt something entering into my stomach. Since then, this demon moves up and down in my stomach, suffocates me, and generally settles in my lower abdomen during the time of ovulation…

In the first narrative, the EM is predominantly scientific (test, hospital, fallopian tubes, secretion of sperm) whereas in the second one there is a mixture of frameworks of interpretation: one is traditional (night poisoning, night rapes, something entering in the stomach), the second is Christian (Bible, demon) and the third is modern (abdomen, ovulation). It is not clear as to why the author of the second narrative takes the thing 'entering into her stomach' to be a 'demon'. But further considerations on how widespread collective representations in Cameroon associate infertility with witchcraft may throw some light on the background of the above narratives, especially on this specific detail in the second narrative which says 'This demon moves up and down in my stomach, suffocates me, and generally settles in my lower abdomen during the time of ovulation'.

In most African traditional societies, as documented by several anthropologists, infertility was perceived as a family tragedy. For example, among the Tallensi of Ghana a man who died without children could not accede to the prestigious status of ancestorship: "Certainly for the Tallensi, writes Fortes, the ideal of the complete person is an adult male who has reached an old age and lineage eldership, who has male descendants in the patrilineal line and who is qualified by a proper death to become their worshipped ancestor" (Fortes1973: 299). In the same line of thought, Lienhardt (1961: 129) remarked about the Dinka that "Children and cattle multiplying and prospering from generation to generation are the ultimate value of Dinka life and the only assurance of a kind of immortality." This is also true of many cultures in Cameroon. Among the Beti of south Cameroon, for example,

a woman's inability to bear children, especially frequent miscarriages, is blamed on her; she is accused of harbouring in her belly a form of witchcraft call *evú* which has extensively been studied by the French anthropologist Philippe Laburthe-Tolra (1985).

Evú is one of the central concepts of Beti beliefs about evil and is particularly associated with the reproductive organs of women. Today people still draw on these beliefs to interpret a wide range of misfortunes. *Evú* generally refers to a physiological source of extraordinary power allegedly located in the stomach of some people. It allows them to do unusual things, especially to kill mysteriously from a distance (ibid.: 61; See also Hebga 1979: 88). The Beti generally represent it as a small animal (variously likened to a crab, a toad, a bat, an owl, scolopendra, etc) located in the belly (especially in the uterus or vagina) of its possessor. They claim that it can be exposed by a *post-mortem* performed by the *mingangan* (diviners). Such beliefs, one can see, echo closely Evans-Pritchard's (1937: 40) accounts of witchcraft among the Azande who also associated witchcraft power with *mangu* (witchcraft substance) supposedly located in the small intestine of witches. A possessor of *evú* is called *nnem* (pl.: *beyem*), a term designating somebody endowed with a special sight which enables him or her to access things hidden from the sight of ordinary people (Laburthe-Tolra 1985: 61). Indeed a *nnem* is believed to have four eyes. Although *évu* is generally associated with evil power, some authors have argued that it is fundamentally neutral or ambivalent in the sense that it can be used for evil or for good (Hebga 1979: 115). Laburthe Tolra insists that the dichotomy between a social (beneficial) *evú* and an anti-social (evil) *evú* is not adequate. For *evú* is always anti-social; only that in few cases, like those of healers, it is domesticated for the benefit of the whole group (Laburthe-Tolra 1985: 63).

Myths about the origin of *evù* blame its introduction into the human world on the mistakes of a woman who ended up with the strange organism in her vagina. Here follows the summary of a version of one of those myths. It says that in the beginning there was harmony between *Zambá* (supreme deity) and human beings. Death and *evù* were not a problem for human beings because *Zambá* could immediately bring back to life any dead person. *Zambá* had a woman and a grown up daughter. Every morning, *Zambá* will go to the forest and get game meat for the family. One day, before embarking on a long journey, he warned his wife not to have any dealings in his absence with *evú*, the evil animal living in the nearby forest swamps. But after his departure,

the woman did not heed his advice and went into the forest where she met *evú* who told her that he usually provides game meat to *Zambá*. The woman offered to take him back to the village so that he will continue to provide meat. *Evú* went through the vagina of the woman into her belly and was carried home. Upon arriving home, *evú* not only refused to continue to hunt but also to leave the belly of the woman. Besides, *evú* started feeding mysteriously on household animals. When there was no more goat or hen around he asked for the daughter of *Zambá* and his request was granted. As the result of this, *Zambá*'s daughter died and was buried by her mother in spite of *Zambá*'s command not to bury the dead in his absence. When *Zambá* returned from his journey he was so disappointed with the resulting mess that he decided to leave the human world for good. And since then *evú* and *awu* (death) prey on human beings. Important to note in this myth are, first, the portrayal of *evú* as a deceptive killer and second the special relation between the woman (especially her sexual organs) and *evú*. It is also believed that *evú* has the power to incarnate itself in an animal, especially an owl, through which it operates preferably in the night to destroy people goods, to make people ill or to kill. As a killer, *evú* is thought to be insatiably thirsty for human blood (ibid.: 77). This sort of mysterious cannibalism is believed to deprive the victim progressively of his or her vital energy until death occurs.

In most Cameroonian families today, infertility, because of the strong social stigma attached to it, is still a great source of anxiety. Most people will do all they can to solve the problem. As the preceding narratives suggest it is not infrequent to see women struck by sterility consulting Hebga for help. And most people would tend to believe that if they can't bear children, it is because somebody somewhere is tempering with their reproductive systems.

N9: Haunted houses: the mysterious boa (A woman in her late forties)

> Dear father, I am writing to you because I know God blessed you to help people. I am not lucky because in every house I have rented there have always been bad things. I do not see them. But my neighbours see those bad things, especially mysterious boas. I have been told the house I am building for myself here in Yaounde has already been spoiled with some mysterious things; you see, I will spent all my money on it but will not be able to use it. I will soon retire from my work and have nowhere else to go. I am an orphan and have never been married because I was spoiled (*bloquée*) in my village after the death of my parents, probably by my elder

> sisters who looked after me. I was still a child. My life is very complex and that is why I request your help. I have two children, a boy and a girl all living abroad. But they are unemployed. Father, please pray also for my daughter who is in France so that she may have children with her husband. Thanks!

The author of the above narrative draws mainly on witchcraft beliefs to explain why she is not married. She suspects her own sisters bewitched her when she was still a child and this false start seems to be the primary cause of all her troubles, including her haunted houses and the problems of her children. The use of the expression, 'I have been told' often suggests that the patient has consulted diviners.

Now I want to expand briefly on the theme of 'mysterious boas' which are believed to haunt houses and cause misfortunes (de Rosny 2002: 365–366). In Cameroonian cities, it is not uncommon to come across houses or buildings that nobody wants to rent because they are believed to be haunted by a variety of mysterious things including 'boas'. The anthropological literature on witchcraft in Africa often refers to widespread beliefs about witches or sorcerers who are thought to possess animal familiars which they manipulate for evil purposes (Turner 1968: 14–15; Ngubane 1976; Goody 1970). Among the Duala of coastal Cameroon, there is a form of witchcraft called *ékon* in which snakes play an important role. A witch or sorcerer is known among the Duala as a *mulemba* (pl.: *balemba*). He is a *mulondedi* (pl.: *Balondedi*), that is someone full of extraordinary powers. As the *beyem* among the Beti, the *balemba* are believed to have four eyes which enable them to 'see in the night', meaning to see beyond this ordinary world. The Duala believe there are three main forms of witchcraft: *lemba*, *ewusú*, *ekón*. *Lemba*, congenitally transmitted from parents (especially from women) to children, is associated especially with owls and praying mantis which are believed to act as messengers of the *balemba*. Twins are also believed to possess *lemba*. But their powers can be removed by means of appropriate rituals. As to *ewusú*, it is the Duala equivalent for *evú* that I have already considered among the neighbouring Beti. In what follows, I dwell on *ekón* which is the most dreadful form of witchcraft among the Duala.

Bureau (1996) notes that, among the Duala, *ekón* may have been seen originally as a *musima* (good luck) for it inspired respect and fear. One who possesses *ékon* is called *mot'ekón*. The Duala believe that every human being possesses two 'souls': the life-giving soul (*mudi*) and a second soul called (*edî*). Besides these two, a *mot'ekón* possesses a third 'soul' considered as a bad *edî*. The Duala also believe that to become

a *mot'ekón*, one needs to join a secret society in which human beings are mysteriously traded. For example, older members of the secret society would ask the one willing to join the society to offer a relative (preferably a close one) in order to have access to magical powers. The offering takes the form of a mysterious 'devouring' of the victim (especially the liver) which deprives him or her of the life-giving soul (*mudi*) without which the victim cannot enter the world of the dead. The 'devouring' causes the apparent death of the victim. After the burial, the 'eater' waits for an opportune moment (a tornado or a thunderstorm) to mysteriously unearth the body from the tomb and reunites it with the *mudi* of the victim. The latter regains some form of life but only to work as a slave for the enrichment of the witch (Geschiere 1997). Until today among the Basaa of Cameroon, after a burial in the village, the tomb of the deceased is guarded day and night for more than a week to prevent witches from stealing the body for witchcraft purposes, especially for the preparation of deadly poisons and other harmful magical devices. Given the macabre nature of these practices, a *mulemba* is seen as the first enemy of the society, the symbol of evil, the first suspect in every case of death. More importantly, a *mot'ekón* is believed to have the power to transfer his life-giving soul (*mudi*) into an animal which then goes out (especially in the night) to harm others while the body of the witch remains on his bed. In the course of the bewitchment process if anything happens to the animal it affects also the witch. The snake, either a boa (*mboma*) or a rainbow (*nyungu*), are believed to be among animals usually sent out by witches to 'eat' their victims. But it is also thought that witches have the power to transform themselves into animals, especially panthers, elephants, cats, and tigers. Against the background of this relationship between witchcraft and mysterious boas, it is understandable that the author of one of the above narratives claims her house is haunted by boas.

N10: Successive misfortunes or deaths (A woman in her early fifties)

> Father, I had five children and four of them have already died in the order in which they were born. The first born died when he was one year old. The second died when he was twelve, the third when he was 24, and I have ju $ lost my 12 year old daughter. I am here with the last born who is sick. It started with headaches when he was 5 months old; I do not know if it is a case of possession or of bewitchment (*envoûtement*) since people are saying that my husband signed a pact with the devil to sell the whole family (*pour livrer toute la famille*)…

In Cameroon in general, successive cases of death within the same family are highly worrying and generally triggers a delirium of suspicions and rumours about their cause. The author of this narrative is a mother who has already lost four of her five children and she is afraid of loosing the last one. She is not sure about the cause of these misfortunes: is it possession (a Christian theme) or bewitchment (a traditional theme)? She uses the expression 'people are saying' which suggests that either she consulted a diviner or her EM is influenced by rumours from relatives or friends about the cause of her tragedy. 'People are saying' that her husband made a pact with the devil (a Christian theme) to sell (traditional theme) the whole family. The theme of 'selling' one's relatives for power or money in the context of witchcraft practices has already been mentioned, when I was considering *ékon* among the Douala of the Cameroonian coast. It is a widespread belief among the Bantu and semi-Bantu people of south Cameroon. It is known as *famla* among the Bamileke of Western Cameroon and as *Djamba* among the Maka of Eastern Cameroon (Geschiere 1997; see also Ardener 1970; Brain 1970). On this, Geschiere and Fisiy (1996: 206) remark:

> A general name is *kupe* after Mt Kupe (100 kilometres to the north of Douala) which plays a central but mysterious role in these beliefs. The basic story, however, is nearly the same. These witches are no longer supposed to eat their victims as in older forms of witchcraft, but to transform them to zombies and put them to work. Often these witches are said to transport their victims 'lorries' to Mt Kupe where they have to work on 'invisible plantations'. Through Cameroon, Mt Kupe has thus become associated with mysterious, and suspicious wealth …The rumours about *ekong*, *famla* or *kupe* all seem to express a deep distrust of the new rich, who are supposed to owe their success only to a new form of hidden violence, breaking through the old communitarian restrictions

Geschiere and Fisiy seem to suggest in the above passage that the theme of 'eating' the victim has been replaced by that of transforming the victims into a source of labour for the enrichment of the witch. My own data lead me not to the conclusion that one theme has been replaced by another, but that both themes ('eating' the victim and 'selling' the victim) now coexist in the collective representations of Cameroonians. Writing on innovations in the domain of the cultural construction of illnesses, Olivier de Sardan (1999: 31) remarks that the emergence of new concepts does not necessarily happen at the expenses of old ones. There is room for coexistence, adjustments, modifications, etc. When the woman behind the above narrative speaks of rumours

about her husband alleged to have made a pact with the devil to sell the whole family, she is drawing upon floating bits and pieces of witchcraft beliefs to interpret her tragedy. These beliefs are not systematized and usually spread through rumours.

N11: Suspicious religious or social groups ('sects')

> 11.1. (A 25 year old man) Father, it is a pleasure for me to request some spiritual assistance from you. Since I obtained my *baccalaureat* [A level] in 2001, my academic as well as my spiritual life have not been successful. Two years ago, I was traumatized by members of a religious sect named '*la Parole Parlée*' who tried to mislead me…would you please advise me on how to win all my spiritual battles against the devil…
>
> 11.2. (A young man in his twenties) Holy father MH, I am writing to request your prayers for me and my family. From 1993 to 1995, my parents and I were members of a prayer group led by a man called '*Apôtre Paul*'. This man will pray over people and heal them, but these people will later die. He healed me from dermatological problems (eruptions all over my body). From 1995 to 2000, the year my father died, we were members of a different group called '*La voie du mystère*'; in this group, they will pray in tongues, interpret messages and prophesy. It is in this group that I finally had sex with my sister. After the death of my father, I left this group and that is when my troubles started. In October, I was in Mangen where your helpers, upon examining me, concluded that I was possessed. But when they laid their hands upon me I did not react like other patients. On the contrary, I fell in a deep sleep, something which generally happens to me anytime I want to pray. … Besides my many illnesses, nothing is working in my life: nobody likes me, even children are afraid of me…In my family, my maternal grand mother is a diviner and a healer (*voyante et guérisseuse*). She has led my mother to trust more in traditional healers (*guerisseurs*) than in God. I do not know if my family is the source of my many problems. Sorry for being this long, and thanks, Holy father, for giving me the opportunity to voice out my sufferings.

– *La parole parlée*: spiritual battle, devil;
– '*Prayer group of 'Apostle Paul'*': faith healing leading to death, he healed me, my father died;
– *La voie du mystère*: pray in tongues, interpret messages and prophesy, have sex with my sister;
– *Traditional religion*: grand-mother (diviner and healer), mother trusting more in traditional resources than in Christian resources.

> 11.3. (A lady in her fifties) Father, I have problems: For 15 years, I shared my life with a man who was a Rosicrucian (member of an esoteric

> movement call *Rose-Croix*). I left him when I came to know about it. And since then I always feel as if I was carrying a burden on my back or on my head; sometimes this burden moves down to my stomach; this makes my life miserable and unsuccessful (*toutes mes affaires sont bloqués*) and I see my life sinking slowly into death. Fortunately, I pray a lot and may be that is what is keeping me alive…

The three preceding narratives all have to do with people who at some point in their lives got involved with non-catholic groups which they now believed are the sources of their troubles. Such groups, Christian or non Christian, are all lumped together by Catholics as 'sects', which in this context carries a very pejorative connotation. Among Catholics, religious 'sects' are believed to be satanic. And priests would openly and constantly warn the faithful against joining them. It has to be said that these groups tend to recruit from mainline Churches and this of course is not appreciated by the leaders of the latter. In the first two narratives the 'sects' in question are respectively named *La parole parlée*, *Apôtre Paul* and *voie mytérieuse*. These must be some of the numerous tiny independent Christian churches which have appeared on the Cameroonian scene in the last two decades. Their founders are generally Cameroonians who claim to have been called by God to such a task. The author of the first narrative claims he was traumatized in one of these groups and requests help to win the spiritual battles in which he is involved.

The author of the second narrative gives more details about his troubles. He portrays the founder of the Christian group he joined as a strange healer: the people he healed went on to die. He and his relatives go on to join a different group, *La voie du mystère*, where they stay until the death of their father. In this group he had sex with his sister. All these troubling details are meant to underscore the dangerous character of the group. His problems really start when he decides to leave this second 'sect'. In the course of seeking a solution to his problems he is examined by Father Hebga's aides who diagnose him as possessed. But he is still puzzled because he did not 'react' when hands were imposed on him. This puzzlement has to do with symptoms generally associated with possession in the context of Ephphata: a possessed person is expected to 'react' (gesticulate, fall into a trance, shout) when he is tested. I will return to this in a latter chapter. But for now suffice it to note that with regard to these symptoms of possession, some patients do "learn to display the 'typical' clinical picture that the doctors are looking for" (Helman 1994: 6) in order to get serious attention. Going

back to the narrative, the patient ends up perplexed about the real cause of his problems: he is not sure whether it is really the result of his involvement with a 'sect' or the consequence of his relatives' involvement with divination and traditional healers. He claims that this has led his mother to trust more in *guérisseurs* than in God. His reading of the attitude of his parents suggests he opposes God to the *guérisseurs*, Christianity to traditional religion. Again, he is echoing here the official discourse of Catholicism which tends to be suspicious of divination and traditional healers.

The third narrative in this section expresses the distress of a woman who was once married to a Rosicrucian, a member of what is popularly known in Cameroon as *Rose-Croix*. Father Hebga has written extensively about the incompatibility between the teaching of this esoteric group and the Christian faith. Rosicrucian together with Freemasonry are perceived among Cameroonian Catholics as extremely dangerous secret societies. In the popular imagery they are accused of brainwashing their members for criminal purposes such as human sacrifices. They are believed to 'sell' their relatives in these esoteric societies for money and power. In an article entitled, *La franc-Maçonnerie gagne le palais présidentiel*, which appeared in an issue (19th October 2005) of the Cameroonian daily news paper, *Le Messager*, its author claims that the current heads of state of Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, Tchad and Central African Republic are all members of Freemasonry which ensures them a long stay in power. He claims that some of the huge sums of money embezzled by the ruling elite of these countries go into financial contributions to these esoteric movements. In the same issue of *Le Messager*, another article entitled *La république des sectes* examines the alleged link between affiliation with esoteric groups and social success in Cameroon today. Such articles on criminal esotericism in Cameroon echo beliefs widely spread among Cameroonians. The woman behind the narrative says that she left her husband when she found out that he was a Rosicrucian. The structure of her narrative suggests that she suspects a direct causal connection between her troubles and the fact that she was once married to a Rosicrucian. Expressions such as *Toutes mes affaires sont bloquées*, *Je suis bloqué*, *Rien ne marche dans ma vie* or *Je suis dépassé* besides indicating the utter despair of the patient generally implies, on his or her part, a suspicion of bewitchment.

N12: Seeking a visa for the West (a young woman in her early thirties)

> Dear father, I am a young mother of a three year old girl… In fact I have a problem with travelling abroad: I had an uncle living in Paris who had promised to my mother to make me travel. But he suddenly died last February without having fulfilled the promise. His wife took on herself the responsibility to do it. I started gathering the necessary documents and I have some of them at home. But now nothing is progressing (*je suis bloqué*), and I do not know why. The person who is supposed to help me get this visa does not seem reliable anymore. Father, I do not know what else to do (*Je suis dépassé*); please help me

For the woman behind this narrative to bring such a case to the attention of Fr Hebga shows how important to her is moving to Paris. This has to do with the African imagination of the West as a haven when at home everything is *bloqué*. Arjun Appadurai (1996) has written illuminatingly on how in the current global cultural economy people's dreams about a better life feed on floating images from imagined havens. Indeed, affected by the 'migrant syndrome', a large section of the Cameroonian youth of today constantly envisages migrating to the West. Many have actually attempted it via several routes including the Moroccan border which is often on the news. In its issue of 18th October 2005 the Cameroonian daily newspaper, *Le Messager*, reports about the repatriation from Morocco to Cameroon of 125 young Cameroonians who were attempting illegal migration to Europe. This 'migrant syndrome' obviously has to do with the ambiguities of the current global order (Hannerz 1992; 1996). In the present world order, money, science and technology appear to be the main means of empowerment. Only those who have access to these can benefit from the processes of globalization. Of the thousands of young frustrated Cameroonians who dream today of migrating to the West very few have the necessary financial means required for such an enterprise. As James (1995: 11) rightly puts it,

> Locality and region, distance and space, mean little except with reference to the means of access, transportation, communication and control or military surveillance and threat. Conversely, possibilities of evasion, concealment, invisibility and silence, or the maintenance of resistance in an active sense, depend on quite specific geographical and spatial relations. The technical wizardry of modern communications, whether aircraft, electronic or spy in the sky, has in one sense made the world smaller and more accessible: but accessible to whom?

The occurrence in narratives of such expressions as *Je suis bloqué* or *Je suis dépassé* implies that patients expect prayers to remove these blocks or obstacles supposedly erected by witches to prevent them from succeeding in life. Indeed during prayer sessions, many people seeking a Western visa come with their documents to be blessed before they are submitted to foreign embassies. The lucky ones who have obtained a visa come to have their passports blessed before travel.

N13: Guilty conscience following abortion or incest (a 28 year old lady)

> Hello, Father! Here are my problems: I was pregnant but did not give birth to the child. I aborted. And since then, my life has been hell. Nothing I undertake succeeds and all men I have gone out with end up cheating on me and leaving me. I have therefore decided to entrust my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I acknowledge the sin I committed. Father, I am coming to you to ask for forgiveness for my sin. I would like to have a husband and many children. … Please help me

The author of the above narrative seems to blame her misfortunes (unsuccessful life, the fact of not having a husband and children) on what she believed now was a terrible 'sin', that is the abortion she committed. This, of course, is a *post-factum* interpretation as she struggles to find an explanation to her miserable situation. She basically believes that this 'sin' brought on her a curse which is preventing her from finding a husband and having children. She hopes that by acknowledging her fault and undergoing a ritual of purification, her life will again become 'normal'. It is difficult to establish with certitude here whether her perception of suffering as a punishment for 'sin' is determined by the local traditional ideology or the Christian understanding of suffering as punishment. On the one hand, in many African traditions, misfortune is sometimes interpreted as the result of the breach of a taboo. The breach triggers the anger of ancestors or spirits and result in the punishment of culprits. This belief is widespread among the Bantu and semi-Bantu people of South Cameroon (Laburthe-Tolra 1985; Bureau 1996; Hebga 1979; Watio 1986; Kaberry 1969; Rehfisch 1969).

On the other hand, the understanding of suffering as divine punishment is also one of the competing interpretations of suffering found in the Bible (Bowker 1970; Melling 1999; John Paul II 1984). In a context where patients unconsciously tap from a variety of available anthropologies of misfortunes, it is not always easy to tell which interpreta-

tion is coming from where. I agree with Kleinman (1980: 109) when he writes: "An explanatory model is partly conscious and partly outside of awareness. … In responding to an illness episode, individuals strain to integrate views in part idiosyncratic and in part acquired from health ideology of the popular culture". In plural societies such as African postcolonial societies people are influenced in the construction of their misfortune narratives by several competing health ideologies.

N14: Repeated failures in school

As the following narrative shows, it is widely believed in Cameroon that somebody can be deprived of his intellectual abilities by means of bewitchment. People often speak of somebody having been chained in the village (*être attaché au village*) in the event of repeated failures in school. It is also believed that these abilities can be restored, that a 'tied' person can be 'untied' by means of appropriate traditional rituals or prayers. The narrative reads:

> Father, let me seize this opportunity to tell you my problems as a secondary school boy. Three years ago, before I came to see you I had already failed the lower six exam twice. But after my encounter with you that year I passed. After my success, I received a bottle of red wine from a woman, one of my father's wives, who is opposed to my progress for I belong to a polygamous family. From that time I began to lose my intellectual abilities. This year I decided to move to a different place but this has not solved my problems. In class, I can't follow the teacher properly and my results are very poor. Let me remind you again that I belong to a big family in which I am the most advanced as far as education is concerned. Please, help me so that I can pass my exam this year.

The author of this narrative, a young school boy in his early twenties who is not progressing in his studies, believes he was bewitched by one of his father's wives out of jealousy. It is the case that jealousy tends to thrive in polygamous families and is seen as one of the prime motivations of bewitchment. I will return later in this chapter to the 'logic' of accusation inherent in this narrative.

N15: Poverty

> Dear Father, can you help me address my problem? I am a young woman abandoned with 4 children. I have no job and I am sick. I would like to meet you to see if there is a way out through prayer. Thanks for your understanding.

This is the cry of a young woman abandoned by her husband. She has to cater for four children. She has no job and is sick. In other words, she is sick from poverty. Can prayer help her out? We are dealing here with a case of 'social suffering' defined in recent anthropological literature as "human problems that have their origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that social force can inflict on human experience. Social suffering results from what political, economic and institutional power does to people and reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems" (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1998: ix). It is not clear why the woman behind the above narrative was left by her husband. But with her four children she apparently does not expect any help from the social security. In Cameroon today, there is almost no social security provision for the destitute. Corrupt practices and the mismanagement of public funds rampant in the country have generated a lot of poverty. Women and children are the primary victims of these social evils since they are often economically dependent on the incomes of men.

The rate of unemployment in Cameroon is estimated at around 40 % and the number of jobless university graduates has increased greatly in the last ten years. Indeed, unemployment is one of the chief problems about which young people complain in their letters to Hebga. Many of them end up explaining their poverty or lack of prospects for the future in terms of bewitchment (*blocage*). This does not necessarily mean that they are not aware of the fact that social injustices are the primary cause of poverty in the country. But the other fact that in spite of all these constraints some of their peers do manage to secure a good job, tends to highlight the question of 'why me?' and to trigger all sorts of causal explanations among which witchcraft figures prominently (Benoist 1993: 12). Today's Cameroonian youth is confronted with a 'general uncertainty and unpredictability of life' (Pearce 1993: 152) and this atmosphere breeds anxiety and witchcraft suspicions. For single unemployed mothers, like the one in the above narrative, a case of sickness is likely to result in death because they simply cannot afford hospital bills. No money means no treatment, and no treatment means death.

Paul Farmer (1998: 271; see also Kielman 1997) argues for the need not to overlook the causal link between structural violence, poverty and health problem. He shows how in Haiti, for example (and this will also be true of many African countries), because of poverty generated by structural violence, women are forced into unwanted and unfavourable

unions which result in the spread of AIDS. In the same line of thought, but with special reference to Africa, Schoepf (1998: 229) remarks that "Globally, AIDS is a disease of development and 'under'—or 'uneven' development. It has struck with severity in nations with economies in crisis" (1998: 229). It is the case that many of those who cannot afford hospital bills usually turn to cheaper alternative therapies including faith-healing and traditional healing rituals. I am not in any way suggesting here that only poor people consult Hebga. His services are requested by people belonging to all rungs of the social ladder in Cameroon, from rich politicians or businessmen afraid of their potential or real enemies to poor single mothers seeking milk for their children. I now consider in the following section the issue of therapeutic pluralism inherent in many of the narratives.

Therapeutic Itineraries

N16: Multiple problems (a lady in her forties)

> Dear Fr Hegba, allow me tell you my problems: for two years now I have been through a terrible situation in my home. It started with pain in my feet; all the tests I did in the hospital came out negative. Later I started having problem with sleeping; every time I go to bed I feel as if there is something like a snake walking on me. But when I try to search for it, I do not see anything. I went to the hospital and did the tests again but nothing wrong was found. As one would expect any typical African (*comme tout bon Africain*) to do, I went to consult diviners (marabouts); everywhere I went, they accused my mother-in-law and my husband. When I told my husband about this, it became a serious issue between the two families. I even fled my home for about a month. When I came back home I asked a priest to come and say a mass and bless my home. He did it but nothing has changed. During the mass, he laid hands on me and I went into a trance. He left some holy water for me to use in the house. But every time it touches me I have a trance. Sometimes, I really have to struggle before I can drink it. … Please father, help me!

– *Therapeutic itinerary*: Hospital……..hospital…….diviners (*marabouts*)…….. a priest……..Fr Hebga….

She started with the hospital, then consulted diviners (she suggests in passing that going to diviners after the failure of Western medicine would be a normal step for a typical African), then went to a priest whose help was not satisfactory either. Now she turns to Hebga for further assistance.

N17: Breast cancer (A lady in her late forties)

> Father, please help my wife who is suffering terribly and is now admitted in the hospital where she is between life and death. It all started ten months ago when her left breast and left arm suddenly grew in size. Three months ago she complained of pains in her back and of the paralysis of her lower members. She was taken to the Chinese hospital in Mbalmayo where she underwent sessions of acupuncture which relieved her momentarily of her pains…Today her body is seriously in pains and she can't eat. She is slowly sinking into death. Doctors suspect breast cancer. But we are still waiting for the tests results. I am convinced that with your intervention something can be done for my wife for I suspect evil forces behind her sufferings. I look forward to your positive response…

– *Therapeutic itinerary*: Western medicine…….Chinese medicine…… Fr Hebga….

They have tried Western medicine, Chinese medicine, and now look forward to spiritual assistance. The fact that there is no mention of traditional medicine does not necessarily mean that they (or any of their relatives) have not consulted local diviners about the real cause of sickness. Most of the time spiritual assistance is concomitant with biomedical treatment, especially when it is a case of disease known to modern medicine. But, of course, the fact that people realize it is cancer or AIDS does not prevent them from inquiring about the 'why me?' aspect of the situation. This leads them to local diviners and eventually to spiritual healers.

N18: Psychosis? (A lady in her late thirties)

> My illness started in 1991 in Yaounde. I was watching TV when towards midnight my name suddenly appeared on the screen and I heard a voice ordering me to take off my clothes and to sit on the floor, which I did. And the voice told me that it was going to look after me as my dead father. …my family first took me to the Centre Jamot (psychiatric hospital), then to the diviners (marabouts), and finally to the Catholic Church …Let me add that I was baptised in the Catholic Church but later joined the Full Gospel Church when my illness started, for I thought I will recover there.

– *Therapeutic itinerary*: Catholic Church….full Gospel Church….psychiatric hospital….diviners….Fr Hebga…

N19: Possession (A young lady in her late twenties)

> Father, my problems started in 1996. At the time, I was living with my aunt in B… In the night, I dreamt of her putting something in my chest. When I woke up in the morning, I felt as if there was a burden at the level of my chest which was stifling me. I visited many diviners (marabouts) but found no relief. In 1997, I started praying at *college de la Salle*. I had already left my aunt's house after having been warned in a dream to do so. With prayers, there was a bit of improvement. In 1999, a cousin of mine took me to an exorcist in Cité Sic and it is there that they discovered that I was possessed by a legion of 29 demons headed by Lucifer and 80 of his ministers seeking to deprive me of my intelligence. The exorcist succeeded in casting out the legion but not Lucifer and his minister. In 2001, he told me that he had done all he could for me. I then went to see a catholic priest and he succeeded in casting out one demon, and it was my father. There is a scorpion in my throat, two demons in my sex. I am also possessed by my cousin, her husband and my former boss. Finally I have another demon in my left toe.

– *Therapeutic itinerary*: Catholic Church….many diviners….an exorcist…. Catholic priest…Fr Hebga….

The patient behind the above narrative claims to be possessed by a variety of entities which include demons (Christian category) and living relatives or acquaintances (traditional theme). In the next chapter, more will be said about the broadening of the range of possessors by Hebga to include some aspects of the local understandings of possession.

Returning to the issue of therapeutic pluralism, the above data seems to suggest that when dealing with a serious biomedical disease, patients who can afford modern medicine will first go to a hospital. It is when the hospital treatment fails to satisfy them that they start suspecting that it may not be a 'simple' sickness. At this stage, it depends whether they are staunch Christians or not. If they are, they will seek the prayers of a priest by having masses said for the patient for example; or they will consult a herbalist free from connections with traditional rituals. If they are not staunch Christians, they may first go to a diviner (*marabout* or *guérisseur*) before thinking of a priest. In fact,

> Certain types of illnesses are seen as best treated by certain types of providers. Broadly speaking, Western medicine is believed to be good for surgical problems, accident cases, and a variety of aches and pains. Problems of the mind, such as sleeplessness, bad dreams, and mental disorders, should be left to indigenous practitioners or prophets (Pearce 1993: 154; see also Janzen 1978: 8–9).

It sometimes happens that because of affiliation with different health ideologies (traditional, modern, Catholic, Protestant, Moslem) members of the same family adopt different interpretations of the same misfortune (Fardon 1990: 205). This conflict of interpretations results in a conflict of therapeutic proposals. This is true of many African societies where in the event of a serious illness, "Within the extended family, the structure of 'therapy management groups' allows input from a wide circle of relatives in connection with diagnosis, treatment and choice of providers" (Pearce 193: 151; see also Janzen 1978: 4).

There are also cases of concomitant multiple therapeutic recourses and various combinations are feasible. Some combine faith-healing with biomedicine. Others allow their patients to be treated at the same time both by a medical doctor and a traditional healer. The combination of Catholic faith-healing with traditional ritual healing is generally condemned by the leadership of the Catholic Church. But as the preceding analysis has shown, when cornered by a life-threatening situation many Christian patients tend to give priority to efficacy: whatever works seems welcome. Emergency situations involving the fear of an imminent death tend to command a 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]) that should not to be reduced to or confused with the practice of logic. Here efficacy seems to take priority over cognitive consonance. On this, MacGaffey rightly remarks: "The assumption that clashing meanings demand resolution, formally known as the theory of cognitive dissonance, remains unverified. In practice, people seem to tolerate high levels of cognitive cacophony" (1994: 244; see also Benoist 1996: 9; Werner 1996: 389).

The Logic of accusations

From my data, some of which have already been examined in the preceding sections, virtually anybody can be accused of witchcraft: a father, a mother, a wife, a husband, a colleague, in-laws, an uncle, a neighbour, etc. These accusations often appear to be a function of already tense social relationships (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Mary Douglas 1970). In other words, the person most likely to be accused of witchcraft in a situation of misfortune is somebody with whom the victim is already not in good terms. Let us consider the following case (a young woman in her thirties):

> Dear Father, this is my problem: in August 2003, I had a quarrel with my sister-in-law before I left for my farm to sow groundnuts. In the course of farming, I wounded my finger and since then I started loosing weight. I first went to the hospital and later on I visited local healers (*guérisseurs*). But still I am not yet cured. My daughter has brought me here for the first time to pray.

It is obvious that the narrator is establishing here a causal connection between on the one hand the quarrel with the sister-in-law and on the other hand the wounding of her hand and her subsequent general ill state. And it is no secret that in many marriages, relationships between the wife and the in-laws can be difficult. Here follows a second example:

> My name is… and I have too many problems. Mother of four, I am 34 years old and I weigh more than 100 kilograms. This is not normal and I feel I am suffocating. I can't walk properly. And it is people from my husband's family who are doing this to me. In my house, I often hear strange noises in the night. They are also coming after my children and my husband. His business is not progressing. And people often come to bewitch my children, to diminish their intelligence so as to make them stupid. They often fall sick. My husband planned to pay my bride price but my in-laws refused. Help me, I count on you.

In a polygamous family, for example, the other wives and their children are likely to be the prime suspects in case of misfortune. Writing on child-witches among the Bangwa of South West Cameroon, Robert Brain (1970: 167) underlines the pattern of tensions in polygamous families as follows:

> In a polygynous compound each wife has her own house, her own stores, her own farms, her own cash profits from trading. She forms with children a semi-independent corporate unit; such units compete against each other, particularly for the favours of the compound head. A strict etiquette is observed between co-wives, among whom the possibility of serious enmity is recognized. … The sense of disunity between half-siblings, and corresponding co-wife jealousies, find their wildest expression on the death of the compound head when mother and children units fight for property and for the succession of one of them to property and titles. These half-sibling antagonisms are reflected in many witchcraft accusations and confessions among children.

This reading of tensions leading to witchcraft suspicions or accusations is largely confirmed by the patients' auto-diagnosis appearing in the narratives I have gathered. Another narrative reads:

> I have suffered from various sicknesses in the last 18 years. I started with a dry cough which latter became asthma; then followed hypertension. A Sickness was 'thrown' into my body (on *m'a lancé une maladie dans le corps*): I often feel a lot of heat in my body like fire as well as pins and needles all over my body. I feel something moving up and down in my stomach. I have been to many hospitals; I have seen diviners and healers (*marabouts*), but still no relief. I am now here in Mangen where I have already been through two novenas. I often have night rapes and bad dreams. Last July, there was a witchcraft problem in my family which troubled me a lot …Please help me!

The author of the above narrative is a woman in her early 50s. In the written account of her problems there is no explicit mention of the suspect although the expression, '*on m'a lancé une maladie dans le corps*' is a clear indication that she believes the source of her ill state is witchcraft. In a relatively long conversation I later had with her, she told me that she had been separated from her husband for 18 years. Let's note that in the above story she mentions that her troubles started 18 years ago. Since the separation relationships with her husband have been very tense in spite of various attempts by the extended family to reconcile them. The prime suspect in this case is the husband who is said to have sold her to *Famla* (an evil secret society widely cited as source of misfortune in the Western part of Cameroon among the Bamileke). According to the woman her suspicions were confirmed by the many diviners she visited. Generally, diviners reconstruct the portrait of the alleged suspect from the elements provided by their clients. In other words, they play a crucial role in the process of identifying the person behind the misfortune of others. And most times, their conclusions are taken at face value especially when two diviners working independently arrive at the same conclusion on a specific case.

Given the importance of dreams as a space of revelation in these processes, some patients claim to have seen or battle with the culprit in their dreams before he or she was later identified by the diviner. With the current spread of ritual healing in Cameroon, exorcisms in Christian settings have become another *locus* of revelations about suspects. For example, the Catholic ritual of exorcism actually commands the possessor of the patient to reveal his identity. This ritual reads:

> I command you, unclean spirits, whoever you are, along with all your allies now attacking this servant of God, by the mysteries of the incarnation, passion, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the coming of our Lord for judgement,

> that you tell me by some sign your name, and the day and hour of your departure. I command you, moreover, to obey me to the letter, I who am a minister of God despite my unworthiness; nor shall you be emboldened to harm in any way this creature of God, or the bystanders, or any of their possessions.

The possessor is ordered to reveal his or her name and it is common to hear a patient in trance reveal names of dead or living people, and also of evil spirits. But in a personal conversation with Hebga about the veracity of these revelations, he cautioned against taking these names at face-value. Because at times, he claims, the devil can and does reveal names of innocent people in order to cause additional dissensions within families. That some patients are aware of the possibility of the disguise of witches is confirmed by the following narrative in which one patient (17 year old girl) claims that her father usually disguises himself as her dead sister to haunt her elder sister in the night.

> Father, here are my problems: we are a polygamous family. In September 1999, my mother gave birth to a child and my father refused to let her return home, threatening to hang himself if she did come back home. On year later he drove my brothers, my sisters and me out of the house. We went to stay with our mother. He is threatening to kill us with witchcraft. We have already spent a lot of money with the charlatans and there is a bit of improvement. He takes one the face of our dead sister to haunt my elder sister in her dreams, preventing her from succeeding in school …help us father to solve this problem

But in spite of Hebga's warning about taking the revelation of names at face value, patients often use them in the reconstruction of the portrait of the suspect as the following account suggests:

> Father, I am a 41 year old married woman, mother of 7 children. My illness started in December 1994. Since then, I have never recovered. My illness started with Typhoid, then followed heart palpitations; several diagnosis have been made: today it is rheumatism, tomorrow it is hypertension…I was on a spiritual retreat in M. last August. During a prayer session, Fr HM laid his cross on me and I reacted. He then told me that I was possessed. After a few questions from the priest, my colleague spoke in me (c'est *ma collègue de service qui parlait en moi*). I am a teacher in a kindergarten. My colleague said she had never hated anybody as she hated me and that she was planning to poison me. I do not understand anything in this possession thing. Since I arrived here in Mangen, she has stopped talking in me but I still react when the Holy Spirit is invoked or when songs of praise are sung, but I am feeling better

The author of this letter latter told me in a subsequent conversation that although this colleague did admit to the principal of the school that she hated her, she did not confess to being the one possessing her. But for the patient, the fact that her colleague 'spoke in her' was an irrefutable proof of her culpability. As the above case suggests, the suspect is not necessarily a family member. It could be a colleague, a friend, a boss, etc. But generally it is somebody you have interacted with and who has subsequently taken advantage of the interaction to bewitch you.

Another important factor in the identification of the mysterious cause of the misfortune pertains to the nature of the social interaction the victim was involved in before the first symptoms appeared. Let us consider the following two accounts:

> [From a 25 year old man] I am suffering since 1977. It is a case of epilepsy. I have been here and there with this sickness (*j'ai beaucoup marché avec cette maladie*), in hospitals as well as with indigenous healers (*se soigner à l'indigène*) and still have not found relief. Maybe it is because this illness was caused by my paternal uncle during my holidays in his home in 1977. He invited me at his place to provide me with school furniture and took advantage of that opportunity to bewitch me.

In this account, the fact that the epileptic crises of its author started immediately after his return from his uncle's place constitutes a sufficient reason for him to conclude that the latter is the cause of his misfortune. The temporal proximity of the two events constitutes here the most important factor. For him therefore, the generosity of the uncle was far from being genuine: it was simply meant to cover up his evil deeds. The other narrative reads:

> Father, my sickness started 2 years ago. First, I read a bad book…When I was doing my small business, a lady borrowed 9000 fcfa [local currency] from me but reimbursed only 3000 fcfa. As soon as I received those 3000, my madness started and has been with me up to this day. I have been treated by 4 diviners (*marabouts*) and a famous healer (*guérisseur*) in Batcham. After them, I went to the hospital. After a month of relief it started again and I was taken to Mangen.

The patient behind this story is a 16 years old girl suffering from a serious personality disorder which makes her loose control of herself. First she mentions the fact that her friends induced her into reading a bad book as a probable cause of her problem. But then another probable cause appears in the picture: the woman who borrowed money from her and later on returned only part of it probably bewitched her

since her madness started after she had received the money. The suggestion here is that those 3000 fcfa were most probably 'bad money', the means through which she was bewitched. But from the story, it is not clear which of the 'bad book' and the 'bad money' is the real cause.

As the preceding analysis shows, patients' narratives in Ephphata tend to 'juxtapose different kinds of knowledge' (Young 1982: 272) which are directly related to postcolonial cultural processes in Cameroon. The postcolonial subject in Cameroon draws on a variety of sources to face the challenges of daily life. This *bricolage* which results partly from the plural character of contemporary postcolonial Africa challenges ideologies of cultural authenticity or essentialism by portraying the postcolonial subject as a strategic actor handling multiple arenas (Werbner 1996).

CHAPTER THREE

A TYPOLOGY OF SPIRIT POSSESSION

In the preceding chapter, I focused on the dynamics of the patients' agency and highlighted the patching together in their misfortune narratives of different, and sometimes dissonant, cultural resources coexisting in the Cameroonian postcolonial context. In this chapter, I dwell on Hebga's agency as he mediates between normative discourses and popular needs. Considered from the perspective of his training, of his position as lecturer at the University of Yaounde and of his priestly status in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, Hebga belongs to the elite. But at the same time through his healing ministry he is constantly in touch with the grassroots. As mentioned in chapter one, he is also a staunch advocate of inculturation. By analysing Hebga's typology of possession, this chapter looks at the workings of his localizing agency as a 'cultural broker'. Drawing on his experience of African patients in general and Cameroonian patients in particular, Hebga distinguishes four categories of noxious possessors: spirits of the dead (*esprit des défunts*), genii (*génies*), living witches or sorcerers (*sorciers vivants*), and demons (*démons*). By so doing, he introduces local idioms of possession into the Christian system. This is not only to legitimate his sometimes criticized practice but also to make the problems of his patients meaningful and solvable within a Catholic context, precisely that of Charismatic Renewal. I also show in this chapter that compared with the North American Charismatic demonology (Csordas 1994) touched on below, Hebga's classification draws less on Western psychopathology and builds more on the experiences of his patients. Indeed both repertoires of evil spirits appear to be instances of localization. I argue that Hebga's fourfold typology of spirit possession is an instance of religious localization and cultural translation which diabolizes some aspects of African religions and cultures. In this sense, localization in the context of Pentecostalization seems to reverse the process of inculturation.

Traditionalists versus Rationalists

One of the enduring characteristics of Pentecostalism, whether Protestant or Catholic, is the 'Pervasive language of the battle against the forces of darkness' (Csordas 1994; Meyer 1998) which presupposes a dualist cosmology with on one side the forces of light headed by God and on the opposite side the forces of darkness headed by Satan. Evil spirits, it is believed, do not only cause people to sin but also can possess human beings. This belief can be traced back to biblical times. On this, a biblical scholar, William Barclay (1983 [1954]: 50; see also Stuhlmueller 1969) writes:

> The ancient world believed that the air was thickly populated with evil spirits which sought entry into men. Often they did enter a man through food or drink. All illness was caused by them. The Egyptians believed there were thirty-six different parts of the human body and any of them could be entered and controlled by one of these evil spirits. There were spirits of deafness, of dumbness, of fever; spirits which took a man's sanity and wits away; spirits of lying and of deceit and of uncleanness.

Jesus was a man of his time, a time when illness was often explained in terms of the affliction of the body by evil spirits (in ancient Greek, *daimonion akatharton*, literally translated unclean or impure spirit as opposed to clean or pure spirit [*daimonion katharton*]). Gospel stories often show Jesus successfully casting such demons out of people. Catholic Pentecostals' emphasis on the demonic affliction builds on official Catholic teaching about devils as personal beings and their ability to afflict people. But they have been accused by their detractors within the Catholic Church of focusing too much on the devil (Csordas 1994: 167). For example, Fr Hebga is sometimes accused by some of his colleagues of dangerously encouraging his patients to see the devil in just any misfortune. This accusation, which he obviously denies, is ultimately about the rationality of such beliefs in a modern context. As Barclay puts it, "On the whole, modern thought regards belief in spirits as something primitive and superstitious which men have outgrown" (Barclay 1983 [1954]: 50). Many critics of the practice of exorcism in the Catholic Church today argue that it does not make sense to transpose to the 21th century concepts of illness which belong to the 1st century AD. But although exorcism is still allowed and practised in the Catholic Church, the latter has sought to keep its practice by the clergy under strict control as the following section of the Law of the Catholic Church shows: "No one may lawfully exorcise the possessed without the special

and express permission of the local Ordinary [Bishop]. This permission is to be granted by the local Ordinary to a priest who is endowed with piety, knowledge, prudence and integrity of life" (The Code of Canon Law, 1983: art. 1172).

Another major challenge confronting exorcists in the Catholic Church today is the ability to integrate the findings of psychopathology in their practice so as not to confuse a psychological pathology with devil possession. This is one of the reasons why years ago Hebga spent time in Paris studying and applying psychopathology. To those who accuse him of reducing just any problem to demonic affliction he often responds that he is well aware, even more than some of his critics, of the differences between psychological disabilities and cases of demonic affliction. But as we shall see he also thinks that this distinction is not an absolute one. Responding to modern critics who hold that with the emergence of psychotherapy exorcism is out of date, he argues that his many years of experience in this field attest to the fact that exorcists sometimes succeed where psychiatrists had failed (Hebga 1982: 98). Hebga accuses the modern critics of exorcism of falling into the traps of psychological reductionism. In other words, he argues that it is one thing to take into account the findings of psychopathology so as not to confuse a neurosis or a psychosis with a case of devil possession, but it is another thing to reduce everything to psychopathology. For him, there are cases which do not fit into the categories of modern science and which have been successfully dealt with by exorcists. He even suggests that behind some cases of neurosis and psychosis, evil forces may be at work, meaning that the distinction is only relative.

This kind of conflict of interpretations, characteristic of most postcolonial African societies, is defined by Mudimbe (1988: 5) in terms of marginality:

> Marginality designates the intermediate space between the so-called African tradition and the projected modernity of colonialism … This space reveals not so much that new imperatives could achieve a jump into modernity, as the fact that despair gives this intermediate space its precarious pertinence and, simultaneously, its dangerous importance … It reveals the strong tension between a modernity that often is an illusion of development, and a tradition that sometimes reflects a poor image of a mythical past.

The implication of this marginality is that one and the same event can be variously interpreted depending on whether the interpreter sees himself or herself as a traditionalist, a Christian, a Moslem, a modernist

or any combination of these. For example, in the past few years, dramatic cases of trances have been reported in a number of secondary schools in Cameroon, each year in a different school. They affect mainly teenage girls and have occurred mostly in public secondary schools. In February 2005, during my fieldwork in Cameroon, in a space of two days about 40 girls from different classes went into trance in a public secondary school in Douala (*Lycée d'Akwa-Nord*). Whereas the principal of the school, followed by the psychiatrist of a local hospital, interpreted the event as the result of a collective crisis of anxiety, most students and their parents saw in these trances the effects of witchcraft practices within the school. Such situations generally lead to speculations and suspicions as to the identity of the culprits: students or teachers? In some cases, exorcists or traditional healers have been called upon for the ritual purification of the school.

Spirit Possession in Africa

Anthropologists have identified forms of spirit possession in almost every ethnographic region of the world. The amount of anthropological literature on spirit possession is dauntingly enormous. Janice Boddy (1994: 408), among others, has helpfully attempted a critical review of its theoretical frameworks. I limit myself here to a few terminological demarcations which set the stage for my analysis of the Christian repackaging of indigenous idioms of possession by Hebga.

With regard to terminological demarcations, Raymond Firth (1969: xi) distinguishes between spirit possession, spirit mediumship and shamanism. For him, although both spirit possession and spirit mediumship refer to a state in which "a person's actions are believed to be dictated by an extra-human entity which has entered his body or otherwise affected him", in spirit possession "his behaviour does not necessarily convey any particular message to other people", whereas in spirit mediumship "the emphasis is upon communication. The extra-human entity is not merely expressing himself but is regarded as having something to say to an audience" (ibid.). As to shamanism, he chooses to apply the term only to the North Asiatic phenomenon of mastering spirits for healing purposes. In their introduction to a book they edited on spirit mediumship in Africa, John Beattie and John Middleton (1969) seem satisfied with Firth's terminology. In 1971, Lewis published the first edition of his influential book *Ecstatic Religion* which, through a

comparative approach, attempts to construct a 'sociology of ecstasy'. Unlike Firth, he does not see the need to separate spirit possession from shamanism arguing that "shamanism and spirit possession regularly occur together, the shaman being essentially a master (or mistress) of controlled spirit possession" (Lewis 1989 [1971]: 8). His study seeks to develop a theory which explains various forms of religious expressions including spirit possession, spirit mediumship, shamanism and Christian mysticism, which he arguably lumps together as religious ecstasy. The main terminological contribution he makes is the distinction he suggests between, on the one hand, 'peripheral' possession cults which 'play no direct part in upholding the moral code' of their respective societies and, on the other hand, 'central' possession cults which, he claims, are 'sternly moralistic' (ibid.: 27). 'Peripheral' possession cults would include those 'cults of affliction' identified by anthropologists all over Africa (Ardener 1956; Turner 1968; Lewis 1969; Bureau 1969; Onwuejeogwu 1969; Colson 1969; Boddy 198; Lambek 1993; Janzen 1992; Lovell 2002; Hell 2002). His much debated theoretical conclusion on these cults, especially on the predominance of female membership, is that they represent an outlet for the politically downtrodden, an oblique means of protest against the dominant order.

Taking a critical stance towards Lewis' functionalist approach and De Heusch's (1965) structuralist perspective that she characterizes as 'instrumentalist', Boddy (1994: 410) argues:

> This model and its assumptions guided a generation of scholarship in which peripheral possession signalled personal and social pathology, eclipseing investigation of its wider social, cultural and aesthetic significances, and preventing possession systems from being discussed on their own terms. Instead, attention was directed to instrumental, strategic uses of consensual beliefs by socially disadvantaged (so-called status-deprived) individuals who, in claiming to be seized by spirits, indirectly brought public attention to their plight and potentially achieved some redress.

For Boddy, anthropological research on spirit possession is "characterized by a fundamental tension between reductive, naturalizing or rationalizing approaches on the one hand and contextualizing, more phenomenological approaches on the other" (ibid.). She argues for the need to pay more attention to experiential dimensions (transformation and embodiment) of spirit possession and sees her own study of the Zar cult (Boddy 1989; see also Lovell 2002, Lambek 1993, Csordas 1994) in post-colonial Sudan as a contribution to that line of research. Having touched on these theoretical perspectives (functionalist, struc-

turalist and phenomenological) guiding anthropological research on spirit possession, I now return to my own ethnographic context in order to describe a specific case of traditional possession which would be familiar to Hebga and his patients: *Jengu* Possession among the Duala.

I draw extensively on ethnographic data gathered by René Bureau (1962, 1968, 1996), a French anthropologist, and Eric de Rosny (1974), a French missionary, who both studied closely the possession cult of water spirits (sing.: *jengu*; plur.: *Miengu*) among the Duala people of the Cameroonian coast. In an earlier study by Edwin Ardener (1956: 93–95), these spirits are briefly mentioned among a neighbouring ethnic group. They are useful for my purpose not only because some of Hebga's patients do complain of *Jengu* affliction but also because, as we shall soon see, Hebga has sought to integrate them in his Christian typology of possessions.

For the Duala *Miengu* (*esprits / genies de l'eau* or *mamiwata*) govern rivers and seas and all they contain. They constitute an essential component of the hierarchy of religious powers. Bureau classifies these powers as follows:

Loba (sky or above: supreme deity)
Nyambe (divine protoancestor)
Bedimo (ancestors)
Miengu (spirits of the water)
Bato (human beings)

In terms of traditional beliefs, Duala people hold that their well-being and health is a function of the quality of their relationships with these supra-human powers. These relationships are mediated by a complex system of rituals. In situations of misfortunes, the Duala call on *Bedimo* and *Miengu* for help. Both *Bedimo* and *Miengu* look after the fecundity of women as well as the general well-being of the community; the fertility of the soil is the prime responsibility of the *Bedimo*, whereas the provision of fish falls to *Miengu*. So, fishing activities are closely associated with *Miengu* rituals: "The Duala might throw tobacco or food into the waters for them before fishing, and more afterwards if successful", notes Edwin Ardener (1956: 93). The history of *Miengu* beliefs and rituals is very difficult to trace. But surviving oral traditions seem to suggest that in the 19th century they were associated with a powerful esoteric society which was dissolved in 1879 by a local paramount Chief for reasons difficult to specify (1974: 211). The institutional framework disappeared but not the related beliefs and rituals.

Some *miengu* rituals portray all the features usually linked with possession 'cults of affliction' that anthropologists have studied in other parts of the world. Turner (1968: 15–16) who coined the term 'cult of affliction' described it as "The interpretation of misfortune in terms of domination by a specific non-human agent and the attempt to come to terms with the misfortune by having the afflicted individual, under the guidance of a 'doctor' of that mode, join the cult association venerating that agent." Janzen (1992: 2) argues that one of the limits of Turner's approach to these rituals is that it was 'largely ahistorical' partly because of the predominant 'structural-functionalist' paradigm of the time (see also Van Binsbergen 1977: 143). Janzen attempts a comparative study of some of these cults located in central and southern Africa and seeks to reconstruct their historical trajectories as well as their pattern of distribution. There are striking similarities between them and *Miengu* possession cults.

This is how Ardener (1956: 98) describes one of those rituals associated with water spirits among the Coastal Bantu of Cameroon:

> The sickness attacks a girl or woman, characteristically by causing her to faint over the fireplace, so that she knocks out one of the three stones (*masoso*) which are used to support the pots. A woman who has done this form of *liengu* then comes and addresses her in *liengu* language. If she shows any signs of comprehension, a *liengu* doctor is called and given a black cock, on which he spits alligator pepper; he then kills it and sprinkles its blood in the hole made by the girl when she knocked out the earth-stone, and replaces the stone.

After the diagnosis begins a period of therapeutic initiation:

> The patient then enters a period of seclusion. The *liengu* drummers are called on a fixed evening, the girl herself staying in an inner room, dressed only in a skirt made of strips of the bark of roots of the iroko tree, hung over a waist string. A doctor then makes her a vomiting medicine like described above, and she similarly produces black seeds, which are threaded on a string worn like a bandolier. The drummers stay all night and they and the doctor receive a fee. There are usually a number of visitors, especially *liengu* women, and these are given food. During the period of seclusion which follows the girl has a woman sponsor who teaches her the *liengu* language, and gives her a *liengu* name. She is subject to a number of conventions and taboos during this period. After several months, the *liengu* doctor is called again, and, in the darkness before dawn, she is picked up and carried in turn by men chosen for the purpose, until they reach the deep part of the stream, where the doctor pushes her in. Women who accompany them sing *liengu* songs, and the company try to catch a crab, representing a water-spirit. After

> this rite, the girl is regarded as a familiar of the water-spirits and one of the *liengu* women.

Today in Cameroon, what remains of *Miengu* beliefs and rituals exists in the postcolonial context alongside Christianity and other ritual alternatives.

It is obvious that *Miengu cults* met a strong opposition from Christian missionaries when they started work among the Duala in the early 1840s (Bureau 1962: 78). Missionaries were more than willing to tolerate herbal medication, but to what extent could the latter be isolated from the cultic dimension of the healing system of the Duala? Herbs and healing rituals were seen by the Duala as complementary forces in the single process of restoring life. Christian converts were not allowed to take part in traditional dances. The intention was to suppress the existing cultic life altogether since no dances meant no *Miengu* rituals. Since the *Miengu* were the owner and controller of life and power, of fecundity and success, of well-being and prosperity, abandoning them altogether would have meant for the Duala a complete reconfiguration of their worldview. The problem, of course, is whether Christianity could fill the ensuing void satisfactorily. The novelty in Hebga's approach to traditional ritual and beliefs, compared with Western missionaries, is that, like his patients, he does not only openly believe in the existence of witchcraft and *Miengu* but he has also sought to give them a Christian configuration so as to be able to deal with them without necessarily resorting to traditional rituals.

Charismatic Demonology

Hebga's localized typology of spirit possession builds on idioms of possession current in the Catholic Church. But, as we shall soon see, it is also influenced by a demonology characteristic of Charismatic Renewal as a working subculture within Catholicism. Concerning the nature of the entity that can possess somebody the terminology of the official doctrine of the Catholic Church has remained as close as possible to that of the Bible which speaks of 'Satan', 'devil', 'demon', 'evil spirit' and 'unclean spirit' without further specifications. It is understood that 'Satan' is like an army chief with a score of demons or evil spirits under his command. Occasionally, personal names of evil spirits are specified: Lucifer, Beelzebul, Asmodée, etc. To refer to possessing evil spirits, the

Catholic rite of exorcism uses additional categories such as 'dragon', 'roaring lion', 'beast', 'fallen and apostate tyrant', 'enemy', 'transgressor', 'seducer', etc. One of the paragraphs of the ritual reads:

> I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every satanic power of the enemy, every spectre from hell, and all your fell companions; in the name of our Lord Jesus + [patient signed with the sign of the Cross] Christ! Begone! And stay far from this creature of God. + [another sign of the cross]. For it is He who commands you, He who flung you headlong from the heights of heaven into the depths of hell. It is He who commands you, He who once stilled the sea and the wind and the storm. Hearken, therefore, and tremble in fear, Satan, you enemy of the faith, you foe of the human race, you begetter of death, you robber of life, you corrupter of justice, you root of all evil and vice, seducer of men, betrayer of nations, instigator of envy, font of avarice, cause of discord, author of pain and sorrow, why, then, do you stand and resist, knowing as you must that Christ the Lord brings your plans to nothing?

One of the main characteristics of Charismatic Christianity is the heightened consciousness of the presence and action of evil spirits in the world, especially in human lives.

As mentioned in chapter one, Hebga's first encounter with Catholic Charismatic Renewal took place in the USA, the birth place of the movement. In his influential study of Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the USA, Csordas (1994: 181–188) treats Charismatic demonology as a form of 'collective representation' with ethnopsychological and cosmological dimensions. The North American demonological landscape shows the personification, as devils, of negative emotions, behaviour, and thought patterns constitutive of the local psychopathological repertoire. Such a classification of demons is also an instance of localization: in the North American repertoire (more than in the African repertoire as we shall soon see) most evil spirits appear to be a personification either of psychological disabilities known to psychiatrists (Anger, Grief, Guilt, Addiction, Depression, Perfectionism, Addiction, Schizophrenia, Fear, Paranoia, etc.), of sins in the Christian sense of the term (Pride, Jealousy, Lust, Sexual impurity, Lying, etc.) or of non-Christian religions or cults (Rosicrucianism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnessess, Horoscope, Spiritism, etc.). Besides, North American Charismatics seek as much as possible to "complement healing with both psychotherapy and spiritual direction, a move aided by the growing number of sympathetic Christian psychotherapists in Charismatic networks" (ibid.: 168). But this does not mean simply collapsing the difference between the two healing systems, for they are built on different cosmologies. Csor-

das (1994: 188) describes the dualist cosmology behind Charismatic demonology as follows:

> Each name is explicitly the personal name of a spiritual being, a demon under the command of Satan. The relation among terms reflects the social organization of the "Kingdom of darkness" against which Christians are engaged in a deadly "spiritual warfare." The existence of demons as active, intelligent, evil beings in a spiritual realm definitively differentiates the demonology from any mere list of human emotions, and does so in a way that culturally validates a distinction between deliverance and psychotherapy as systems of healing practices.

Another dimension of localization which appears in North American Charismatic demonology is the ethnic distribution of devils, meaning their classification according to which kind of evil spirits tend to affect which kind of ethnic group. North American Charismatic healers claim that Irish are more associated with Guilt and Anger, Blacks with Hatred and Bitterness as an aftermath of slavery, Hispanic and Orientals with ancestral spirits, Italians with Evil Eye and Curse, Sicilians with Murder, Portuguese with Father's Curse, Haitians with Voodoo and Black Magic, Germans with Legalism, American with Nationalism or Emotional deprivation, etc. It is obvious as Csordas remarks that "To a great degree these 'empirical' reports reflect North American ethnopsychology of ethnic stereotypes" (ibid.: 187).

Hebga's Typology

Hebga distinguishes four categories of possession, with the nature of the possessing entity functioning as the discriminating factor: spirits of the dead (*esprits des défunts*), genii (*génies*), living witches or sorcerers (*sorciers vivants*), demons (*démons*). Although Fr Hebga acknowledges the ambivalence of some of these possessing entities, his working principle is that apart from the Holy Spirit nothing else should be allowed to possess a human being. That is why, as we shall soon see, they are all indiscriminately cast out. Hebga holds that with regard to the relationship between possession and psychopathology two extremes views are to be avoided: one is to make evil spirits the cause of all misfortunes (to see the devil everywhere); the other is to fall into the trap of positivist rationalism which reduces everything to psychopathology. In this section each category of possession is treated separately with an emphasis on how it is identified and dealt with.

Possession by the Spirits of the Dead

In many African societies, people maintain ritual ties with their dead relatives. This is the case with many ethnic groups in Cameroon (Maillard 1984; Fardon 1990; Pool 1994; Banadzem 1996). In the anthropological literature on spirit mediumship in Africa the dead appear indeed as one of the entities that can possess people (Field 1969; Colson 1969; Bloch 1971; Schoffeleers 1977; Lan 1985; Lambek 1993; Sharp 1999; de Souza 1999). It goes without saying that the social and cultural function of these possessions varies from one context to another. For example, whereas in Zimbabwe or Madagascar the spirits of the dead use their mediums to transmit morally binding messages to the living, among the Bijagós Islanders (Guinea Bissau) they possess women for the purpose of initiation. Within Catholicism, possession by the spirits of the dead is a category found only in Charismatic demonology and not in the official terminology. This points to the fact that such a category is born out of contacts between Western Christianity and non-Western cultures. As alluded to earlier, even when Csordas refers to the ethnic distribution of devils in the North American Charismatic demonology it is manifest that ancestral spirits tend to be associated with Hispanics and 'Orientals' (1994: 187).

In the field, I witnessed a number of exorcisms in the course of which the possessor identified himself or herself as a deceased relative of the patient. When asked about the why of the possession, the alleged possessors often gave some of the following reasons: impede the social and intellectual progress of the possessed, infest their reproductive systems through night rapes, find a secure abode, etc. However, some of these possessors also claimed to be benevolent, and when summoned by the exorcist to leave the patient, they protested that they were not out to harm the possessed but to give them divining powers or protection. For the purpose of illustration, here follow two examples of possession by spirits of the dead: the first from my own field notes and the second from Hebga's ethnographic notes (Hebga 1982).

Case A. Maleficent spirit of the dead

Calvin is a fourteen year old boy, a baptized Catholic and a form two student in a prestigious Catholic secondary school in Yaounde. Here follows excerpts of an interview I conducted with him in Mangen about his possession crisis:

> My illness started three years ago. I was living in the village with my mother and my maternal uncle. One day, my mother asked me to go and fetch water for her. At the same time my uncle asked me to go and buy cigarettes for him. I did not know whom to obey first and both of them started an argument at the end of which my uncle said that since they cannot both have me, they will both lose me… Soon afterwards I started suffering from epileptic fits…My mother took me to a diviner who told her that it was my uncle's doing. … My mother died soon afterwards. During my first stay in Mangen, my uncle was driven out of me (*on a fait sortir mon oncle de moi*) and I was told that I was delivered. I went back home and two days later my uncle committed suicide. … And soon after my crisis restarted and were even more violent than before. … I was brought back to Mangen and there again was my uncle speaking in me. After his death, he returned to possess me. He says that he will not leave me until holy water is sprinkled on this tomb. He also says that it is a way of taking his revenge on my mother who, in the other world, is insulting him saying that he will be severely punished for the evil he did on earth. … He says that I should not go to Mangen because it is a dangerous place for him.

In the preceding testimony, Calvin sees possession by his uncle as the main cause of his epileptic fits. Interestingly, the quarrel between his mother and his uncle, which started in the village, is seen as continuing in the other world. The key causal element here is jealousy. In other words, Calvin claims that jealous of his intelligence, his uncle, both before and after his death, is resolved to prevent him from progressing in school. On this, another section of the testimony is more explicit:

> When I am being exorcised these days, my uncle claims that it is not his fault if he possessed me. He says that he was misled by others. He says that originally he wanted to bewitch his own children (*donner ses propres enfants dans la sorcellerie*), but that it was refused. They told him that they wanted only the intelligent one, his sister's child. He says he regrets it and that if my mother stops threatening him, he will leave me. … During one of the recent sessions, he asked the priest to allow him to go into the bodies of his own children (*entrer dans le corps de ses propres enfants*). But Father refused and told him that they were not his children but the children of God. … He complained that I only had mass said for my mother and not for him. He says that where he is he is suffering a lot. … Recently I was taken to the hospital and doctors found out that there was something wrong with my brain… I am sure they are the ones who wounded my brain. … He says that I should stop going to school. When I was in primary school, I was always the 1st in my class. It is often when we are about to reopen that my crisis intensifies…

Often, several sessions are needed to complete the deliverance of a patient. As we shall see with subsequent cases they can be physically

demanding mainly because of the violent movements of the patient during prayer sessions. As the next case shows, some dead possessors claim to be beneficent, but their goodness is never taken for granted by exorcists.

Case B. The 'beneficent' possessors of Marianne (Hebga 1982: 108–109; my translation).

> Marianne is a young sickly girl. She has already been operated upon thirteen times. Aided by a group of nuns I decided to subject her to a spiritual therapy. Upon reading the gospel passage about the crowning of Jesus with thorns followed by the imposition of the cross, she starts a trance and voices begin to come out of her.
>
> '*This girl, claims a male voice, is not doing what she was sent to earth to do, namely to cure people with herbs that we showed her in dreams. She is selfish and spiteful; she does not pray anymore as she used to do. She does not go to mass, but instead goes to talk to the river. We are not happy with her!*' 'Who are you?', I ask them. '*Saint Paul*', he replies. '*We are many of us in her: her grandfather, her uncle, her mother and I. I am not a devil*'
>
> It was clear to me that this man who had died in 1974 could not be Saint Paul. He explained to me that during the long period sickness preceding his death, Marianne alone took care of him. And after his burial she regularly swept around his tomb and prayed there. The deceased members of the family were reproaching her selfishness, her spitefulness, her refusal to cure others, her obsessive desire of health, her return to the cult of the river, her neglect of Christian practice, etc. This male voice often joined us in prayer and sang with us to Jesus. Then came a female voice, that of Marianne's deceased mother. She started speaking in the local language when the head of the group of possessors interrupted to ask her to speak in French because Father [Hebga] did not understand their language. … The possessors told me that they did not want Marianne to get married but to serve God and human beings just like nuns do. Another of their many requests says: '*my daughter, empty a bottle of liquor on the tomb of the patriarch*'. I then shouted, 'No way, you want her to sacrifice to genii?' '*No*, they reply, *it is not a sacrifice. Father, help her to do good and to abandon spitefulness.*' As I oppose the sacrifice, they do not insist. They join us in singing and soon after, the girl regains her consciousness. We tell her about the concerns of her dead relatives

It is interesting to notice that in this second case, the possessing spirits vehemently protest that they are not devils and should not therefore be treated as such. They do want the girl to 'do good' and to 'be good'. They even join Hebga and his aides in prayer. We are obviously not dealing here with devils in the traditional Christian sense of obnoxious

spiritual beings. Hebga does acknowledge the ambivalence of these spirits of the dead, an ambivalence which is characteristic of many spirits which inhabit the invisible realm of African religions.

Possession by Genii (génies)

Genii are a category of spiritual beings difficult to describe with precision. They are often associated with places like rivers, forest and mountains. In this category, Hebga puts entities such as the *miengu* (water spirits) discussed earlier, the *Vodhun* deities of West Africa (especially Dan, the snake and *Legba*, the evil one), the *kirkinsi* (forest and mountain spirits) in Burkina Faso. He would probably also include in this category other possessing spirits such as *zar*, *bori*, etc. that anthropologists have studied elsewhere (Lewis 1969; Boddy 1989). Again, within the Charismatic context, this seems to be a category of possession proper to African cosmology. Nevertheless, Hegba suggests that a probable reference to such entities in the New Testament may be found the following passage:

> Finally, build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power. Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age. So put on God's armour now! Then when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy's attacks; and after fighting to the end, your will still hold your ground (Ep 6, 10–13).

As a number of anthropologists (Meyer 1998; van Dijk 1998) have shown, the demonization of African cosmological and spiritual entities is characteristic of Pentecostalism in Africa.

The case described here below is a scene of exorcism that I witnessed and during which the alleged possessors identified themselves as *mamiwata* (water spirits). They claimed that they had been invited into the patient, a secondary school girl, by the Queen of the sea to endow her with the gift of divination. These spirits wanted the girl to work with them, which implied stopping her education and practicing as a diviner. It took several sessions to exorcise her and before leaving the patient, her possessors confessed that they had taken advantage of her fragile psychological state resulting from the separation of her parents to settle in her. I describe in what follows only the session during which they identify themselves as spirits of the water.

Case C. Mireille's water spirits

The session was conducted by two of Fr Hebga's lay aides during a Charismatic weekend in Mangen. The sixteen year old girl was made to sit on a bench in one of the workrooms. She was given some holy water and some salt. Then a passage from Mark's Gospel (16, 15–18) was recited over her. When one of the intercessors reached the following verse, 'they will drive out demons in my name', the girl shouted:

'*No! Leave us alone!*'
'Who are you?', they asked.
'*We want to help her.*'
'Who are you then!', the intercessors insisted! (No reply) 'Ah! You do not want to talk! Get out!', they added.
'*No! We are in our house!*'
'No, this girl is not your house. You are preventing her from continuing her studies. You are evil. Leave her alone', shout the intercessors.
'*Not we do not want to harm her, we want to help her*!', the voice replies.
'How many are you and what are your names', the intercessors asked.
'*We are three of us and we do not have names.*'
'Bunch of liars, you have names. Let the fire of the Holy Spirit burn you!'
'*Please have mercy on us! You are burning us! We do not have names. We were invited by somebody else to live in her.*'
'Who are you then?'
'*We are the spirits of water.*'
'Who invited you?'
'*The Queen of water*' (*Reine de l'eau*)
'What is her name?'
'*She did not tell us her name.*'
'If you do not cooperate, we will send you more fire. What is her name and why did she invite you?'
'*She wanted us to help this girl with the gift of divination so that she can work for her.*'
'Oh, no! She does not need it. Do you understand?'
'*Yes, we do!*'
'Now, take all your belonging, anything you brought with you, and get out!'
'*That is what we are doing!*'

Suddenly the girl calms down and gradually emerges out of her trance. She is sweating all over. She is made to sit.

As mentioned earlier, the belief in *Mamiwata* is a widespread collective representation in the southern part of Cameroon, especially among

coastal people. In another case of exorcism by Hebga, the possessing spirit identified itself as the 'totem of the family.' This has nothing to do with totemism in the traditional anthropological sense of the term. In Western Cameroon, it is a popular term associated with the world of the dead, especially ancestors, but remains a rather vague and indeterminate category. Fr Hebga chooses to classify it as a genius. During this session the spirits resisted Hebga's attempt to demonize them by arguing that they wanted to help the girl in exchange for her attention. What made Fr Hebga's doubt their goodness is the fact that they did not want the girl to marry or to progress in school.

The features of the above exorcism are typical of deliverance involving an afflicting spirit in a Charismatic setting. It crystallizes the idea of 'spiritual warfare' between the forces of evil (spirits afflicting the patient) and the forces of good (Fr Hebga, Jesus Christ, the Cross, Archangel Michael, the Word of God, Rosary, etc.). A fuller picture of this dualist cosmology will appear in the next chapter when I look at Fr Hebga's interaction with a variety of patients in the spiritual centre of Mangen.

Possession by Living Witches or Sorcerers

This is the most common form of possession I encountered during my fieldwork. The analysis of misfortunes narratives in the preceding chapter showed that witchcraft beliefs are still widespread in Cameroon and that they have easily adapted to the postcolonial modern setting (Geschiere 1997). Since most people in Cameroon look at witchcraft as evil, the Christian demonization of witches and sorcerers does not appear to meet any major cultural resistance. In other words, African Christians have no major difficulty representing witches and sorcerers as agents of the devil. Fr Hebga's classification encourages this line of thinking and departs from early missionary approaches only in the fact that he actually believes in the existence of witchcraft and has attempted a philosophical argument on its plausibility, an argument to which we will return later in the book. Disclosing their identity during deliverance sessions, some possessors claim to be living relatives, friends, colleagues, etc. of the patient. Most of the time, these are people with whom the patient has or had some acquaintance. Imagine a woman who suddenly finds out that she is possessed by her father or her best friend. It goes without saying that such disclosures often lead to serious relationship crisis. Here follows an example that I witnessed during fieldwork.

Case A. A 15 year old teenager

Fr Hebga takes out his crucifix and places it on the cheek and the ear of the girl. Then he starts praying: 'Behold the cross of the Lord! Begone, you adverse powers! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has triumphed, the rod of David'. The girl becomes restless and falls into a state of trance. Fr Hebga is assisted by 5 of his lay aides (4 men and a woman) who are struggling to subdue the girl. They managed to hold her still on a bench. Father Hebga keeps on summoning the alleged possessor.

Hebga: 'Satan, you are such an idiot. Whoever you are, your days are numbered. Dirty thing! (*talking to his assistants*) Give her some holy salt and holy water to drink.'

The girl is resisting and is shouting. Holy water and salt are forced into her mouth.

Hebga: (*pressing the crucifix on her chest*): She must drink it and you, servant of the devil, are going to perish. She is going to be delivered from your claws. Dirty thing! You are going to leave this girl alone; you will perish; you will be buried. In the name of Jesus she will be healed (*pressing the crucifix on her mouth, then on her chest*). In the name of Jesus Christ she will be freed. (*Fr Hebga himself is sweating!*) Let those who are persecuting her die! Let them rot beneath the earth! (*The girl is still held on the bench by his assistants who are joining in prayer*). At the name Jesus, every knee shall bow; Lucifer shall bow; witches shall bow. You, old wretched witches who are infecting God's children with AIDS and other diseases! You pretend that you are strong? If you are, come and attack me, instead of attacking minors. (*He reverts to Latin formulae*) Jesu! Jesu! Jesu!

Hebga takes a short break and girl is made to sit. Then after a few minutes, the session resumes.

Hebga: Give her some holy water to drink (*She is given water by one of the assistants*.)

Hebga: how do you feel?

Girl: I am confused! I have headaches!

Hebga (*laying his hands and the crucifix on his head, he recites the Gospel passage of the crowning of Jesus with thorns before the concluding prayer*): Lord, free the head of this girl of every weight. Let her continue her studies in spite of the jealousy of witches. Lord, shame them! It is Jesus who is the ruler of heaven and earth. Yes, they will perish! (*The girl becomes restless again and is shouting*).

Girl (in trance): give us some time, we are going to depart; you are burning us!

> Hebga: No! You are going to leave now! I do not negotiate with witches. Who are you, in the first place?
>
> Girl: I am her grandmother! Please do not harm me. I will leave. Give me time to take my belonging and I will leave.
>
> Hebga: Finally you are talking. You must depart now! If not, you will perish! (*pressing the crucifix on her chest*) Behold the cross of Jesus. At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow. Jesu! Jesu! Jesu! I command you wretched witch, in the name of Jesus, depart from this girl! (*The girl looks exhausted and falls asleep*) It is enough for today. Let her rest.

In the context of *ephphata* trances are almost always interpreted as a sign of possession, especially when they are provoked by prayer or the presence of any other sacramental such as holy water. During deliverance sessions, as in the above account, bodily reactions of patients (shouting, crying, howling, groaning, etc.) often taken to mean that the possessing entities are tormented by the battle tools (holy water, name of Jesus, various litanies, crucifix, etc.). Indeed, when a patient goes into a trance, he or she is considered by the healer as a different personality and is impolitely and harshly treated as an intruder. Patients often speak of the effect of the cross on their bodies in terms of 'burning' and 'crushing'. In another account of a case of exorcism, Hebga (1982) claims that as he was touching the patient with the crucifix his pains were moving from one part of the body to another, thereby suggesting that to escape the effect of the crucifix the spirit embodying the pain tried to move to other parts of the body. These bodily reactions are readily interpreted as proofs of the superiority of Christ's power and as signs of his forthcoming victory over the intruder. More will be said about these battle tools in one of the following chapters.

In some cases Hebga takes the trouble to travel to the village of the patient to threaten the suspected witches. One of these cases is that of Beatrice. Beatrice is a secondary school girl of about 18 years old who, according to her teachers, has been the subject of frightening fits for more than a year. She howls, refuses to go to class and often bursts out laughing. Sometimes her body stiffens, her eyes start out of her head and this makes her suffer a great deal. Beatrice's entourage suspects it is somebody in her village who is tormenting the young girl. So, Hebga and his collaborators decide to pay a visit to her village. He writes:

> My collaborators and I went as far as travelling to the village of Beatrice to threaten witches who were priding themselves on having subdued her.

> After a long meeting with the alleged culprits some of them showed no sign of backing down. We prayed to the Lord asking him to make these wicked people unable to harm the innocent girl any further. And we left. Two weeks later some of the suspects in this sinister saga fell sick with the result that I was threatened by one of them, an old damned fool who had boycotted the meeting in the village. After all these steps, the overall state of Beatrice seemed to improve. She wrote me a letter of thanks telling me that her crises stopped after my stay in the village and that she passed her exam. This whole saga seems to confirm that behind hysteric manifestations there can be an evil influence; for this reason it is necessary to back up an ordinary therapy with a spiritual cure (Hebga 1982: 105–106; my translation).

It also happens that suspects in a case of bewitchment or possession are called upon to meet with Hebga, especially when they are denying the accusation. And since suspects almost never accept the blame, Hebga would generally not confirm any suspicion but simply promise God's punishment to the possessing witches or sorcerers in case they do not withdraw. The allusion in the above story to the fact that one of the suspects in Beatrice's case fell sick implies that Hebga sees a causal relation between his stay in the village and the falling sick of this culprit.

Possession by Satan or Demons

Hebga argues that contrary to popular claims, cases of full possession (in the Catholic sense of the term) are not all that common (Hebga 1995: 11). Of course, in Hebga's entourage, this effort of terminological demarcation is the privilege of only a few. Most of his patients and some of his aides tend to see the devil everywhere. During my fieldwork, I did not witness any case which was diagnosed as one of full possession. For this reason, the case of Raïssa described below is taken from Hebga's own ethnographic notes which, I believe, are reliable. I only quote sections which refer to elements characteristic of a typical case of full possession.

> The first time Raïssa [a secondary school girl] came to see me she was accompanied by a mate and a few relatives. … The exorcism of Raïssa lasted for six hours and left us exhausted. As soon as I made a sign of the cross on the girl, she collapsed. But when she stood up she started beating us. Although we were six adults present it was not easy for us to subdue her. She spat on my face, bit my hand and claimed that I was afraid of her. When following the ritual I asked the names and the number of possessors, she laughed at me mockingly… I presented the

> crucifix to Raïssa commanding her to look at it. She turned her eyes away from it and closed them. I placed it under her nostrils asking her to breathe 'the good smell of Christ'. She grimaced and sighed with distaste: '*Hm! Hm! Hm! He is stinking! He is stinking! I prefer my own smell.*' I showed her again the crucifix, ordering her to adore Jesus in front of whom 'all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below fall on their knees.'
>
> She sneered saying: '*That coward of yours! He [Jesus] abandoned his brothers and ran to his father!*'
>
> I insist: 'Adore him'
>
> '*No! I say no! Let him adore me too!*', she replied
>
> When my aides were singing 'praise God, and sing his name', the possessor parodied: '*Praise demons!*' I showed her an image of Saint Michael crushing Satan under his feet. The voice in her said: '*Michael is a coward! He gave up! I will never give up!*' But when I showed him an image of the Virgin Mary, she did not blaspheme. … Presented with images of Christ, Saint Michael, he howled like a trapped beast saying: '*Stop it! It is crushing me! I am exhausted. You are cruel, worse than criminals*' … From time to time, Raïssa relaxed, cried, called on her dead mother, named two of her uncles who, she claims, wanted to kill her. When we were all exhausted, we stopped the session. She would then sleep deeply for at least half an hour (Hebga 1982: 115; my translation)

According to Hebga's diagnosis, this is a case of demonic possession in the biblical sense of the term. This kind of interpretation is based on features such as blasphemous language, hostile reaction to sacred things, tough resistance, etc. Hebga, as already mentioned, also argues that psychopathologies and possessions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They can coexist in the same person since it is believed that the devil generally takes advantage of people's psychological or physical weaknesses to subdue them.

Hebga's demonology which lumps together witches, sorcerers, spirits of the dead and genii as evil entities is not unproblematic, at least from the local perspective. Such a lumping together, common in mainline Christianity and in Islam (Lewis 1969: 190; Hutchinson 1996: 311; Bureau 1968: 171–172), undermines important distinctions inherent in local collective representations, and constitutes a potential causal factor in the selective reception of normative religious discourse at the grassroots level. For example, among the Duala of Cameroon the *miengu* spirits, briefly discussed earlier, but which Hebga classifies as evil entities, have very little to do with evil or witchcraft, at least as far as the local perspective is concerned. On the contrary, they are seen by Duala

fishermen as benefactors of the community, as providers of fish for the well-being of human beings. Indeed, with regard to the world of spirits in Africa,

> The beneficent aspect of traditional spirit cults…has important implications. It means that the cults are very widely regarded as auspicious, very different from the more nefarious activities associated with sorcery and witchcraft, with which all spirit cults have often been indiscriminately classed by Europeans. In fact they often form, as it were, the established religion of the communities which have them, and far from being socially disapproved, participation in the cults is obligatory (Beattie and Middleton 1969: xxiii).

By demonizing the spirits of the dead and some other spirits, Hebga consciously or unconsciously pursues the early missionary policy of devaluating African traditional deities (Behrend and Luig 1999: xv). This demonization is rather paradoxical considering the fact that Hebga is a staunch advocate of Africanization (inculturation) who has harshly criticized Western iconoclastic missionary policies in Africa (Hebga 1976).

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARISMATIC PRAYER SESSIONS

Both this chapter and the next deal with the two major components of ritual practice in Ephphata: Charismatic prayer and ritual healing. Jonathan Smith, who holds that "Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention" has written illuminatingly on the ability of the ritual place to 'direct attention' (1987: 102). The above mentioned ritual events are indeed associated with two major ritual places, Nkol-Eton and Mangen, which are the object of much 'attention' in Ephphata. These events are treated here separately for the purpose of analysis, as it is believed in Ephphata that Charismatic prayer itself can have healing effects. My arguments in this chapter and the next are on the whole consonant with Rappaport's following statement about ritual innovations:

> Rituals composed entirely of new elements are, however, seldom if ever attempted. "New" rituals are likely to be largely composed of elements taken from older rituals… There is still room for the rearrangement of elements, and even for discarding some elements and introducing others, but invention is limited and the sanction of previous performance is maintained (1999: 32).

This is true of the 'domestication' of Charismatic ritual elements in Ephphata, a process which consists mainly in the rearrangement of pre-existing 'authorized' items imported from the USA, the birthplace of Catholic Pentecostalism. Rearranging also means selecting, dropping, modifying or highlighting, especially with regard to which gifts of the Spirit have been allowed by Hebga to become part of the ritual practice in Ephphata. For example, why is it that in Ephphata gifts of the Spirit such as 'speaking in tongues' and 'prophecy' which tend to figure prominently in the ritual life of Catholic Charismatics in North America (Mcguire 1982: 80; See also Csordas 1994, 1997) are simply ignored in favour the gift of healing? This chapter considers some of the institutional (Catholic Church), personal (Hebga's influential agency) and contextual factors behind such variations. Both this chapter and the next seek to strengthen an argument which runs through this book, the argument according to which there is no globalization without

localization, even as the latter does not necessarily mean unrestrained creativity.

A central feature of Charismatic ritual life worth underlining at the outset of this section is well captured by Csordas as follows: "Catholic Charismatic ritual performance is characterized by a marked linguisticality, in that *most of what goes on is verbal*. In this sense it is a religion of the 'the word'" (1997:158; my emphasis). As we shall soon see, this is entirely true of Ephphata rituals. Durkheim saw beliefs and rites as the two major constitutive components of religion: "The first, he writes, are states of opinion, and consist in representations; the second are determined modes of action" (Durkheim 1915: 36). Religious rituals enact specific beliefs and belong to the domain of performative or 'ceremonial' (James 2003: 110) practice which involves, among other things, congregations and different degrees of participation (Geertz 1973; Turner 1982; Csordas 1997; Bell 1997; Rappaport 1999; Schieffelin 2005). I dwell here on the format of Charismatic prayer in Ephphata with an emphasis on the workings of human agency in the related processes of localization.

Nkol-Eton as a Ritual Place

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, letters are the usual means through which patients channel their problems to Hebga. He is aided in the tedious task of sorting them out by some of his lay assistants. During my fieldwork, these aides were two ladies who had been trained by Hebga himself for this purpose. They will come to his residence on Mondays and Thursdays, collect the letters from the box at the entrance of the residence, spend about two hours reading through the letters and deciding on what sort of therapeutic attention to give to each individual case. I was impressed by their sense of duty. They will write on each envelope not only the place and time of the appointment with Hebga but also a few biblical references for the personal prayer of the patient. With these indications written on them, empty envelopes are then taken back to the box where they can be collected by patients or their relatives at any time. The letters themselves are immediately torn into pieces and burnt for obvious reasons of privacy.

Besides Hebga's residence, where he occasionally attends to patients, there are two other main places to which the latter are generally referred for appointment, depending on whether the case is consid-

Fig. 3. A view of the congregation engaged in praise in Nkol-Eton

ered serious or not. For less serious cases, the meeting place will be a parish centre (known as Nkol-Eton) located in the urban environment of Yaounde where Hebga lives. Serious cases, mostly suspected cases of possession requiring more time and follow-up, are referred to the spiritual centre of Mangen on which I dwell in the next chapter. In Nkol-Eton, there is more emphasis on Charismatic prayer (praise and adoration) and this means less focus on healing rituals; whereas in Mangen the emphasis is shifted to intercession which involves intensive healing prayers for each patient. Hebga's understanding of Charismatic prayer is encapsulated in the two concepts of adoration and worship (Hebga 2005: 6).

The Nkol-Eton parish centre belongs to the diocese of Yaounde and is hired by Ephphata for its Charismatic prayer sessions which take place every Wednesday from about 3.30 pm to 6.30 pm. These Wednesday prayer sessions are well attended (about 1500 to 2000 people per session) and draw participants mostly from the city of Yaounde and its suburbs. The majority of participants are active members of Ephphata already involved in the activities of the movement in their respective parishes, for Ephphata groups exist at the parish level in various dioceses of Cameroon. The Wednesday prayer session provides a weekly occasion for Ephphata members living in Yaounde and its surroundings to gather and pray together, often in the presence of the highly

solicited Hebga. It is also a ritual event in which the agency of Hebga's lay assistants is very active. They take in turn the responsibility of planning and conducting it.

People are encouraged to come to the prayer session dressed in red, a colour adopted by Ephphata for the simple reason that in the traditional colour symbolism of the Catholic Church, red is associated with the Holy Spirit or martyrdom. The majority of participants are women (about 70 %). It is not easy to account for this female dominance, but here are some guesses: on the one hand it may simply be a reflection of this other fact that at the grassroots level the majority of people actively involved in the ritual life of the Catholic Church in Cameroon (for example in terms of mass attendance on Sundays) are women; on the other hand, this gender disparity may be a function of 'social suffering' in the sense that because of structural injustices coupled with gender politics, suffering in Cameroon tends to affect women and children more than men; another factor worth taking into consideration is that in the event of sickness in a Cameroonian family, the burden of managing it is more likely to fall on women than on men. Although I privilege the first of these factors, I do not think that they are mutually exclusive.

In Nkol-Eton, Ephphata conducts two main activities: the Charismatic prayer and the reception of patients; the latter is contingent on Hebga's presence. In this chapter, I do not dwell much on the attendance of patients in Nkol-Eton because it differs from what happens in Mangen only in terms of scale. Hebga usually arrives in Nkol-Eton at about 4 pm driven by his personal driver. Most often, he reaches Nkol-Eton when the Charismatic prayer session led by his lay assistants is already underway. Upon his arrival, a number of his aides welcome him and lead him to the sacristy of the parish where a space has been arranged for him to start receiving patients. He takes a seat, gets his crucifix out of his shoulder bag and waits for patients to be introduced to him by his aides. The prayer session is then interrupted for a moment to allow a roll call of patients who have received an appointment for that day. When this is over, the patients move out of the main Church and line up in front of the sacristy, each one holding his or her envelope. They are then introduced, in small groups of ten to fifteen people, to Hegba. Here the attendance of patients is collective and fast, often to the disappointment of some who were expecting to be given the chance to speak individually. But this is not possible in Nkol-Eton because of time constraints. Hebga will quickly move round in

the room and impose his crucifix on the forehead and on the chest of each patient while saying a biblical verse or a prayer such as "In the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld all beings should bend the knee at the name of Jesus" (Phil 2, 10) or simply 'Jesus' (sometimes in Latin). After the imposition of the cross, one of his aides anoints each of the patients with holy oil on the forehead, the chest, and sometimes the neck. In Ephphata, the latter is believed to be the part of the body where witches usually store their evil substances (*maléfices*). For this reason, a neck diagnosed as stiff is often massaged with blessed oil or salt.

When every patient in the group has received this standard treatment (imposition of the crucifix and anointing with oil), the group is asked to go back to the main Church where the Charismatic prayer is continuing. Then the next group is brought into the room. After those who had an appointment have all been attended, and depending on whether or not Fr Hebga is preaching at the prayer session on that day, he may ask his aides to bring in pregnant women and children who wish to receive a blessing. They also come in small groups and are given the same treatment. When Hebga feels that he has had enough for the day, he asks his aides to stop letting people in. Some of these aides will then seat or kneel themselves and Hebga will bless them before moving the main chapel where the Charismatic prayer is drawing to its conclusion. The reception of patients usually lasts for about an hour.

Prayer Session items

Charismatic prayer sessions are almost entirely planned and conducted by Ephphata lay senior members. But Hebga may intervene in the running of a prayer session for one of the following reasons: to give a teaching (*enseignement*), to oversee the money collection for special projects, to make an important announcement (for example, the appointment or sacking of his aides) or to bless sacramentals (water, oil, etc.). The eleven items of a Charismatic prayer session in Ephphata are spelled out in the statutes of the group. It is entitled *Programme des prières charismatiques style Ephphata*. The word *style* indicates that it is a distinctive mark of the movement and points to an awareness that in other Catholic Charismatic groups things may be done differently. In Nkol-Eton as well as in Mangen, a Charismatic prayer session is led by two people, one who introduces each item of the session both in French and *Ewondo*

(one major local language) and the second who introduces them in *Basaa*, another major local language. The choice of these local languages reflects the ethnic distribution of membership in Ephphata in this region of Yaounde.

I now list the items separately in the order in which they are enacted in a normal prayer session:

i) *Invocation* of the *Holy Spirit* with a song
ii) Spontaneous prayer of *praise* and *adoration* (spontaneity means that everybody prays loudly at the same time, each one according to his inspiration. It gives an impression of cacophony) followed by a lively song of praise which goes with drumming, clapping and dancing).
iii) *Testimonies* about God's wonders (two or three people spontaneously come forward to share with participants the wonders of God in their lives).
iv) Spontaneous prayer of *thanksgiving* for all the other unvoiced wonders of God in human lives (All pray loudly to thank God for something), followed by a lively song of thanksgiving.
v) Prayer to invoke *God's pardon* followed by a song of *repentance*: participants are invited to confess collectively their sins to God and ask for forgiveness.
vi) Reading of the *Word of God* followed by a *teaching* (*enseignement*) done by one of the senior lay members of Ephphata or a priest (Hebga himself or another of his colleagues). The biblical reading on which the teaching is based is first taken in French, then in *Ewondo* and then in *Basaa*, only occasionally in English.
vii) Short period of silent *meditation* on the teaching received followed by a lively song (*chant vif*) to the *Holy Spirit*.
viii) Spontaneous collective prayers to the *Holy Spirit* (to ask for strength and wisdom) followed by another song to the Holy Spirit.
ix) *Money collection*: People are invited to donate generously to support the movement. Collectors line up with baskets and while the choir is singing people freely come up to donate money. These collections make an average of 60,000 fcfa (£55) per Wednesday.
x) *Intercession*: all at the same time loudly pray to God, each person expressing his personal wishes. It is followed by a song expressing faith in God's providence.
xi) *Our Father*: the prayer session concludes with one 'Our Father' collectively taken.

A semantic analysis of the preceding sequence reveals the key components of a charismatic prayer session: Holy Spirit, Praise, Adoration, Testimonies, Word of God, Teaching, Money, intercession, faith in God's providence, etc. I will now further comment some of the above items: testimonies, teachings, and money collections.

a. *Testimonies*: here follows one of the testimonies collected during one of the many Charismatic prayer sessions I attended while in the field.

> My name is M.B., I am 50 years old. I joined Ephphata in the cathedral parish of Mbalmayo three months ago. It is more than two years now that I have been suffering from something in my right eye. At some point doctors thought of operating upon me. There was something like an abscess in my eye but without any trace of pus. It eventually disappeared without any treatment. But still I couldn't see clearly with that eye and it was hurting atrociously. Medical doctors and traditional healers I visited couldn't cure me. So, I resigned myself to my fate. I was sure I was going to lose the eye completely. But on the 1st of January 2004, the Lord prompted brother J.H. [the leader (*Berger*) of her local Ephphata group] to come and wish me happy new year. Upon arriving at my place, he was sadly surprised to find me confined to my bedroom. I explained my problem to him. He asked me if I had holy water. I still had a bit of holy water that Fr Hebga had blessed on the occasion of the launching of the building of a new amphitheatre for Ephphata. Brother J.H. asked me to put some of it in my eyes. He showed me how to use it. He asked me not to look at it as a magical potion, but to pray with firm faith to Jesus Christ who died on the cross for all of us. I did exactly as he told me. Three days later, a small living maggot came out of my eye. I took a picture of it. Today, my eye has completely healed. I have recovered my sight and I am well again. I give thanks to God for this miracle with which he has blessed me. And I invite my brothers and sisters who are listening to me or will read (testimonies are often published in the periodical of Ephphata, *Le Paraclet*) this testimony to pray with faith and use sacramentals blessed by Fr Hebga; they will find solutions to their problems. I thank brother J.H. who taught me how to pray. Blessed be the name of Jesus Christ!'

And the assembly responds: 'For ever!'

All testimonies tend to have the same structure: a problem leads somebody to desperation from the midst of which springs an unexpected (often last minute) solution mediated by prayer or something else (holy water or oil) from Ephphata. The solution is interpreted in terms of a providential intervention from God and triggers feelings and expressions of thanksgiving. In the above testimony, it is worth noticing that

the patient is asked to use holy water not as a magical device but in a spirit of faith. Behind such advice is the attempt to distance Ephphata healing practices from the term 'magic' disparagingly associated with competitive traditional or esoteric forms of healing. I return to this issue in chapter six where I look at the ambiguities of this demarcation between magic and religion in the context of Ephphata. The speaker of the above testimony makes a very explicit causal link between the use of holy water and the exit of the maggot. The fact that she takes a picture of the maggot allegedly forced out of her eye by holy water suggests that she suspects some sceptics might dispute her claims, in which case the picture will serve as additional evidence. At the end of the testimony the lady calls on others to 'pray with faith' and to 'use sacramentals blessed by Hebga'. Her overall message (as that of most testimonies) is straightforward: prayers and sacramentals work, especially those blessed by Hebga. The explicit mention of Hebga is meant to suggest that his healing power is more effective than that of other priests equally involved in the ministry of healing.

But testimonies are not only about healing. They can also be about getting a job, having a baby, passing an exam, travelling abroad or even things such as keeping rain at bay during a prayer session as the following testimony from one of Hebga's aides suggests:

> On the 13th May 1989, in the midst of rainy season, the organizers of a big Pentecost vigil prayed to God asking him to stop the rain which was pouring down, so that it may not to disturb the vigil. The vigil was to take place in the chapel of Nkol-Eton which at that time was still unroofed. Miraculously God heard their prayers and it stopped raining exactly at 6pm, just an hour before the beginning of the vigil. God is great! Praise the Lord, Alleluia!

Many African traditional cultures are familiar with rainmakers or people credited with the ability to stop rain. Among the Bamileke of Western Cameroon, for example, they will be called upon to 'burn rain' when it is threatening to disrupt a major traditional ceremony. But it is difficult to say whether Charismatics behind the above testimony are simply transferring a traditional belief to a Christian setting. What is certain is that such testimonies manifestly presuppose a cosmos which is not at all disenchanted.

b. *Teachings*: The Word of God is first read out and then the preacher of the day comments on it. Teachings are verbal performances based on the Scriptures and meant for the spiritual edification of the assembly.

Fig. 4. Fr Hebga adressing a congregation

Here follow two teachings: one by a lay member of Ephphata and the other by Hebga himself.

The first teaching, based on Jn 3: 16–21, was given in Nkol-eton on 22nd September 2004 by one of Hebga's senior aides in front of a crowd of about two thousand people. He is a university graduate and teaches Western philosophy at the Catholic University of Yaounde. At the time, he was deputy president of Ephphata. But before I left the field he had just been sacked by Hebga over allegations of involvement with dubious spiritual practices. He later told me that his sacking resulted from a coup mounted against him out of jealousy by other leaders in Ephphata who saw in him a potential threat to their positions. Here follows his *enseignement*.

> My dear brothers and sisters, the word of God we are meditating upon today invites us to rediscover the centre of our faith, namely our Lord Jesus Christ. As the reading says, he came to free us, to save us and not to condemn us. Those who accept him in their lives are automatically saved. But those who reject him in favour of darkness condemn themselves. 'Jesus is light' says Saint John. In the beginning was the word and the word was light, the true light that shines in the world. It is this light which frees us from darkness and brings us life. Nowadays, many Christians do not want to walk in that light; they refuse to hold the hand of Jesus. In fact, Jesus does not condemn us, he frees us and saves us; we

> are the one condemning ourselves when we refuse to follow him. On this earth only the name of Jesus can save you and deliver you from the yoke of Satan.

At this point some participants started moving out of the chapel because it had been announced that Hebga, although present, was not going to impose the cross on patients on that day. The preacher then interrupted his preaching and challenged the congregation in these words:

> Please, do not do that again. Why are you leaving? You are ignoring the most important thing: the word of God which saves and frees you. I do not really understand why some of you come here. You want to annoy Fr Hebga again. What you are doing is not good. I now order the doorkeepers to lock the doors. If you do not want to pray, stay home!

Then the preaching continues:

> So, I was saying that it is Jesus Christ who saves us. When you have Jesus in your life, he enlightens you such as to make you radiate his light. Our works become righteous and we escape condemnation. When Fr Hebga was talking to us this evening, he said that by his or her way of life each one of us chooses where he wants to end: hell or heaven. …It is up to us to make our choice. Let us continue to live as children of light, as children of God. As children of light we know where we are going, we know what to do because the Holy Spirit directs us to what is good. When you see an evildoer, even if he goes to Church every day, even if he gives hundreds of millions [money] to the Church, he is not with Jesus Christ. He is not a child of the light. Children of light radiate peace, joy, love, charity around them; but more importantly they are saved. They are saved in body and soul, it is an integral salvation. It means that it is enough to be Jesus' friend. It doesn't matter whether we are sick or not; we will still be saved. Sickness or suffering is nothing to someone who is Jesus' friend. In spite of suffering, Jesus' friends always keep interior peace and joy because the spirit of God is within them. These days, people are really confused, they want healing at the expenses of their salvation. Look, if Fr Hebga imposes his cross on you now, you may get well if that is the will of Jesus. But if you abandon Jesus, you are lost for ever. Physical healing is not an end in itself. Seek first Jesus and the rest will follow.

Note the contrast between hell and heaven, between children of the light and children of darkness and the attempt to make salvation of the soul more important than physical healing. The teaching continues:

> When you go to other religions, for example Buddhism, you are seeking a different kind of salvation which will simply extinguish your soul. There

> you do not even meet God. Every good Christian is a friend of God and is saved right from this earth. Even if he is sick or poor, it does not matter. He still radiates God's light and joy. He or she is not interested in the works of darkness: jealousy, hatred, witchcraft, love of the things of this earth that can not give eternal life. He or she seeks only Jesus … Change your lives and become children of the light. Jesus is the true light. Put your trust in him, believe in him and he will heal you. Do not just run after Fr Hebga's crucifix; listen to the word of God and welcome it in your heart. It will heal you! I do not know why you find it so difficult to get it. You are running around in every direction like senseless people. Hold on to Jesus and he will heal you; you will not even need somebody to pray over you. Jesus works directly. You behave as if you have forgotten that Jesus is God. If he decides right now that your problem will go away, that is what is going to happen and you will not even know how and when it happened. But the main problem with you people is your lack of faith in Jesus Christ. You only believe in miracles from witches, sorcerers, diviners; they make you drink potions which can only give you a passing feeling of well-being. Jesus, on the contrary gives you eternal happiness. When Jesus heals, it is once and for all (*The assembly claps, a sign of approbation*).

In the above verbal performance, it is worth noticing another contrast between on the one hand the power of Jesus Christ and on the other hand other religions or competitive figures such as witches, diviners, etc. Here again, witches and diviners are lumped together and discarded as dangerous and ineffective. The congregation is also challenged on its insatiable thirst for healing which the preacher finds potentially dangerous to their faith. They are invited to seek Jesus (salvation) first (and healing will follow) instead of focusing exclusively on healing to the expenses of their faith. When he says, "Do not just run after Fr Hebga's crucifix; listen to the word of God and welcome it in your heart; It will heal you", he is attempting to persuade the congregation to look beyond Hebga to Jesus Christ who is the ultimate source of his power.

The point that it is Jesus who heals and not Hebga is often made in teachings (*enseignements*) delivered in Ephphata, some of which are published in *Le Paraclet*. It is because a good number of people seem only interested in the power attributed to the crucifix or prayers of Hebga and not in the Christian faith as such. This is manifest in people's behaviour when either Hebga is absent at one of these prayer sessions or when he is ministering to patients with one or two other priests. When he is absent, some people (even some of his senior aides) tend to lose interest in the movement and its prayer sessions. When he

is attending patients with another priest, for example if they are both imposing hands or the cross on a group of people, some will want to be touched only by Hebga. I have seen the latter (his aides also) chastise people or even suspend a healing session altogether because of this kind of behaviour which he interprets as spiritually immature. Again, the fear is that too much focus on Hebga's power at the expenses of faith in Jesus Christ is likely to generate or nurture some sort of 'magical' mentality disparagingly associated in Ephphata with diviners and magicians. Of course, Hebga would not at all want to be associated with the latter for this is potentially damaging to his reputation as a Catholic priest.

The teaching concludes:

> So, my dear brothers and sisters, from this evening on let us remember the fact that Jesus' love is a privilege for us… A Christian should not imitate a non-Christian. A Christian should enlighten others; you are the light and the salt of the earth. You wouldn't want to be guided by a member of a religious sect (*celui qui est dans une secte*) or somebody who practises witchcraft, would you? (The assembly responds: No). You are the one to enlighten them and lead them to conversion. They are the one to learn from us; what have they got to offer us? So from this evening on, let us offer ourselves to Jesus, our source of life, light and salvation. Praised be the name of Jesus Christ!

The congregation enthusiastically responds: 'for ever' while applauding the preacher, a sign of satisfaction. The teaching is then briefly summarized in each of the two major local languages (Bassa and Ewondo) of the area for those participants who are not fluent in French and who make up about 10 % of the congregation.

The second teaching that follows was given by Hebga in Nkol-Eton during the prayer session of Wednesday 13th October 2004. The theme of the teaching was 'Proclaiming Jesus Christ.'

> A Christian should not be ashamed of Jesus Christ, of proclaiming by his acts and words that he or she is a disciple of Jesus. 'In the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld all beings should bend the knee at the name of Jesus' (Phil 2, 10). If you people prefer to bend the knee before wretched mortal human beings who will soon be eaten up by worms and return to dust, that is your problem. As for me, my choice is clear, it is Jesus Christ. He alone is powerful and should be served. No human being is powerful, we are all mortal. So, believe in Jesus Christ, proclaim him. He alone is God. God alone is God. I have said this time and again. But many of you are still afraid of human beings who are nothing compared to God. A human being is nothing, three times nothing! Only God is, was and will be. I am really proud of a few of you who are not

> afraid to witness to Jesus courageously. In some public offices, people will ask you why you are wearing a medallion of Jesus, they may ask you to hide it. I know a woman who courageously replied to them: 'Why do not you also hide your Rosicrucian or freemason medallions? Jesus Christ is God and I am not ashamed of him; if you are not happy with that you are free to sack me.' Recently, one of our girls who is a member of Charismatic Renewal here was accused at her workplace by one of her colleagues of praying 38 times in a day. I do not know how he counted it, as the accused is alone in her office. Fortunately, her boss, intelligent as he is, answered that he did not care whether the girl prayed 200 times per day or not as long as she did her work well… I want you to be proud of being Christians, of proclaiming Jesus Christ. I have given you many prayers which can help you fight against fear, for example psalms 23, 26, 27. Christians should not live in fear…

Note the mention of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry which are very active in Cameroon and have been the targets of Hebga's critiques. He continues:

> I will soon go back to the sacristy over there to attend some patients to whom I personally gave an appointment. Before coming here, I met with a priest who had a challenging experience…he got trapped by somebody who was either a Rosicrucian or a freemason. The latter came to see him pretending that he needed spiritual help. The priest prayed over him. But soon after, the poor guy [priest] fell sick and almost died. (The congregation sighs with shock) He could not breathe properly, his body was aching. He thought he was going to die. He prayed to God and God saved him. The next day, the same man came back still pretending that he wanted confession, but this priest asked him to go somewhere else. You know, there are some people sitting in this congregation, they come here not to pray but to trap people. But let me warn them: their traps are worth nothing. If they were strong enough, they would have caught us long ago! Let those who come here to trap others give up. And if they do not give up, we will force them to give up (The assembly spontaneously responds: 'Amen' meaning that they approve of this challenge). When we invoke Jesus Christ, he listens to us. Do not fear human beings. … Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to witness to Jesus Christ in words, writings, on radio and television. I am not praising myself. But I can honestly say that Jesus has given me the courage to proclaim his name in Africa, Europe, America, Asia, etc. I have visited all these continents to talk about Jesus Christ. You should be proud of being Christians… (*The congregation claps hands*).

Because of Hebga's enchanting style of preaching, and because many of his stories speak to the 'paranormal' experiences of his listeners, any event involving him generally attracts crowds. Hebga rarely preaches without stigmatizing esoteric groups such as Rosicrucians or Freema-

sons whose doctrines are interpreted as a dangerous not only to Christians, but also to the whole country.

Hebga's story about the young priest who was allegedly trapped by a dubious character is authentic. They met in my presence. Occasionally bishops, priests and nuns also seek the services of Hebga either for their personal problems or on behalf of their relatives. The belief in witchcraft is not a marginal phenomenon among the Cameroonian clergy although they tend to play down its effects on a Christian. Still, Hebga is familiar with allegations of bewitchment within convents of Cameroonian nuns. He has been called upon several times to help deal with them. I was present once when he was interrogating a nun suspected by her colleagues of having bewitched to death a number of people including a priest and a nun. On the spot, she actually confessed not only to killing these people with the help of her uncle in the village but also to making one of the nuns fall sick. But I was to learn that the accused nun had a history of mental troubles. Indeed later on she attempted to retract her damning statements, arguing that she had made them under pressure. Her superiors got involved in the case and, on Hebga's request, the suspected nun spent a few weeks in Mangen in the company of other patients. She eventually went back to her convent. But, finding it more and more difficult to cope with suspicions, she asked to quit religious life, to the satisfaction of many of her fellow nuns. Such allegations create a sense of insecurity in some convents leading some nuns to go as far as seeking protection from diviners (*marabouts*).

While in the field, I also came across one priest who spent a few days in Mangen alleging that he had been bewitched by a colleague. During a Charismatic week end in Mangen, Hebga had a private conversation with this priest and prayed over him. These isolated cases point to the fact that witchcraft beliefs and practices are a concern not only for lay Christians, but also for a number of Cameroonian priests and nuns. Their many years of training in Western philosophy and theology do not necessarily wipe out collective representations which fashioned their imagination before they joined the seminary. Among lay Christians a version of these representations is perpetuated through their translation into Christian categories, as we saw earlier with Hebga's typology of possession. Through these translations, which are 'thick' reinterpretations of people's local experiences, the Cameroonian clergy does not only resist the rationalist perspective of early missionaries but also seeks to keep some control over the religious life of the laity.

c. *Money Collection*: at the time of the collection, people freely line up, while dancing and singing to the rhythm of drums and xylophones, to put their offerings in containers held by Ephphata money collectors. This is an ordinary collection which goes into financing the administration of Ephphata and a variety of other projects. At the time of my fieldwork, there was also an extraordinary collection (Hebga would personally supervise it if attending the prayer session) to help finance a building project. Hebga has recently undertaken the project of building in the outskirts of Yaounde a multipurpose amphitheatre which, he hopes, will host Ephphata Wednesday prayer sessions in the future. He also hopes by this to find a lasting solution to the problem of overdependence on the parish church of Nkol-Eton which is sometimes not available for use. The new amphitheatre could also be hired by other organisations so as to generate money for Ephphata. Ephphata is not sponsored by any external organisation and relies entirely on internal collections or on the generosity of well wishers (often the many relations of Hebga) for its financial needs. Hebga often says that he relies mostly on God's providence which he sees at work in the history of Ephphata, especially in the building of the spiritual centre of Mangen. There are no traces of the theology of prosperity in the movement and no practice of tithing.

As far as I know, services in Ephphata are free of charge, as stipulated in article 50 of the statutes of the movement (see appendix). But if somebody invites Hebga to come and bless his or her home, he expects the beneficiary, as a matter of common sense, to take care of his travel expenses (fuel, hiring a taxi or picking him up at his residence). Beyond that, he does not charge patients for any treatment received. But since a good number of well-to-do Cameroonians are among his patients, they often, out of gratitude, support his projects financially. One reads the following statement in the statutes of Ephphata (article 30): 'Sources of income in Ephphata include: ordinary and extraordinary collections, voluntary donations and bequest, revenues from Ephphata products (selling of our books, knitting, pottery, etc.), and any other legal and honest source.' Indeed, Ephphata has on sale a number of small items: booklets written by Hebga on topics such as religious 'sects', prayers of deliverance, etc.; T-shirts, polo shirts, scarves, wraps, all red in colour and stamped with images of Jesus (one of the two types of wrap on sale bears the image of Hebga). These items are advertised at every Charismatic prayer session in Nkol-Eton or in Mangen. People are urged to buy them in order to support the movement. I didn't have

access to the annual accounts of Ephphata but it is easy to see that the movement is not a lucrative business.

Ephphata looks more like a Christian humanitarian enterprise, at least from Hebga's perspective whose endeavour to help people alleviate their suffering appeared to me genuine. For example, patients who are admitted in the spiritual centre of Mangen only contribute about 4.500 Fcfa (less than £4) per month, which is really symbolic compared to hundreds of pounds that some of these pay to diviners or traditional healers. The money collected from patients in Mangen goes into the maintenance of the centre. Besides the dominant therapeutic concerns, Hebga has established within the movement a special fund to help the destitute (orphans, widows, single mothers, etc.). Actually, in his original project, the spiritual centre of Mangen was to house also an orphanage. But because of lack of funds, this project has failed to materialize. Hebga himself leads a very modest life and Ephphata is certainly not a means of enrichment for him. On the contrary, he pours a lot of personal revenue into the movement to keep it going.

Comparing Prayer Session Formats

I contrast here the Charismatic prayer format in Ephphata with two others extensively documented by McGuire (1982) and by Csordas (1997) among Catholic Charismatics in the USA.

Ephphata	*USA (McGuire 1982: 76–77)*	*USA (Csordas: 1997: 163–165)*
(i) Invocation of the Holy Spirit	(i) Invocation of the Holy Spirit	(i) Period of praise in English hymns or in 'tongues'
(ii) Praise	(ii) Exorcism of evil spirits	(ii) Teaching
(iii) Testimonies	(iii) Hymns	
(iv) Thanksgiving	(iv) Scripture reading	(iv) Thanksgiving (prophecy)
(v) Repentance	(v) Praise in English or in 'tongues'	
(vi) Word of God and teaching	(vi) Confirmation of prophecies	(vi) Testimonies
(vii) Meditation on the teaching	(vii) Spontaneous prayer	(vii) Petitions

Ephphata	*USA (McGuire 1982: 76–77)*	*USA (Csordas: 1997: 163–165)*
(viii) Invocation of the Holy Spirit	(viii) Teaching	(viii) Announcements
(ix) Money collection	(ix) Witnessing (testimonies)	(ix) Final song
(x) Petitions	(x) Petitions	
(xi) Conclusion (announcement and Our Father)		

Although there are basic themes such as Praise, Testimonies, Thanksgiving, Holy Spirit, Petitions, Teaching, Singing, that one can expect to find in most Charismatic prayer sessions across national and denominational boundaries, formats vary from one prayer group to another both in terms of the number, order and content of ritual items. For example, as already alluded to in chapter one, whereas items such as 'speaking in tongues', 'prophecy', 'resting in the Spirit' feature prominently in the ritual life of neo-Pentecostals and North American Catholic Charismatics, I did not see any trace of them in Ephphata, neither during prayer sessions nor the yearly ceremony of baptism in the Spirit. How does one account for these discrepancies? They certainly have nothing to do with the legitimacy of these ritual expressions for Hebga himself attests to having spoken in tongues on the occasion of his Baptism in the Spirit in a classical Pentecostal Church (*Assemblies of God*) in Ivory Coast (Hebga 1982: 24).

It seems to me that the discarding of these ritual elements in Ephphata has more to do with Hebga's influential agency in shaping the ritual practice of the movement throughout the three decades of its history, than with constraints from the local Catholic Church. Although 'speaking in tongues' and 'prophesying' are legitimate ritual languages in the wider context of Catholic Charismatic Renewal, they remain very controversial because of the difficulty to determine their authenticity when they actually occur. Where the expression of these gifts of the Spirit is allowed, it usually goes together with the practices of interpretation (determining the content of the message) and discernment (the process of determining the authenticity of a prophecy or of any other gift of the Spirit): "It is held that discernment is necessary because prophecy can be inspired not only by God but by the Devil (in which case it is 'false prophecy'), or by the speaker's own human wants and needs (in which case it is 'nonprophecy')" (Csordas 1997: 172). The scramble for the gifts of the Spirit, specially for the most

prestigious ones such as 'speaking in tongues', 'prophecy' and 'healing' is not uncommon in Charismatic groups. It is often one of the main sources of divisions and tensions in Charismatic groups. Therefore, the exercise of leadership in these groups also has to do with controlling access to spiritual resources as sources of power. By not favouring a ritual environment conducive to the expression of haphazard spiritual gifts such as 'prophecy' and 'speaking in tongues', Hebga has tried to shield his movement from potential sources of delusion and disruption. Such processes of selection and discarding are dimensions of the workings of localization.

Another area in which there seem to be a notable difference of emphasis between Ephphata and its ancestors in North America is the use of music and dance during prayer sessions. These are overtly shaped by local cultural forms. First, as far as music is concerned, the song repertoire of Ephphata reflects the internal linguistic and cultural diversity of the movement. Musical instruments include local items such as drums, xylophones, etc. which feature also in local traditional rituals. Secondly, whereas Csordas describes dance as a minor and 'rare genre of Charismatic performance' among North American Catholic Charismatics, I cannot say the same of Ephphata, in which dance is definitely a major form of ritual expression. There is almost no Ephphata prayer session in Nkol-Eton without dancing. It generally spreads to the whole congregation from choir members who do not hesitate to display their dancing skills, turning the scene into what Durkheim would describe as 'collective effervescence' with 'a psychical exaltation not far removed from delirium' (Durkheim 1915: 226). This prominence of dance has everything to do with the local context in the sense that not only is dance a major social and ritual event in many cultures of southern Cameroon but the rhythms and dancing movements reproduced in Ephphata during prayer meetings intentionally reflect traditional forms.

Furthermore, from his research among North American Catholic Charismatics, Csordas concludes that "Clothing plays a comparatively small role in the Charismatic presentation of self" (1997: 69). This also is not true Ephphata in which clothing is definitely an important identity mark. Each Ephphata member is expected to show up at major events dressed in the red uniform. Such a requirement is consonant with the wider social context in which the use of clothing (uniforms) by a wide range of associations to express a shared identity is a common practice.

Lay leadership is particularly strong in Ephphata at the parish level and is often exercised in the absence of a priest. But prayer sessions in Nkol-Eton often take place in the presence of a priest, Hebga himself or one of his colleagues. When a priest is present, besides the ordinary eleven items of the above prayer format, time is always allotted to the blessing of sacramentals, meaning water, salt, oil, incense, crucifix, medallion, rosaries, medicines, pencils, etc. brought with them by members of the congregation. These can only be blessed by a priest and are widely used in Ephphata. Because of the high demand, the objects are always on sale at any major Ephphata gathering. But this small business which has developed around Ephphata ritual events is not owned by the movement itself. Every Ephphata group, whether in Cameroon, in Paris or in London, is required to follow the above format when it meets for a Charismatic prayer session.

CHAPTER FIVE

THERAPEUTIC STRATEGIES IN MANGEN

In Ephphata, as in many other religious settings, healing rituals consist mainly of 'things said and things done' (McGuire 1982: 139) to harness the power necessary for the transformation of the patient's experience (Csordas 1994: 35). As McGuire further points out, it is crucial to realize that, "healing ritual is aimed not only at effecting a cure but also at providing meaning" (ibid.). Concerning the efficacy of Charismatic healing, it is important therefore not to overlook the difference between cure and healing. Some patients report healing even when still showing the symptoms of their illness. This distinction has mainly to do with the patient's change of attitude towards his or her illness, with finding a consoling meaning to his or her condition. Sometimes healing consists mainly in this change of perspective which allows the patient to cope with the situation, and Charismatic healers contribute greatly to this process of rationalization (construction of consoling meanings) through 'things said'. Within this line of thought, and from the particular angle of embodiment theory, Csordas glosses Charismatic physical healing in terms of the alteration of the patient's 'somatic mode of attention': "The recognition of healing, he writes, is a modulation of orientation in the world, so that one monitors one's symptoms and responds to them by modifying one's activities. This reorientation not only preserves but actually constitutes the healing" (1994: 70). He does not deny the efficacy (transformative power) of ritual healing but argues that it is only incremental, meaning that "We exclude the occasional claim that miracles of spontaneous and total healing occur" (ibid.). Csordas does not give any serious reason for excluding this claim which may falsify his hypothesis of 'incremental efficacy'. Such an arbitrary exclusion gives me the impression that either he is simply squeezing data to fit his concept of 'incremental efficacy' or it is merely a reflection of a positivist or agnostic attitude towards 'miracles'. Claims of 'spontaneous and total healing' are not uncommon in Charismatic circles and I do not see any reason why they should be given less ethnographic weight than other claims. I am not implying that they are necessarily true.

Since misfortunes are generally interpreted in terms of the assault of evil powers on human beings, therapy consists in setting the patient free (*libération*) by compelling, in the name of Jesus and his allies, the intruding forces to relinquish their power over the person of the patient. Healing is generally couched in formulae such as *Je suis libéré* or *J'ai obtenu ma libération*. This chapter shows Hebga and his aides in action in Mangen as healers. It is argued their therapeutic strategies are firmly rooted in the mainstream Pentecostal dualist cosmology (forces of good vs. evil forces) and dramatizes the victory of Christianity over traditional religions. This dramatization constitutes a challenge for an advocate of africanization such as Hebga. The chapter concludes, like the preceding one, with the consideration of a few areas of contrast between Catholic Charismatic healing in Ephphata and similar practices in North America.

The Spiritual Centre of Mangen

The Basaa village of Mangen is sixty kilometres away from Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon where Hebga resides. There Ephphata owns several acres of land received as a gift from a well-wisher in the early 1980s. On this land Hebga built the spiritual centre of Ephphata which also serves as its headquarters. The original plan was to put in place a structure comprising a chapel, a living house, an infirmary, an orphanage, a library, an office building and especially dormitories for patients. He wished to create a health centre which would combine modern medicine with spiritual healing. But this dream has not yet come true. Because of the lack of financial resources the centre has not been able to actualize all its potentials. So far, only a basic structure consisting of the chapel, Hebga's office, the dormitories and the well are in place. The centre also has electricity. Because there is no public provision of running water in this rural area, Ephphata managed to dig a well which meets the needs not only of resident patients but also of local villagers. But although uncompleted and unfurnished as it is, the centre has been functional for more than a decade under the supervision of two lay members of Ephphata.

The centre of Mangen was built to serve as the ritual headquarters of the movement. It deals with severe cases of illness, especially incurable diseases, and suspected cases of possession requiring some follow-up. So when a case is judged serious, it is referred to Mangen where Hebga

and his senior aides hold a week-end of prayer (*Weekend Charismatique* as it is known in the movement) for the sick every two weeks. A patient may choose to reside in Mangen until he or she is cured or may decide to travel to the centre every two weeks to attend Charismatic week-ends. During the period of my fieldwork, the average number of patients residing in the centre at any given time was between thirty five and fifty.

Here follows an interview I conducted in September 2004 with Philibert, the current director of the centre, about the scope and the activities of the centre.

How long have you been in charge of the centre?

> *Philibert*: I have been running the centre for the past three or four years.

What are the main activities of the centre?

> *Philibert*: There are major events such as Pentecost, solemn anniversaries of the movement, etc. But it is Pentecost which is our major feast. It draws crowds of people to this place. Then on a more regular basis, you have week-ends of prayer called 'weekend charismatiques'. People come from all over the country and spend the week-end here praying, from Friday afternoon to Saturday morning. I am in charge of the centre on a permanent basis and it is my task to organize novenas [series of nine consecutive days of prayers], triduums [series of three consecutive days of prayers], Charismatic weekends, and the major feasts such as Pentecost and Ephphata anniversaries.

That is a lot of work, isn't it?

> *Philibert*: Yes! But it is during vacation times that we get many resident patients in the centre. Now that schools are about to reopen, their number begins to go down. For Charismatic week-ends, when people arrive, we welcome them, listen to them individually and try to diagnose their problem. Listening includes making them go through a test of possession to see if they react in the face of the cross or not.

What is the content of this test of possession? How do you know whether somebody is possessed or not?

> *Philibert*: It depends on the reaction of the patient when we impose the cross on him or her. We need to distinguish those who react in the face of the cross (*réagir à la croix*) from those who do not. So when we impose the cross on somebody, we watch his or her reaction. We want to know if it is an ordinary case or a case of possession. Possession has become a popular term, you know! In fact, it refers to somebody who is tormented by forces of evil. It is misleading to think of possession in terms of a

container with a content (*contenant-contenu*); that is a mistake many people make. There are also cases of obsession. So, we have cases of obsession and possession.

What do you mean by obsession?

Philibert: When somebody is only obsessed by powers of evil, he does not react to the imposition of the cross because these powers do not afflict him on a permanent basis. They visit their victim from time to time. Sometimes, somebody would tell you that he is seeing people, hearing voices or feeling as if somebody is touching him; some even claim that they are joined in bed in the night by strangers. But when you impose the cross on them, they do not react.

So, you call that obsession?

Philibert: Yes! When the affliction of the patient by evil forces is only intermittent, it is obsession. When is it is constant, it is possession.

You said that this test is done to classify patients?

Philibert: Yes, to distinguish ordinary cases from cases of possession. The test of the cross is not enough to conclude that somebody is possessed. This element alone is not enough. One needs other symptoms and the sum of them all constitutes a syndrome.

You mean that if somebody starts gesticulating after the imposition of the cross, this reaction alone is not enough to diagnose him or her as possessed?

Philibert: That is right! Some people easily shout or fall out of fear. The one conducting the tests must be very vigilant.

Do you refer some cases to Fr Hebga?

Philibert: Well, during Charismatic week-ends, we let Fr Hebga attend both ordinary cases (those who did not react at the imposition of the cross) and particular cases such as HIV AIDS, cancer, people who have traded with dubious religious groups, witchcraft, people who want to get rid of their fetishes, multiple abortions, multiple deaths within a family, etc. Fr Hebga knows which advice to give them.

Are there cases of exorcism that Fr Hebga conducts himself in the centre?

Philibert: Yes, whenever he wants. But you know, he is very busy, overwhelmed by work. And given the fact that cases of possession must go through sessions of exorcism, it requires time and physical energy. Fr Hebga taught us this work and when he comes across a case of exorcism in Yaounde, he sends it to us here in Mangen. Because it needs

intense prayers and follow-up. But in spite of our help, many still want to be touched by Fr Hebga himself, and this is an important psychological element for their cure. That is why during Charismatic week-ends, he attends also ordinary cases, so that he can touch as many people as possible. He personally attends only very few cases of possession. For Charismatic weekends, Fr Hebga usually arrives when we have already started the stations of the cross. He joins us and concludes with the blessing of pilgrims. Soon after follows a meeting with his lay collaborators (known as *intercesseurs*) during which we exchange news about Ephphata. After the meeting, the *intercesseurs* attend in groups of two or three particular cases (those who reacted during the test). Around 9.30 pm, we have mass in the chapel, followed by Charismatic prayer. For Ephphata, this is a key thing: praise and adoration, with intercession.

How do you deal with the daily follow-up of patients here in the centre?

Philibert: It is not easy, but my assistant and I do our best. We have a daily timetable which does not vary much. The major item is prayer, mainly novenas, the rosary and Charismatic prayer which culminates in Charismatic weekends. We lead patients in their daily prayers, teach them how to pray the rosary and to use sacramentals, if not they may think it is a fetish. Twice a week, we also receive them individually and pray over them. For the rest, they cook for themselves. We also organize the cleaning of the place and make sure that there is order around this place. Occasionally there are serious problems between patients; we do what we can to solve them. It does not always work. But we have the power to order a patient to leave the centre if he or she does not cooperate. Fr Hebga trusts us; but, of course, he has the final word on major decisions concerning this centre.

How much do they pay for their stay?

Philibert: Very little! That is why we do not have salaries. They are asked to contribute just 1.500 fcfa (less than £2) per novena [nine days]. This is really not much. It is only for the maintenance of the centre and for electricity bills. Still, some are so poor that they can't afford it.

What do you do in those cases?

Philibert: They are asked to go and explain their situation to Fr Hebga. When it is a genuine situation of deprivation, Fr Hebga allows them to stay in the centre free of charge.

How long do they stay in the centre?

Philibert: It varies a lot, from a few days to about a whole year. We tend to discourage patients from staying too long in the centre. I think the average would be about a month or two. People generally need more than a novena to feel better. There are also cases of relapse meaning that some people end up having several stays in the centre.

As the above informant points out in the interview, the centre functions as the ritual headquarters of the movement and hosts all the major events of the movement. The terminological demarcation between possession and obsession featuring in his answers is a more or less successful attempt to reproduce what he learned from Hebga's ideas on the subject, ideas disseminated mainly through his books (Hebga 1982: 98) and his articles in *Le Paraclet*.

Csordas notes that American Catholic Charismatics have developed a similar terminological delineation based on how much control evil spirits are believed to have over a patient:

> One version of the scale of severity begins with *temptation* to which all humans are understood to be exposed. In *oppression* the evil spirit's attack is more directed, but they remain "outside" the person. In *obsession* the spirits have entered "inside" the person, but do not have complete control, or may have control only over certain "areas" of the person, on the analogy of a house where fire is contained to one or two rooms. *Possession* is a condition in which the spirits have both entered and taken complete control of the person. Somewhat apart from these is demonic *harassment*, in which evil spirits are apparently not intent on gaining any degree of control, but on interfering with one's attempt to lead a Christian life or on disrupting spiritual activities such as Christian teaching and healing (1994: 193–194).

We have here an example of the global-local dialectics in which Hebga, a member of *Association Internationale pour la Délivrance* (an international and ecumenical forum based in the West which brings together exorcists from all over the world), serves as the link between on the one hand the Charismatic global arena where the above categories are produced and on the other hand the local arena of Ephphata. Through Hebga, this terminology, which is part of the global Charismatic demonology, filters to the man in charge of the centre at Mangen.

Mythical Word and Biblical Word in Ritual Healing

I mentioned in the preceding chapter that besides the place and time of the appointment, each patient finds written on his or her envelope a biblical reference for personal prayer. Hebga's aides are guided in their choices by the following table which associates a particular misfortune with a suitable biblical reference. It is widely circulated within Ephphata.

Misfortunes	*Biblical passage for therapeutic prayer*
Head	Mt 27: 27–31; Jn 19: 1–7
Chest, heart	Jn 19: 31–37
Eyes	Mk 8: 22–26; 10: 46–42
Ears	Mk 7, 31–37
Skin, wounds	Ps 38; Is 1: 5–6
Leper	Mk1: 40–45
Epilepsy	Mt 17: 14–21
Paralysis	Mt 9: 1–8
Blood diseases (including HIV/AIDS)	Lk 8: 43–48
Stomach	Acts 28: 7–10
Sterility	Ps 127, 128; Lk 1: 5–25
Cancer	Is. 38: 1–8
Anxiety, fear	Ps 23; 27; Mt 11: 25–30
Other diseases	Mt 4: 23–25; Mk 6, 53–56; Lk 6: 17–19; Ac 5: 12–16; Ps 41
Evil forces (demons, witches) local or imported witchcraft in esoteric groups or sects such as *Rose-Croix*, free-masonry or other form of Satanism	Ps 35, 54, 91; Lk 10: 17–20
Unemployment	Mt 20: 1–16
Marriage	Tobit (chapter 3)

The above list is not exhaustive and Hebga explicitly says that these are suggestions which do not limit the ability of the patient to find for himself in the Bible other suitable passages related to his or her problem.

Behind the above combinations is the belief in the healing power of the word of God, the belief that what Jesus did more than two thousand years ago, namely the healing of the sick through his words and actions, continues to happen today. This use of biblical passages in the event of an illness echoes, it seems to me, what Mircea Eliade calls 'Prestige of origins' when writing on the ritual role of myths in some of the so-called archaic societies. Some healing rituals feature, among other things, the chanting not only of a cosmogonic myth, but also of the myth of the origin of the medicine. On this he writes:

> Sometimes a solemn recitation of the cosmogonic myth is enough to cure certain sicknesses or imperfections. … As the exemplary model for all "creation," the cosmogonic myth can help the patient to make a "new beginning" of his life. The *return to origins* gives the hope of a rebirth. Now, all medical rituals we have been examining aim at a return to origins. We get the impression that for archaic societies life cannot be *repaired*, it can only be *re-created* by a return to sources. And the 'source of sources' is the prodigious outpouring of energy, life and fecundity that occurred at the Creation of the World (Eliade 1998 [1963]: 30; the emphasis is the author's).

I draw a strong parallel between this ritual use of myths and the ritual use of the Bible in Ephphata.

In Catholic theology, indeed, the redemption of the world through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is interpreted as a process of re-creation with cosmological dimensions. For example, Jesus and Mary, respectively described as new 'Adam' (Rm 5, 12–21) and new 'Eve', are the 'new' pair through which God recreates the world. As St Paul puts it, "It was not for its own purposes that creation had frustration imposed on it, but for the purposes of him who imposed it—with the intention that the *whole creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God*" (Rm 8, 20; my emphasis). This process of re-creation culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus which is ritually re-actualized in the celebration of every Mass. The Eucharist is described by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as 'Memorial of the Lord's passion' (# 1330). As a memorial 'it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross' (# 1366; emphasis in the original) as well as the outpouring of grace associated with it. Re-presentation has here both meanings of ceremonial re-enactment (James 2005: 107) and re-actualization of the effects associated with the original sacrifice for the benefit of the participants. These effects are nothing else than the 'prodigious outpouring of life', to return to Eliade's terminology. In the light of this sacramental theology, healers who use the Word of God believe that by reading a particular passage over a patient they *re-present* the original scene as well as its healing or empowering effects.

For example, let's consider the passage suggested above for all the diseases of the blood (HIV, haemophilia, bleeding, painful menstruation, etc): Lk 8: 43–48. It reads:

> There was a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years. She had spent all her living on doctors and she could not be cured by any of them. She came up behind Jesus and she touched the tassel of his robe;

> and immediately her flow of blood was stayed. Jesus said, "Who touched me?" When they were all denying that they had done so, Peter and his companions said, "Master, the crowds are all round you and press in upon you." Jesus said, "Someone has touched me, for I know that power has gone out of me." The woman saw that she could no longer hide. She came all trembling; she threw herself at his feet; and in front of everyone she told him why she had touched him, and that she had been cured there and then. "Daughter," he said to her, "your faith has cured you. Go in peace."

Why is this passage suggested for prayer to those who are suffering from any blood disease? Because the woman cured by Jesus in the story was suffering from a flow of blood. Most patients of Hebga would easily identify with the situation of the above woman: she has been suffering for a long time; she has spent all her money on doctors who have not been able to cure her; now she turns to Jesus. She is cured by simply touching a fringe of Jesus' robe. At the end of the story, Jesus tells the woman that what actually cured her is her faith: her trust in God's power manifested in Jesus. It follows that in the context of Ephphata, the faith of the patient is considered absolutely necessary for healing. Indeed in gospel narratives, the faith of patients is often mentioned by Jesus as a necessary condition for healing or for miracles to occur.

In the absence of physical contact with Jesus today, Catholic Charismatics believe that the experience of the healing power of Jesus is mediated by the sacraments of the Church (masses for healing, for example), by his ministers, by the word of God (Bible) and by sacramentals such as water, oil and salt blessed in the name of God. We will return to the use of these blessed things for healing purposes in the next chapter. That Jesus usually heals with his word is evident in many gospel passages. Here is another example (Lk 5: 12–13):

> While Jesus was in one of the towns a man who was a severe case of leprosy saw him. He fell before him and besought him, "Lord, if you are willing to do so you are able to cleanse me." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him.

Here healing is explicitly requested by the patient and is willingly granted by Jesus. The touching of the leper is accompanied by efficacious words that cleanse him. Catholic Charismatics believe indeed that faith healing is a function of the will of God; it is sheer grace: a free gift from God. It follows that the faith of the patient although necessary is not enough. It must also be God's will that the patient be healed. Effi-

cacy is neither automatic nor predictable because all depends on the will of God to which Hebga and his aides do not claim to be privy. It is in this spirit of faith and complete surrender to the will of God that patients are often invited to use the above biblical passages to address their problems. The above analogy between the ritual use of myths and the ritual use of the Biblical word may add some grist to the mill of those who have illuminatingly cautioned against the danger of overlooking commonalities between the so-called 'primitive' religions and World religions (Douglas 2002 [1966]; Lévi-Strauss 1958).

Charismatic Weekends in Mangen

It is 2.15 pm when four of us, Hebga, two of his aides and me, board Hebga's car in front of the residence in Yaounde to begin our journey to Mangen. We are driven by his personal driver. He takes the front seat and during the one hour journey he quietly says the rosary or reads his breviary. We reach Mangen at about 3. pm. Charismatic week-ends in Mangen follow a format which can roughly be described as follows:

Friday afternoon:

3pm–4pm: Stations of the Cross,
4pm–5pm: Hebga's meeting with his senior aides (*intercesseurs*)
5pm–8.30pm: ministry of deliverance
9pm–10 pm: Mass
10pm–11.30pm: Charismatic prayer, after which people retire.

Saturday morning:

6.30 am: rosary
7am–8am: general cleaning up
9am–11am: blessing of sacramentals followed by additional ministry of deliverance.

The blessing of sacramentals on Saturday morning marks for many the end of the Charismatic weekend and non-resident patients begin to leave the centre. Only those who for one reason or another could not be attended on Friday evening are received by Hebga or his aides on Saturday morning.

As the above time-table shows Charismatic weekends always begin on Friday at 3.00 pm with the Stations of the Cross which take place at the entrance of the centre where there is a space designed for it. The fourteen stations gradually take the pilgrims through the differ-

ent stages of the passion of Jesus on which they are invited to meditate for their own spiritual growth. They exalt the triumph of Jesus over sin and death, the victory of life over death. This belief in the healing (or liberating) power of the cross of Christ is not a creation of Ephphata; it is an essential aspect of Catholic theology that Ephphata, mainly Hebga, chose to emphasize in the process of developing its ritual corpus. Indeed, the crucifix is one of the main ritual objects used in Ephphata for healing purposes. Like Hebga, all his senior aides (*intercesseurs*) own crucifixes which they lay on patients when they are praying over them. In this sense, there is more 'laying on of the cross' than 'laying on of hands' in Ephphata. Among Ephphata members, there is a widespread belief that the sight of the cross unsettles or sent into trance somebody possessed by evil spirits.

It is commonly held within Ephphata that many patients have recovered their health during these Stations of the Cross and so its healing effects are explicitly stressed by Hebga and his aides. This meditation on the passion of Christ ends at the foot of a huge sculpture of the crucified Jesus which dominates the entrance of the centre. Here, Hebga, holding his crucifix, gives a short exhortation before blessing the pilgrims in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It frequently happens that during these Stations of the Cross some patients experience trances. They are generally interpreted as manifestations of evil spirits in a context of intensive prayer.

After the stations the pilgrims congregate in the chapel while Hebga meets with his aides in a room nearby. These aides are mostly senior members of Ephphata whose ability to intercede for the sick has been acknowledged. They come from various regional sections of Ephphata in Cameroon to assist Hebga during the weekend. This meeting, chaired by Hebga himself, is a forum where some internal issues of Ephphata are discussed. As to its content, I touched on it in the first chapter where I discussed the internal politics of Ephphata in relation to the interplay between asymmetric, and sometimes conflicting, agencies. The history of Ephphata is also a function of this interplay which necessarily involves power relationships.

At the end of the meeting, Hebga blesses sacramentals (water, oil, salt, crosses, incense, rosaries, prayer books, etc) placed by the intercessors on a table in the room. The things blessed at this stage of the proceedings are tools to be used later by the intercessors to pray over patients. More will be said on the debate surrounding the use of these objects and on the dualist cosmology underlying their ritual blessing in

the next chapter. After the blessing of the battle tools, Hebga blesses the intercessors in these words:

> Lord, strengthen these servants of yours with the power of your spirit. Touch the people they will touch and may your powerful word free those tormented by evil forces in nightmares and night rapes (*couches de nuit*). Also liberate those persecuted or possessed in one form or another by the devil. May you destroy the power of these evil forces….

This final blessing concludes the meeting. The intercessors are then grouped by the director of the centre into teams of two or three. Each team is destined to one of the seven workrooms (*ateliers*) in which patients are attended. Hebga remains in the meeting room with one or two intercessors for his share of the work.

Upon arrival in Mangen, each patient is briefly tested (diagnosis) by a few intercessors to determine whether it is a case of possession, in which case the person is sent to the workrooms, or an ordinary case of misfortune, in which case the person is received in the main room by Hebga. The test consists in praying briefly over the person with a cross. If the patient reacts with a trance, he or she is given a red ticket with a number indicating the order in which he or she will be received by the intercessors in one of the workrooms. The logic behind this distribution is that a trance, although not necessarily a sign of possession, is always suspicious and requires therefore further attention. If on the contrary, during the test the patient remains calm and does not show any sign of disturbance, he or she is considered as an ordinary case and is given a white ticket indicating that they will be attended to in the main room by Hebga. It may sound strange that while Hebga looks after ordinary cases, his aides take care of more serious cases. There are a number of reasons behind this fact. First of all, in the early years of Ephphata when the demand was not yet high, Hebga himself dealt with cases of possession. But as time went on, the number of patients grew bigger and bigger. Hebga could not carry the whole burden alone and simply trained some of his lay assistants to do part of the job. Each weekend in Mangen, hundreds of patients are attended, with at least fifty cases of suspected possession. Secondly, Hebga has grown old and can no longer meet all the physical demands of a *séance* of exorcism. Only on special occasions does he personally deal with cases of possession. Let us now turn to what actually happens on the therapeutic scene, first in Hebga's meeting room, and secondly in one of the workrooms.

On the Battlefield: Spiritual Warfare

Hebga's workroom (Friday, 17th September 2004)

Ordinary cases are further subdivided into 'very ordinary' and 'particular' (*particulier*) subgroups. On this day, Hebga's assistant was a woman in her early forties. With very ordinary cases, the ritual is brief and follows the same format as in Nkol-Eton. It consists of three main parts: a short exhortation, then the imposition of the cross on the patients, and the anointing of the patient with blessed oil. Patients are brought in the room in groups of 15 to 20 depending on the number of seats available. Hebga seats on a chair facing them. His assistant makes sure that each of them has a seat and then makes a short speech as follows:

> Welcome to Mangen, especially to those who are here for the first time. Father Hebga is going to lay his cross on you. It is not magic, it is prayer. Here in Mangen we do not do magic; we pray, and faith heals. Just believe and you will be healed. It is not Fr Hebga who heals, it is Jesus who heals. Fr Hebga is only an instrument in the hands of God. God does miracles in this centre. Put your trust in him and he will bless your life.

After these words of encouragement, Hebga rises, goes round and touches each patient with his cross (generally on the forehead and the chest) while saying biblical formulae such as: 'Jesus'; 'Jesus is Lord'; 'Believe in Jesus of Nazareth and you will be saved'; 'Whoever confess the name of Jesus will be saved'; 'Power went out of Jesus and healed those who touched him'; 'In honour of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees', etc. Finally, Hebga's assistant anoints each patient by making with blessed oil a sign of the cross on the forehead, the chest, and occasionally on the neck.

When all the cases classed as 'very ordinary' have been dealt with, then follows the turn of 'particular' cases. This category includes cases of complicated pregnancy, grave illness, abortion, people who joined religious sects, etc. I now consider some of them.

a. Overdue pregnancies

On this day, two women, visibly pregnant, entered, the first claiming to be carrying a 16 months pregnancy and the second a 12 months one. Father Hebga turned to me and said:

> God can solve those problems! I once came across a woman with a 24 months pregnancy and during her pregnancy she was menstruating. Isn't that strange?' He is interrupted by one of the women who said: 'I am also menstruating'. Then Father Hebga carries on with the story: 'I prayed for that woman and she later gave birth to a child weighing four kilos.'

For the two women, Hebga had this biblical passage read:

> I am telling you the truth: you will cry and weep, but the world will be glad; you will be sad, but your sadness will turn into gladness. When a woman is about to give birth, she is sad because her hour of suffering has come; but when the baby is born, she forgets her suffering, because she is happy that a baby has been born into the world. That is how it is with you: now you are sad, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be filled with gladness, the kind of gladness that no one can take away from you (John 16, 20–22).

After the reading, he prayed over these women saying: "May these pregnancies come to an end and may these women deliver their babies safely. Lord, remove any obstacle preventing them from delivering." He then went on to impose the crucifix on their bellies before his assistant anointed them with oil.

b. The dumb little girl

A girl of about 4 years old is brought in by her mother who explains that she is dumb. Looking at the form of her head and her eyes, Hebga says it is a case of Mongolism. "*She probably suffered a lesion in her brain*", he adds. Her mother complains that she behaves strangely and is very selective in what she eats. For her, Hebga chooses the following passage narrating the healing of a deaf-mute by Jesus (Mk 7, 31–37). After the reading has been taken by one of his aides, Hebga prays over the child, imposes his cross on her and she is anointed with oil.

In this particular case, Hebga's diagnosis seems to privilege a biomedical interpretation which obviously contrasts with the girl's mother's reading of the situation. Children with such a mental condition are believed to have been 'damaged' (*gâtés*) by witches before their birth. That is the reason why pregnant women seek a blessing from Hebga. It is to shield the unborn against any eventual witchcraft attack. In this line of thinking, involuntary abortions are highly suspected. We can see that in the above case, in spite of the biomedical diagnosis, Hebga goes on to offer the standard spiritual treatment. This is partly because biomedicine is not seen as incompatible with spiritual therapy

and partly because of the belief that no misfortune is beyond the power of God.

c. Cases of witchcraft

Patients in this category are all brought in at the same time and each one, in turn, briefly narrates his problem to Hebga who then offers an advice on the proper way to deal with it before praying over them.

> *Patient A*: I planted fetishes (*fétiches*) in the family compound and I would like them to be removed.

Hebga: My assistants can do it. Contact them.

> *Patient A*: I am afraid my brother will oppose the initiative.

Hebga: Try to convince him. But for the time being, I advise you to get some blessed salt. Put some of it on those fetishes to annul their evil powers.

In this case it is evident that the patient and his brother are not in agreement concerning the removal of fetishes. This is an example of conflicts of perspectives within a family whose members do not share the same religious orientation. The provisional therapy proposed by Hebga is the annulment of the evil power of fetishes with blessed salt. Some of the rituals usually conducted in private homes by Hebga's lay assistants are the blessing of houses and the purification of compounds from evil spirits or fetishes. The former is a traditional Catholic ritual whereas the latter is proper to Ephphata as it is not a common pastoral practice in the Catholic Church in Cameroon.

> *Patient B*: I was married to a man who joined a dangerous sect (free-masons) and threatened to kill our children and myself. He bewitched me and there is something like a snake circulating in my body.

Hegba: Are you still living together?

> *Patient B*: No, we are separated.
>
> *Patient C*: My husband also joined a secret society called *Famla* (a form of witchcraft predominant in West Cameroon) and then attempted to bewitch me.

Hebga: I do not know why you people are so afraid of witchcraft. Put your faith in Jesus Christ and he will protect you. Do not be afraid of boas and snakes. With faith in Jesus Christ, you can overpower them.

Hebga's assistant: They should do novenas. It will help them.

Hebga: Your fear of witches is too much! Do not fear Free-masons and Rosicrucians because they are nothing! Put your faith in Jesus Christ. In Yaounde, I met a woman who told me that her husband after having put a boa in her boasted that not even Father Hebga could remove it. It was removed. The woman was healed by faith in Jesus Christ, by the cross. Do not be afraid of witches. They are worth nothing.

> *Patient D*: I was bewitched with *evú* [a local form of witchcraft predominant in the area of Yaounde], and my spirit is enslaved; I do not grow anymore.
>
> *Patient E*: I live alone in my room. But in the night when I am sleeping, somebody mysteriously deprives me of my underwear. [Hebga's assistant advice: 'Purge yourself with holy water.']
>
> *Patient F*: My baby has blood cancer (*cancer du sang*, the hospital diagnosis)
>
> *Patient G*: My husband and my in-laws accuse me of witchcraft practices. But I am innocent.

Hebga: Is it possible to gather all of them together at once so that they can explain to me what makes them think you are witch? Because that is how I proceed. I do not indulge in divination. I gather people together and I tell them that if you are a witch and I impose my crucifix on you, you will die. In this way people are reassured. I did it several times and in several places. I do not need to go to a diviner; I use the power of Jesus Christ. I confront the accused person with his detractors and if they are making false accusations, they will be stricken by God. That is how I deal with these cases. I warn them. To accuse an innocent person of witchcraft is some kind of social assassination.

> *Patient H*: I was working. I lost my job. I married a Moslem girl. We have been together for 26 years. Before we got married, each one promised to respect the faith of the other. One day we agreed to throw away all the fetishes in our possession. We were happy but suddenly she changed. She does not want to see me anymore.

Hebga: why does she not want to see you anymore? What happened?

> *Patient H*: I do not know, she told me one day that I am a dead man, and she gave our children away to other people.

Hebga: Where do you live?

> *Patient H*: I live in Yaounde

Hebga: Do you live with her in Yaounde?

Patient H: We live in the same house, but each one…

Hebga: how old are the children?

Patient H: One is 25 years old and the other 18 years old.

Hebga: Are they employed?

Patient H: None of us is employed, except her. I am the one who helped her find a job, but later on I lost my own job.

Hebga: That is a serious family problem. It can not be solved here. Talk to her and try to see if she agrees to come with you to see me in my chapel in Yaounde. If she does not, it does not matter, I will pray and my prayers will affect her where she is.

Patient H: Let me add that now she is going out with a Moslem.

To conclude the session with cases of witchcraft, Hebga adresses all the patients as follows:

Take down these biblical references and use them for your personal prayer. To combat fear: Psalms 23 and 27; against evil forces and all forms of witchcraft such as *famla, ekong, boas, evú*: Psalms 35 and 91. But above all, ask for faith that saves and breaks down all the powers of darkness. With faith in Jesus Christ, you can cast out all the evil powers, even Lucifer. When your faith in Jesus is strong Lucifer is powerless. I have encountered Lucifer several times, sometimes in my room. I asked him to go away. Sometimes in my room, around my table, I see three little fellows and I do not know how they get there. I am not afraid of them. I do not know why you are afraid of them. Ask bishop Ntep (a local bishop in charge of a diocese in Cameroon) what happened when I exorcised a secondary school girl in his presence and in the presence of 21 other priests. The devil uplifted the girl with her chair. If you were present, you would have fled. Know that with Jesus we can overcome all the witches of the world.

Hebga then asks his assistant to read Psalm 27. After the reading, he says the following prayer:

I beseech you, Lord God our father, God almighty and merciful; free your children from anxiety and fear. Knock down those who want to knock them down and break those who want to break them. Whoever they are, *kon* or *famla*, we tread them underfoot with the power of the holy spirit; may everything work out well with those of you who are about to be operated upon; shame those idiots who do not know the power of Jesus Christ. Satan owns some power but Jesus is more powerful than him and we lean on Jesus. Holy archangel Michael, come to our help! We crush Satan and his army. Pray and you will triumph.

Father Hebga then goes round and imposes his crucifix on each patient. The imposition is followed by the anointing with holy oil which marks the end of this session.

d. Cases of abortion

The next group to come in is made up of four young women who all confess to having committed abortion, some of them several times. Hebga then says to them:

> Abortion is a crime. Westerners, since they do not care about God anymore and are all going to hell, abort carelessly, even with a six month pregnancy. In this country (Cameroon), when a Catholic aborts, she must refer to a bishop; for it is not an ordinary sin and only a bishop or a priest specially appointed for it can absolve it. But we are going to implore God's forgiveness for you, for your sin. God created us to praise him, not to kill. Let us take psalm 32.

Psalm 32 which talks about personal sin and God's forgiveness is taken by his assistant. After the reading of the psalm, they all say a common penitential prayer. Hebga then imposes his crucifix on them before they are anointed with oil.

e. Involvement with dubious religious groups (sects)

Father Hebga has on sale a booklet of his own entitled, *Mouvements religieux et sectes à l'assaut de la planète: le cas de l'Afrique* in which he seeks to enlighten people about the nature and alleged danger of what is disparagingly known in Cameroon as '*sectes*'. Free-masons and Rosicrucians are often singled out as some of the most dangerous. It is alleged that most of the high ranking officials in Cameroon are affiliated with them for the sake of social promotion. It happens that after having left the Catholic Church or a major Protestant Church to join one of these new groups, some people later decide to come back to their initial Church. Some of them come to seek help from Hebga. It is the case with the next group of patients.

> *Patient I*: I joined the Anglican [she meant Gallican] Church. I did not know it was a sect. I was desperately seeking healing for I was sick. I had the feeling that things were walking in my body. It gave me the sensation of fire burning like electricity. My body was heating like pepper.

Hebga: Yes!

Patient I: When I arrived there [Gallican Church] with my little boy, they did things to me. They told us that we will stay awake all night in a vigil. Then around four in the morning, a woman stood up and started moving round in circle in the room. Then she said that my little boy was an aviator (*aviateur*) [meaning a sorcerer]. She said that I was a witch myself. I told them that if they see witchcraft in me, they should remove it. They told me that I had come to test them and vowed to kill me. They put something in my ears and my nostrils. I suddenly fell down, lost consciousness and they continue to do things to me. Then they threw me out of their compound.

Hebga: I wish you could narrate your story in front of all those people who still go to those idiots in spite of warnings. When you are asked to avoid those dangerous sects, you do not listen.

Patient I: Father, I did not know it was a religious sect. When I went there, he told me he was an exorcist. At times they will tell me that they are working with spirits called '*mbamba*'.

Hebga: Why did you not inquire of your parish authorities what it was?

Patient I: Father, I am a Protestant.

Hebga: It does not matter. You could have inquired of your pastor what it was all about.

Patient I: I had lost my mind since I was seeking healing.

Patient J: [a young man visibly disturbed, accompanied by his mother who speaks for him]: He is called J.B. He used to speak but it is two months now since he lost his speech. He was a small trader in Yaounde. It is three years now since he fell sick. He joined a religious sect, the Jehovah witnesses. I tried to treat him traditionally (*à l'indigène*), but it failed.

Patient K: I have been a diviner for 12 years, but I now want to quit this job.

Patient L: I unknowingly joined a sect in Oyomabang (a quarter in Yaounde).

Hebga: Which sect?

Patient L: It has no name. It is a woman who started it. It is my nephew who is a deacon who introduced my family and me to it.

Patient M: My father is Rosicrucian and I have been sick for sometime. It all started one morning in 1991, on my way the bathroom, I met a white lady and she disappeared. It was the beginning of my sickness. No hospital has been able to help me.

Hebga: Did you join the Rosicrucians yourself?

> *Patient M*: Never! Sometimes when I am on my bed, people start beating me; not that I am dreaming. They arrest me, chain me and take me to several places.
>
> *Patient N*: I joined the Pentecostals.

Hebga: How can you join groups that you do not know? Can you explain to me what Pentecostalism is all about?

> *Patient N*: They are those who have the Spirit of Jesus.

Hebga: And what about us [Catholics], what do we have? Do not forget that the Catholic Church started immediately after Jesus. Pentecostalism appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century. It is a recent thing. Do you mean that people did not have the Spirit of Jesus before the 20th century? It does not make sense.

> *Patient O*: When I was sick, they took me to a Church. I do not know which kind of prayer they said over me. Because when I lost consciousness, I found myself caught between two powers fighting one another.

To conclude this session, Hebga adresses the patients as follows:

> You people make a lot of mistakes. When you belong to Catholic or Protestant churches, inquire of your pastors and your priests before you join any group. President Bongo (of the neighbouring country Gabon) banned some of those sects in his country because it was killing many people. In our Charismatic Renewal, we do have some elements of Pentecostalism such as the focus on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands, etc. But you should inquire of your pastors and priests the difference between your churches and those groups. Stay in the main churches where you were baptized, where there is security. Do not involve yourself in things you do not master. I wrote a book to enlighten you on those groups and it is on sale. I have also written a lot in our magazine, Le Paraclet, about these things. Read them and you will not be misled by sects.

Hebga then goes round to impose the crucifix on each of the patients, says a prayer of deliverance over them before they are anointed with oil. When everybody has been attended, Hebga retires to his private lodgings where he has supper, takes a short rest before moving to the chapel for the Mass and the Charismatic prayer.

Lay Workroom (atelier)

This *atelier* is staffed with two intercessors, a man (soldier by profession) in his forties and a woman (an accountant by profession) in her late thirties. They are both dressed in red, the official colour of Ephphata. They have now gathered all they need to start attending the patients assigned to them. Their tools include blessed water, blessed salt, crucifixes, incense (but not required), a Bible, prayer books, and a bucket with some holy water (in which patients expectorate as they usually do during the ritual). The group of patients (about 15) assigned to them that evening is sitting in front of the workroom waiting to be called in a prearranged order. Before calling in the first patient, the two *intercessors* pray together: First one Our Father; then a Hail Mary and then a spontaneous petition:

> Lord our God, you have called us to serve you although we are sinners. We are only instruments in your hands. We beg you to bless our work this evening as we intercede for your children who are sick. Heal them so that the enemy may again be humiliated. Come Holy Spirit, be our strength and lead us to victory in this battle we are about to begin. Amen.

The first patient is then called in: a lady in her early fifties comes in and sits on the bench. She is welcome by the two intercessors who remain standing with their crucifixes held in front of her.

One intercessor: what is wrong with you?

> The patient: I have a problem with my nerves; I have been through years of tension with my husband. We do not live together anymore. I just feel heat all over my body. I have been told that it is my husband who is trying to kill me, that he sold me to the famla (*Il m'a vendu au famla*).

First, she is sprinkled with holy water. Then blessed water is mixed with salt for her to drink. Then is said one 'Our Father' followed by one 'I confess to Almighty God' (confession of one's sins). Now from just holding the crucifixes over the patient, the intercessors lay them on her while repeating: 'Lord, have mercy!' or 'Christ, have mercy!' They carry on with the imposition of the cross on various parts of the body while reciting gospel passages about the power Jesus gave to his disciples to heal the sick and cast out devils (for example Lk10, 17–20 or Mc 16, 15–18). The patient does not show any sign of trance. The intercessors stop for a moment and talk to her:

One intercessor: I do not think it is a case of possession

Patient: Why?

One intercessor: Because, you are not reacting (*Tu ne réagis pas!*)

One intercessor: You have been here since yesterday. You have listened to the teachings given by the priests. Trust in Jesus Christ. Who is the master of life?

Patient: Jesus Christ.

One intercessor: Famla cannot do anything to you when you are following Jesus. You must decide now to put all your trust in Jesus Christ. Even that heat in your body, it is nothing. It is bewitchment (envoûtement) which is going to disappear; you must have a personal relationship with Jesus and everything will be alright. Just because people say that your husband bewitched you is no reason to hate him. You must pray for him to change his heart and come back to Jesus…Jesus asks us to pray for our enemies. It does not mean that you must run to him and let him strangle you. No! What is love of enemies? It is forgiveness. Pray for your husband to be well and you will be liberated. Your husband may be a cross sent to you by the Lord. Jesus needs both of you: your husband and you. So you must let go all that hatred in your heart. For your prayer, use Psalms 35, 54 and 91 against the forces of evil. You must read them as if it were food, chew it and swallow it. Buy some oil, have it blessed and use it to massage yourself. For massages and prayer are very efficacious against bewitchment (*envoûtement*). So, massage the whole your body with blessed oil. Get also blessed oil, grind it until it becomes like powder, and then mix it with oil to massage your body. Massage especially your neck and its nape. But first pray to remove hatred from your heart.

Patient: I also feel that there is something in my belly which is stifling me.

Intercessor: did you go to the hospital?

Patient: Yes, but the doctors could not help.

Intercessor: did they do any scan?

Patient: No!

Intercessor: God is not against science. He can cure you. He can cure every sickness. But he wants you also to give some space to doctors.

So you must go to the doctor and he will prescribe something for your belly… God also works through the doctors. We are now going to say a final prayer for you.

They lay their crucifixes on her again and one of them prays as follows: 'Crucified Jesus, bury this servant of yours in your holy wounds. Lord, remember your bruised face! Heal your servant; free your servant; destroy anything that is tormenting her. May the blood of Christ flow on you and heal you'. The woman is then anointed with oil and moves out of the room.

The second patient is called in: she is a young lady in her mid-thirties. She comes in and sits on the bench. The intercessors start a short conversation with her:

One intercessor: What is your problem?

> Patient: I am stuck in my life (*Je suis bloqué*); I am not progressing. I can't have children.

One intercessor: Do you have night rapes (*couches de nuit*) and night meals (*repas de nuit*)?

> Patient: yes!

As in the previous case, she is sprinkled with blessed water. Some drops of blessed oil are put in her nostrils. Then with crucifixes laid on her, one intercessor prays: 'spirit of hatred and jealousy, spirit of bewitchment (envoûtement) and of witches, we break you, we chain you, in the name of Jesus Christ.' After this short prayer of exorcism follow advices:

> This is what you are going to do: get holy water to purge yourself at least twice a week. For your prayer, use Lk 8: 43–48; Ac 28: 7–10; Ps 127/128. With all these prayers, entrust yourself to the Lord. Ask the Lord for whatever you need and he will give it. But continue with your treatment in the hospital. From time to time, cook your food with blessed salt. It is very efficacious against night rapes and night meals. Drink often blessed water and purge yourself with it and it will wash away all the dirt that demons deposited in you through night rapes and night meals. Love Jesus, purify your heart of any hatred. God blesses everybody even women without children. God can still give you children as he did with Sarah [reference to a story in the Old Testament].

As a final prayer, holding again their crucifixes over the lady, one of them prays:

> Lord, visit your handmaid as you visited Peter's mother-in-law. Lord, you are the greatest doctor, the greatest surgeon, the greatest drug. You are gold, silver, you are everything for us. Here is your handmaid, see her pains and sufferings; you made her; you know her entirely and you know the source of her sickness. We beg you this morning to bury her in your holy wounds. Lord, every woman would like to have a child; she is younger than Sarah and Elisabeth to whom you gave a child in their old age. Everything that human beings [meaning sorcerers or witches] tied in this belly [pressing the belly of the woman with a cross], Lord, untie it. Holy Virgin Mary, you who unties all kinds of knots, here is your handmaid, your daughter who has never born a child; in her belly untie all the knots tied by the enemy…

Each *atelier* receives about fifteen to twenty patients during each Charismatic week-end. The format of the therapeutic process varies very little and, as in the two preceding cases, always include the following main items: use of sacramentals, short dialogue with patient on her problem, prayer over the patients with crucifix, use of biblical texts (read or recited), advising the patient on how to deal with her problem beyond the ritual. It happens that in a few cases (about 9 out of 15) the patient goes into a trance (*réagit*), in which case more physical energy is required to handle her. This is one of the reasons why there is almost always more than one intercessor in a workroom. Trances also often involve some loss of control and some violent gesticulation. This is delicate for women especially when they are attended by men. For this reason, they are encouraged to come to the ritual dressed in trousers and not in skirts. Cases of trance are treated as if they were cases of possession. They always involve a verbal battle between the intercessors and the 'possessor speaking through the patient'. I do not describe any of those instances here because they are very similar to those described in chapter three. The format is exactly the same and variations occur only at the level of performance, meaning the ability of the intercessor to be creative in the choice of prayers, of biblical texts, of responses to the 'adversary' and of sacramentals, etc. At least 80 % of resident patients in Mangen would be associated with trances. They would constitute the majority of patients received in the *ateliers*. Since their recovery is in most cases gradual, they are attended by several intercessors in the course of their weeks or months of stay in the centre. Obviously, in such an environment pervaded by floating beliefs, by an open-ended repertoire of deliverance prayers and by innovative uses of sacramentals, contradictory diagnoses are not uncommon. Also, as far as the therapeutic process is concerned, there is no real follow-

up in terms of sustained communication between intercessors about the therapeutic itinerary of each patient.

As in many other healing systems, the position of intercessors as providers of health services gives them some control over the lives of patients. Indeed, Mangen is not the only place where these intercessors pray over patients, they also do so in their small Ephphata groups or when they are contacted privately by patients who need a sustained follow-up but can't reside at Mangen for one reason or another. Only acknowledged intercessors are allowed to pray over patients as there is always a risk that some of them may use their positions, as it has happened in the past, to extort money from desperate patients. Indeed article 50 of the rules governing the behaviour of Ephphata members stipulates not only that services rendered to patients are free of charge (quoting Mt 10, 8 which says: 'You receive without charge, give without charge') but also that it is an intolerable abuse (*abus intolérable*) to extort money from patients in the name of the movement.

A Few Comparisons

Writing about etiologies of sickness in Charismatic groups in suburban America, McGuire notes that although they named God, self (sin), and Satan as the three main causes of misfortunes, "Most respondents from these Christian healing groups believed that individuals were responsible, to some degree, for their own illnesses. The linkage might be that they had failed to repent of certain sins, forgive people, or turn wholly to the Lord" (1988: 52). Elsewhere, writing specifically about Catholic Charismatics in North America, he says that "The most frequently cited etiological category was 'sin' " (1982: 149–150), meaning 'original' or personal sin. In the North American context, there seems to be an emphasis on personal responsibility even if "Attributing illness to Satan or to humankind's fallen condition implies a lower degree of individual responsibility for any given illness" (1998: 52). In the same line of thought, attempting a contrast between Azande witchcraft and demonic affliction, Csordas (1997: 62) remarks interestingly:

> The equivalence between witchcraft among the Azande and demonic harassment among Charismatics subsists primarily in the mode of reasoning and not in the cultural content. Specifically, Azande witchcraft is unequivocally an interpersonal affair, whether or not a direct accusation is ever made. Demonic harassment among North American Charismat-

> ics, however, is an affair of the self, for if the misfortune is attributed to a spiritual entity, no occasion for social conflict can ensue.

Csordas' demarcation between witchcraft and demonic activity may be true of North American Catholic Charismatics, but it is certainly not true of Ephphata in which, as the result of an ongoing indigenous cultural translation, witches and sorcerers are seen as agents, among many others, of Satan. In other words, witchcraft has been reinterpreted in Ephphata as a demonic activity. In a previous chapter on Hebga's typology of possessions, we saw that 'living witches or sorcerers' constitute a category of 'possessors'. This category of possession is the most frequent one in Ephphata and suspected possessors are often patients' close relatives. It goes without saying that such suspicions lead to serious social tensions or conflicts. Moreover, with the dominant tendency in Ephphata to explain one's misfortunes in terms of witchcraft, which implies blaming a fellow human being, there is not much place for personal responsibility in the way patients or their relatives usually apportion blame. As we saw in the few cases considered above, it is only in the course the therapeutic process that Hebga or the lay *intercesseurs* try to draw the attention of patients to their personal responsibility.

Because of this strong emphasis on the social environment (witchcraft accusations) in Ephphata's etiology of misfortunes, Hebga often seeks to involve the social network of the patient in therapeutic processes. For example, in the case of Patient G mentioned above, she tells Hebga that although she is innocent, her husband and her in-laws are accusing her of practising witchcraft. Then Hebga asks her if it is possible to bring the whole family together in order to address the issue. Sometimes, the problem concerns not only a single family but a whole village. It is clear that in these cases, healing is not just a matter of transforming the 'Charismatic sacred self' (Csordas 1997), but also of transforming the relational or social self. In other words, the focus in the healing process is not just the afflicted individual but her entire social network. This greater attention to the social environment of the patient of course has parallels in a number of African traditional therapeutic procedures. For example, in his account of the performance of *Ihamba* healing ritual among the Ndembu, Turner remarks that "part of the process of removing the *ihamba* consists in the doctor's summoning kin of the patient to come before the improvised hunters' shrine (identical with that used in the hunters' cult) and inducing them to confess any grudges (*yitela*) and hard feelings they may nourish against the patient. … The

patient, too, must acknowledge his own grudges against his fellow villagers if he is to be rid of the 'bite' of *ihamba*" (Turner 1967: 366; cf. also Watio 1986: 118).

Concerning the classification of illnesses, McGuire (1982: 133), in the wake of McNutt (1974: 146), distinguishes: physical illness, emotional illness and problems, spiritual illness (sin for example), demonic oppression. To these categories correspond respectively the following types of therapies: prayer for physical healing, prayer for inner healing including the 'healing of memories', prayer for repentance, prayer for deliverance (exorcism). McGuire further remarks: "Emotional healings and 'healing of memories' figure prominently in the Catholic Pentecostal scheme…" (ibid.). Csordas (1994: 40–41) describes emotional healing as follows:

> Inner healing is also often referred to as "the healing of memories," a term that reflects its underlying theory of affliction. This theory holds that emotional "woundedness" or "brokenness" is the result of traumatic life events. … The typical technique is to pray for the supplicant's entire life stage by stage, from the moment of conception to the present. Events or unreconciled relationships that emerge in this review of life history are given special attention in a period of prayer, and the supplicant is asked to forgive the offending person.

Already, some Pentecostals reject this healing technique as a disguised form of psychotherapy and as 'non biblical'. Also, I saw no trace of the practice of the 'healing of memories' in Ephphata. As we saw in some cases considered above, healers in Ephphata limit themselves to exhorting patients to forgive their past and present persecutors in imitation of Jesus who from the cross forgave his persecutors. I mentioned in a previous chapter that compared to healing rituals among North American Catholic Charismatics, Ephphata therapeutic processes draw far less on psychotherapy. This is mainly because in Cameroon, the latter is still a marginal healing genre. For example, Csordas (ibid.: 35) remarks that among North American patients who seek Charismatic healing for emotional/relational problems, about 40 % would have already seen a psychiatrist or psychologist. The picture is different in Ephphata. Since 95 % of its patients interpret their misfortunes in terms of witchcraft practices, recourse to psychiatrists or psychologists is a rare occurrence. Furthermore, regarding the professional training of Catholic Charismatic healers in North America, Csordas (ibid.: 27) notes that out of the 87 that he came across, about 26 had some training in health or mental-health care (psychology, psychiatry, nursing counselling, etc.). Again, the picture is different with Ephphata healers who, apart from

Hebga who received some training in psychiatry in Paris, rarely refer to psychotherapy.

There is, however, a prayer known as *prière de guérison de son arbre génealogique* available within Ephphata and other local prayer groups. It is used for the healing or purification of one's family tree including the dead. Although the practice of praying for 'the healing of the family tree' was introduced in the Charismatic world in the early 1980s by a British Charismatic psychiatrist (ibid.: 43), it seems particularly consonant with the belief in parental or ancestral curse found in some African societies, including Cameroon (Hebga 1979). Csordas describes ancestral healing as follows: "The theory of ancestral affliction in ancestral healing is that problems can be passed to successive generations through the 'bloodline.' Whereas in some societies the attribution of illness to ancestors is a common place, in contemporary North America it is somewhat awkward and ambiguous" (1994: 43). Most patients within Ephphata easily accommodate the belief that ancestors can or do send misfortunes to their relatives. As to the technique used in ancestral healing, North American Catholic Charismatics, according to Csordas, speak of 'cutting of bond' between the patient and the afflicting ancestors (ibid.: 44). Interestingly, for my purposes in this section, Csordas goes on to underline the following contrast:

> The severing of bonds is of interest for a comparative reason as well. Affliction by ancestors is commonly recorded as a cause of illness in the ethnomedical systems of diverse societies. … By and large, however, the ancestors are thought to take action in response to having been offended or neglected by living descendants. Therapy often consists of *reestablishing* bonds by appeasing, meeting the demands of, or fulfilling obligations toward the ancestor. That Charismatic ancestral healing requires the *severing* of bonds is strikingly concordant with a North American ethnopsychology that objectifies the healthy self as a discrete, bounded, entity (ibid.: 44; emphasis in the original).

Although I find Csordas's above contrast very helpful, I think that it should not be overemphasized. With the permeability of cultural boundaries made more salient by current processes of globalization, Charismatic idioms of therapy easily travel from the West to Third World countries making it possible for different therapeutic ideologies to coexist in the same healing system. This is true of Ephphata within which Charismatic prayers imported from the West are used in conjunction with those composed by Hebga himself or other African Catholic healers. Moreover, patients are usually more interested in find-

ing an efficacious prayer for ancestral healing than in knowing whether they are praying for the 'severing' or for the 'reestablishing' of bonds.

In this chapter, my account of what happens in Mangen during Charismatic weekends has sought to highlight the asymmetric intersection (but also the distance) between the horizons of the healers (Hebga and his aides) and those of the patients who travel from various parts of Cameroon to Mangen in search of a solution to their problems. It appears that the great variety of misfortunes coupled with the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of the patients contrast with the quasi uniformity of therapeutic processes.

CHAPTER SIX

RITUAL HEALING: RELIGION OR MAGIC?

Most anthropologists writing on ritual acknowledge its transformative power, that is, its ability to modify the subjective state of participants (Durkheim 1915; Lévi-Strauss 1958; Turner 1967; Douglas 2002 [1966]: 87–88; Csordas 2002; James 2003: 110; Severi 2005: 236). But they do not always agree on the nature of this transformation. The blessing and the use of ritual substances (known as sacramentals in the doctrinal language of the Catholic Church) are common practices in Ephphata. As Keith Thomas (1971: 29) rightly points out, the origin of the blessing of sacramentals can be traced back to early medieval Christianity:

> By the early Middle Ages the ecclesiastical authorities had developed a comprehensive range of formulae designed to draw down God's practical blessing upon secular activities. The basic ritual was the benediction of salt and water for the health of the body and the expulsion of evil spirits. But the liturgical books of the time also contained rituals devised to bless houses, cattle, crops, ships, tools, armour, wells and kilns. … There were procedures for blessing the sick and for dealing with sterile animals, for driving away thunder and for making the marriage bed fruitful. Such rituals usually involved the presence of a priest and the employment of holy water and the sign of the cross. Basic to the whole procedure was the idea of exorcism, the formal conjuring of the devil out of some material object by the pronunciation of prayers and the invocation of God's name.

One of the long-term effects of the Reformation critique on mainstream Catholicism has been the marginalization (not the suppression) of some of these blessings in its ritual practice. But they still appeal to those who are interested in the immediate and temporal returns of Christianity, and ritual life in Charismatic Renewal in general is an instance of their revival.

The blessing of sacramentals is based on the belief that the words and gestures of a priest, acting in the name of Jesus Christ, have the power to transform ordinary substances (water, salt, oil, etc.) into sacred efficacious objects. As mentioned in chapter five, ritual performances in Ephphata display the predominance of utterances perceived by partic-

ipants not only as mere locutions but also as 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary' acts, to use terminology borrowed from Austin:

> …We said that we also perform *illocutionary* acts such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c., i.e. utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. … We may also perform *perlocutionary acts*: what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading. (Austin 1962:108; the author's emphasis)

Indeed, most Charismatics believe in the power of the spoken word to do things, to endow people and things with new properties and powers. This is what some anthropologists have called the 'magical power of words' (Malinowski 1965; Tambiah 1968). I first consider the dualist cosmological framework of blessing formulae before discussing the related problem of the demarcation of religion from magic with some focus on Weber's concept of religious rationalization as disenchantment. I further suggest that the resurgence of a ritual-oriented Pentecostalism from within Protestantism shows that this rationalization is not irreversible. The chapter concludes with a few observations on the scope of the domestication of Pentecostal features within Catholicism.

Blessing formulae: the power of words

Besides the dazzling red uniforms, another striking feature of Ephphata major gatherings is the pervasive display of bottles (or even jerry-cans) of water, of packets or bags of salt, of bottles of oil (especially olive oil), etc. awaiting blessing. Why precisely these substances? The authority of the Bible is often invoked to defend the legitimacy of this selection. For example, to justify the use of oil for healing purposes, the following passage from the letter of James in the New Testament is often quoted: "Any one of you who is ill should send for the elders of the Church, and they must anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray over him. The prayer of faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up again" (James 5, 14–15). For the use of incense to ward off evil spirits, the following passage from the book of Tobias (6, 17–18) is quoted: "Do not worry about the demon; take her. This very evening, I promise, she will be given to you as your wife. Then once you are in the bridal room, take the heart and liver of the fish and lay a little of it on the burning incense. The reek will rise, the demon will smell it and flee, and there is no danger that he will ever be found

near the girl again". For the use of water and salt, the usual references would be the second book of Kings (2: 19–22), the book of the prophet Ezekiel (47, 1–12), or simply the water in which Jesus was baptized (Mk 3, 13–16). As the following blessing formulae show, blessing is perceived as a ritual act which endows a selection of God's creatures (water, salt, oil, incense, etc) with God's power for the battle against the devil and its agents.

The following formulae used in Ephphata are not an invention of Hebga. They are part of a set of rituals published in the 1960s by the Vatican. Where this sign (+) appears in the formulae, it indicates the time when the priest makes the sign of the cross with a crucifix or with his hand over the substance being blessed.

The Blessing of Water

> [*The priest says*]: God's creature, water, I purify you in the name of God + the Father almighty, in the name of Jesus + Christ, His Son, our Lord, and in the power of the Holy + Spirit. May you become purified water, empowered to drive afar all power of the enemy, in fact, to root out and banish the enemy himself, along with his fallen angels. We ask this through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is coming to judge both the living and the dead and the world by fire. Amen.
>
> Let us pray:
>
> O God, who for man's welfare established the most wonderful mysteries in the substance of water, hearken to our prayer, and pour forth your blessing + on this element now being prepared with various purifying rites. May this creature of yours, when used in your mysteries and endowed with your grace, serve to cast out demons and to banish disease. May everything that this water sprinkles in the homes and gatherings of the faithful be delivered from all that is unclean and hurtful; let no breath of contagion hover there, no taint of corruption; let all the wiles of the lurking enemy come to nothing. By the sprinkling of this water may everything opposed to the safety and peace of the occupants of these homes be banished, so that in calling on your holy name they may know the well-being they desire, and be protected from every peril; through Christ our Lord, Amen.

A semantic analysis of the above formula leads to the following classification of key terms:

Fig. 5. Father Hebga blessing oil, water and salt

Forces of Good	*illocution/Perlocution*	*Forces of evil*
God	purify	enemy
Father	empower	fallen angels
Jesus Christ	drive afar	unclean
Holy Spirit	root out	hurtful
Prayer	banish	breath of contagion
Holy name	pour forth	taint of corruption
Fire	Cast out	wiles of the lurking enemy
mysteries	Deliver	peril
grace	protect	
Fr Hebga		

The Blessing of Oil

[Fr Hebga]: Our help is in the name of the Lord.
[The Congregation]: Who made heaven and earth.

[Fr Hebga]: God's creature, oil, I cast out the demon from you. By God the Father almighty (+) who made heaven and earth and sea and all that they contain. Let the adversary's power, the devil's legions, and all Satan's attacks and machinations be dispelled and driven afar from this creature oil. Let it bring health in body and mind to all who use it, in the

name of God (+), the Father almighty, and of our Lord Jesus Christ + his Son, and of the Holy Spirit (+), the Advocate, as well as in the love of the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who is coming to judge both the living and the dead and the world by fire. Amen.

Fr Hebga: Lord, hear my prayer.
The congregation: And let my cry be heard by you.
Fr Hebga: The Lord be with you.
The congregation: And also with you.

Lord God almighty, before whom the hosts of angels stand in awe and whose heavenly service we acknowledge, may it please you to regard favourably and to bless and hallow this creature, oil, which by your power has been pressed from the juice of olives. You have ordained it for anointing the sick, so that, when they are made well, they may give thanks to you, the living and true God. Grant, we pray, that those who use this oil, which we are blessing + in your name, may be delivered from all suffering, all infirmity, and all the wiles of the enemy. Let it be a means of averting any kind of adversity from man, made in your image and redeemed by the precious blood of your Son, so that he may never again suffer the sting of the ancient serpent, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Forces of good	*illocution/perlocution*	*Forces of evil*
God	cast out	demon
Father	dispel	Satan
Jesus Christ	be driven afar	devil's legion
Holy Spirit	bring health	suffering
Host of angels	hallow/bless	infirmity
Blood of your son	ordain	wiles of the enemy
Fire	deliver	adversity
Fr Hebga	averting	sting of the ancient serpent

As the preceding terminological specification shows, the dominant idiom in this therapeutic process is that of warfare. The purpose of the blessing is both to purify the substances from any evil influence and to endow them with divine power for the battle against the devil, the enemy of God and humanity.

Among the many categories used in the formulae to refer to the devil we find 'serpent' or 'snake'. This obviously has to do with the symbolism of evil in the Bible. In the book of Genesis (3: 1–7), for example, it is in the form of a snake that the devil misleads Eve. But there is also a corresponding African traditional symbol. The analysis of misfortune narratives in chapter two showed that patients often

complain of things crawling on them in the night or circulating in their stomachs like snakes. Indeed, among the Duala and the Beti of southern Cameroon, as mentioned earlier, the *serpent* (*boa mystique*) is considered to be a source of misfortunes. It is owned by witches or sorcerers who manipulate them as familiars for evil purposes (Laburthe-Tolra 1995: 93). This analogy between the Bible and some cultures of southern Cameroon suggests that in terms of cultural translation Hebga's patients can easily associate snake with evil because it echoes some of their collective representations.

According to Catholic doctrine in general, the war between the forces of evil and the forces of good, which condition human health, is not a war between equals. Catholics firmly believe that Jesus came on earth to help human beings defeat of the forces of evil. Indeed, New Testament stories suggest that the devil had no power over Jesus. For example, Jesus successfully resists all devilish temptations in the desert (Lk 4: 1–13). That the presence of Jesus terrifies demons is suggested by several passages of in the Gospel. One of them reads:

> There was in the synagogue a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon and he cried out with a loud voice, "What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." So Jesus rebuked it. "Be muzzled!", he said, "and come out of him." And after the demon had thrown him into the midst of them, it came out of him and it did him no harm. Astonishment fell on them all and they kept saying to each other, "What word is this? Because he gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and with power and they come out." And the story of him went out to every place in the surrounding district (Lk 4: 31–37).

For Catholics the resurrection of Jesus following his violent death on a cross epitomizes the irreversible victory of good over evil. What this victory implies for the disciples of Jesus Christ is that they too, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can overcome evil in their lives and in the world. But without the help of the saving power of God manifested in Jesus Christ, human beings are at the mercy of evil forces. This set of beliefs provides the background for the therapeutic logic within Ephphata: the devil attacks and subdues human beings in one way or another (variety of misfortunes); they call upon God who comes to their help and defeat the evil one; healing is experienced as liberation from the yoke of the devil.

Revisiting Weber

Within Ephphata sacramentals are so much credited with healing powers that together with prayers and faith they constitute the main weapons against evil forces. Their use has a long history in the Catholic Church. For example, blessed water, which is still found at the entrance of many Catholic Churches today, is often credited with the power to ward off evil spirits. The use of blessed oil on the sick is also an old Catholic sacramental practice. Hebga obviously has no control over what patients make of these substances once they have been blessed. People are creative in the many ways they use them for protective or therapeutic purposes: they are applied on ailing parts of the body, ingested, sprinkled on things and places, etc. For example, as we saw in the preceding chapter, a patient can be advised to drink blessed water or to use holy oil on his/her private parts as a remedy to *repas de nuits* or *couches de nuits*. The critics of Hebga claim that the healing powers of these sacramentals are overstressed in Ephphata and that this could mislead patients into using them as if they were fetishes (*fétiches*) from any local traditional healer or diviner. The idea here is to distance Catholicism from the so-called 'fetishism' (magic) of traditional healers. Hebga usually defends himself not by denying the possibility for such a confusion, but by arguing that it is not because something useful can be abused that it should not be used. He will often ask his aides to explain to patients that faith in Jesus Christ is more important in the healing process than the use of sacramentals. In other words, the use of sacramentals without faith in Jesus Christ is inefficacious magic whereas their use to support one's faith in the healing power of Jesus Christ would be efficacious religion (miracle). Hebga often says to his patients: "I am not a magician; I am not a diviner. I pray to Jesus Christ and he works."

But it is a fact that the clientele of Hebga is not exclusively Catholic; his services are also sought by a good number of Protestants and (occasionally) Muslims who are not at all familiar with the Catholic symbolic universe (holy water, holy oil, rosary, etc). Protestant patients admitted in Mangen end up adhering to practices which in their own churches would be considered superstitious and magical. These include saying the Rosary, invoking the saints, using sacramentals, etc. These non-Catholics do not tend to worry much about the issue of meanings attached to these ritual practices. They seem mostly interested in their efficacy. I wouldn't therefore rule out the possibility that many of them

do not really make a major difference between these substances and those of traditional healers, whom they are likely to have visited before coming to Hebga. We are dealing here with a situation in which the uniformity of perceptions between healers and patients cannot be presumed. Still Hebga does not refrain from praying over non-Catholics, arguing that during his life Jesus indiscriminately ministered to sons of Israel and to 'pagans'.

It is interesting to see that in the above demarcation attempts, the Catholic priest and the blessed substances are associated with religion whereas diviners, the representatives of local religions, and their substances (disparagingly termed *fétiches*) are associated with magic. In order to understand this value-laden distinction it is important to remember that African Catholicism has always sought to distance itself from the healing practices of local religions lumped together as magical superstitions. But the relativity of these differentiations becomes manifest when one also remembers that Reformation thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "attacked the rites of the Catholic Church, including the doctrine of transubstantiation, as sacramental magic" (Tambiah 1990:18). As Keith Thomas (1971: 75–76) puts it,

> Protestantism thus presented itself as a deliberate attempt to take the magical elements out of religion, to eliminate the idea that rituals of the Church had about them a mechanical efficacy, and to abandon the effort to endow physical objects with supernatural qualities by special formulae of consecration and exorcism.

Given their understanding of divine sovereignty, providence and omnipotence, "it was inevitable and logical…that Protestant theologians would hammer out the distinction between religious acts as primarily intercessionary in character, and magical acts as being coercive rituals ambitiously attempting to manipulate the divine" (Tambiah 1990: 19). More importantly Tambiah goes on to argue that it is this "Protestant legacy which was automatically taken over by later Victorian theorists like Tylor and Frazer, and given a universal significance as both historical analytical categories useful in tracing the intellectual development of mankind from savagery to civilization" (ibid.). Traces of the Protestant influence, I argue in what follows, can also be found in Weber's demarcation of religion from magic. I have chosen to focus on Weber not only because he discusses 'world religions' but also because of his understanding of religious rationalization in terms of the recession of magical elements (disenchantment), an understanding which presents Protestantism as the result of the rationalization of medieval Catholicism.

Weber's general assumption about social realities is that their *raison d'être* is the service of human interests (material or ideal). He sees magic as the 'universal and primeval form of religiosity' which emerged as a practical response to the specific human problem of individual suffering and evil. For him, religion evolves from magic in the sense that "Magic is transformed from a direct manipulation of forces into symbolic activity" (Weber 1993: 7). Weber distinguishes three main stages in this gradual transformation: from 'pre-animistic naturalism' (extraordinary power attributed to physical things) through 'animistic naturalism' (evolvement of the concept of the 'soul') to symbolism (spiritual entities symbolized by concrete objects). This cumulative process of 'abstraction' is a function not only of people's religious needs but also of the rationalizing skills of the 'professional masters of symbolism', their ability to organize the incipient religious beliefs into a meaningful whole.

Weber does not give much empirical evidence to support his idea of the transformation of magic into religion and, like the evolutionary theories of Tylor and Frazer, it is mere 'speculative history.' But, for my purpose in this chapter, it is worth revisiting his idea of religious rationalization as implying among other things the purging of a religion of its magical elements. I schematize his comparison of magic and religion as follows:

abstraction/rationalization

Magic (sorcery)	→	*Religion (Cult)*
Demon (s)		god (s)
magicians/mystagogues		prophets/priesthood/laity
coercion		worship
naturalism		symbolism
taboos		religious ethics
this-wordly		this-wordly or/and other-worldly
magical charm		miracle
charisma		charisma/institution/grace
ecstasy (orgies)		sacraments

For Weber the categories of 'magic' and 'religion' are 'ideal types' differentiated for the purpose of analysis. In reality most religions would exist as a mixture of magical and religious elements. As he puts it,

> There may be no instance in which it is possible to apply this differentiation absolutely, since the cults we have just called "religious" practically everywhere contains numerous magical components. … The sociological aspect of this differentiation is the rise of the "priesthood" as something

> distinct from "practitioners of magic." Applied to reality, this contrast is fluid as are all sociological phenomena. Even the theoretical differentiae of these types are not unequivocally determinable (Weber 1993: 28).

One of the areas in which this fluidity is instanced is the distinction between magicians, priests, and prophets. Although Weber contrasts the 'personal' and 'occasional' characters of a self-employed magician with the 'regularly organized' and 'institutionalized' social function of a priest, he maintains that in many great religions, including Christianity, the concept of the priest includes such a magical qualification. This qualification has to do with the coercion of gods or demons by means of prayers or sacrifices. For Weber, this is particularly true of the use of sacraments in the Catholic Church. On this he writes:

> Indeed, such coercive religion is universally diffused, and even the Catholic priest continues to practice something of this magical power in executing the miracle of the mass and in exercising the power of the keys. By and large this is the original, though not exclusive, origin of orgiastic and mimetic component of the religious cult especially of song, dance, drama, and the typical fixed formulae of prayer (Weber 1993: 25).

According to Weber the subsistence of magical elements in religion, especially in Christianity, is a function of the need for the priesthood to adapt to the magical inclinations (needs/interests) of the masses. He argues that these (magical) needs of the masses impeded the full development of Catholicism into a monotheistic religion: "The security provided by a tested magical manipulation is far more reassuring than the experience of worshipping a god who—precisely because he is omnipotent—is not subject to magical influence" (ibid.). It goes without saying that, if one were to classify ritual healing in Ephphata according to Weber's above criteria, it would belong to the realm of magical practice. But as already mentioned, the understanding of Catholic ritual life as magical (coercion versus worship) was an essential component of Reformation thought, which means that Weber may simply be establishing here as sociological value-laden concepts which emerged from within a particular Christian tradition.

Weber who seems to assume a strong correlation between class and religious expression remarks that "Wherever the attachment to purely magical or ritualistic views has been broken by prophets or reformers, there has frequently been a tendency for artisans, craftsmen and middle-class people to incline toward a rather primitively rationalistic ethical and religious view of life" (ibid.: 40). Although I have suggested that Weber's concepts of magic and religion bear the influence of Ref-

ormation thought, I think that what he says about people's religious needs determining the agency of priesthood is relevant for the processes of localization occurring within Ephphata, especially for Hebga's attempts to adapt Charismatic Renewal to the local context of Cameroon. Moreover, although Weber thinks of the rationalization of a religion in terms of the recession of its magical elements, he does not suggest that this process is irreversible. He envisions the possibility for a 'rationalized' religion to slide back to magic because of the imperative to adapt to the 'religious needs of the masses.' In his discussion of pastoral care, Weber remarks that "as the masses increasingly became the object of the priests' influence and the foundation of their power, the priestly labors of systematization concerned themselves more and more with the more traditional, and hence magical, forms of religious notions and practices" (ibid.: 77). Hinduism and Islam are given as examples:

> Hinduism constantly betrayed a growing tendency *to slide over* into magic, or in any case into semi-magical sacramental soteriology. The propaganda of Islam in Africa rested primarily on a massive foundation of magic, by means of which it has continued to outbid other competing faiths, despite the rejection of magic by earliest Islam (ibid.: 78).

The 'sliding over into magic' is needed by the priestly class to maintain some power and control over the laity. In fact, the masses are so associated with magic in Weber's sociology of religion that he ends up suggesting that a prophet's rejection of magic cannot be sustained for a long time as he needs the latter to authenticate his charisma: "The laity's acceptance of the prophet, however, is generally based on the fact that he possesses a certain charisma. This usually means that he is a magician, in fact much greater and more powerful than other magicians, and indeed that he possesses unsurpassed power over demons and even over death itself" (ibid: 78). Weber describes this recourse of a prophet to magic as the 'decline or petrifaction of prophecy'.

The argument that religious rationalization is not irreversible may also find some empirical support in rise of Pentecostalism from within Protestantism. Pentecostalism, which has some of its roots in Wesleyanism, has indeed revived some ritual practices suppressed by the Protestant Reformation. In the light of this suggestion the following questioning by Keith Thomas (1971: 77) makes sense:

> At first sight the Reformation appeared to have dispensed with this whole apparatus of supernatural assistance. … Yet the problems for which the magical remedies of the past had provided some sort of solution were still

> there—the fluctuations of nature, the hazards of fire, the threat of plague and disease, the fear of evil spirits, and all the uncertainties of daily life. How was it that men were able to renounce the magical solutions offered by the medieval Church before they had devised any technical remedies to put in their place? Where they now mentally prepared to face up to such problems by sole reliance upon their own resources and techniques? Did they have to turn to other kinds of magical control in order to replace the remedies offered by medieval religion? Or was Protestantism itself forced against its own premises to devise a magic of its own?

As a response to the problem of evil, Protestantism replaced the ritual apparatus of the Catholicism with the doctrine of divine providence based on the ideas of God's omnipotent sovereignty and of divine retribution (virtue is rewarded by well-being and vices punished by misfortunes). According to K. Thomas,

> This was comfortable doctrine for the well-to-do, but it can hardly have appealed to that sizable proportion of the population which never had any hope of dragging itself above subsistence level. … It is not surprising that many should have turned away to non-religious modes of thought which offered a more direct prospect of relief and a more immediate explanation of why it was that some men prospered while others literally perished by the wayside (ibid.: 112).

In chapter three, I raised a similar issue with regard to the activity of Christian missionaries among the Douala of Cameroon. The fact that the rejection of African traditional rituals was not followed by the provision of satisfactory alternatives has resulted in a 'cultural void' with which many converts to Christianity are still trying to fill. They often end up in a situation of shared loyalty. The current popularity of neo-Pentecostalism and its theology of prosperity in Africa may indeed have to do with the difficulty to sustain an entirely other-worldly religion, especially in a context of dire poverty and human suffering. Where people are more interested in what religion can do for them here and now, the distinction between 'intercession' (religion) and 'coercion' (magic) is likely to be blurred. Moreover, in the context of Ephphata the interest in the temporal returns of religion seems to bridge some gap between Charismatic Christianity and many African traditional religions since the latter tend to be pragmatic, that is, problem-solving oriented.

Reformation from within

About mainline churches, it has also been noted that "Generally, members of the renewal groups are not satisfied with the ethos of their churches, because of unfulfilled goals and aspirations, yet they are determined to remain in them and revitalize them along Charismatic lines" (ibid: 12). Although studies of religious innovation in African Christianity have shed some light on why African Christians have deserted mainline churches to join new religious movements, what has been left largely unexplored is the issue of why other African Christians have chosen to stick with mission churches in spite of their perceived limits. Take, for example, Jean Comaroff's account of the contrasts and contradictions between the Methodist Church and Zionist churches among the Tshidi Barolong in Mafeking (South Africa). She sees the emergence of these Zionist churches as "a more radical expression of cultural resistance" (1985: 166) to the 'hegemony' and conservatism of the Methodist Church in a context of social and political alienation. According to her they offered to the "proletarianized dispossessed in South Africa…the apparent possibility of reconstructing a holistic community within which the impact of industrial capitalism could be resisted" (ibid.: 176). With the passage of time, the contrast between Zionism and Orthodox Protestantism, "has been brought into relation—if not strict alignment—with the cleavage which sets Tshidi peasant-proletarians off from the mainstream culture and from their bourgeois and petit bourgeois fellows" (ibid.: 189). There is a clear attempt here by Comaroff to account for the divide between Zionism and orthodoxy in terms of 'class' or 'status'. She further remarks:

> There remain in the Methodist church many poor Tshidi, most of them elderly, whose reverence for its authority still outweighs the conflict it engenders; and a large number of orthodox Protestants will turn to Zionist healing in the face of personal affliction, although they might do so in secret. … A detailed analysis of membership sample suggests that while a proportion of the poor and uneducated remain in the orthodox churches, the Zionist ranks draw none of the petite bourgeoisie as formal adherents. … The few cases of mobility from Zionism to orthodoxy were associated with attempts to gain government employment or entry into a state-controlled secondary school; for Zionist affiliation was a handicap, being associated by whites, as well as by the local elite, with "primitive" and general "unreliability" (ibid.: 189).

Although Comaroff's analysis sheds some light on why Zionism has attracted mostly the poor (and 'none of the petit bourgeoisie' as she

puts it), it doesn't really account for that other 'proportion of the poor and uneducated' that has chosen to remain in the orthodox churches. Why would some poor Tshidi choose to repudiate (or resist) the hegemony of Orthodox Protestantism and others not? Neo-marxist paradigms such as those of Comaroff and Van Binsbergen (1981) fail to address the question of the diversity of religious responses to the same situation of alienation from within the same social class.

Like Comaroff, I subscribe to the predominant view among scholars that religious innovations in African Christianity are generally expressions of some form of resistance. But there is a need to distinguish at least two forms of resistance in relation to mission churches: one from without (Independent African Christianity) and the other from within. Ephphata would be an instance of the latter as it seeks to introduce within African Catholicism the element of ritual healing shared both by African Independent Churches and African Charismatic Christianity. I think that the relative success of both African Independent Churches and Charismatic Christianity in Africa has more to do with the fact that, unlike mission churches, they have taken witchcraft and spirit affliction seriously by building upon it African versions of Christian demonology. This translation makes it possible to address these phenomena from a Christian perspective. Even Comaroff acknowledges that "The healing of affliction was the most pervasive metaphor of the culture of Zion" (1985: 179). Writing on Independent Christianity in Africa, Morris remarks:

> Religious change during the twentieth century, expressed by these various innovations, has attempted to formulate alternatives to witchcraft. Although continuing to accept the reality of witchcraft, prophetic movements, watchtower, and independent churches all attempted, in various ways, to eradicate witchcraft once and for all and to establish new forms of community (Morris 2006: 176).

In my view, the growing popularity within mission churches of Charismatic practices is also a function of the cultural void created by the displacement of traditional rituals and local religious specialists by missionary Christianity. Many African Catholics continue to challenge their clergy on the issue of how to contain or eradicate witchcraft in a context where Christian belonging is incompatible with recourse to traditional rituals and divination (Green 2003). Hebga's ritual innovations examined in this book strongly suggest that the dismissal of witchcraft as inexistent by Western missionaries is not necessarily shared by their African successors. But how far can a Catholic priest fill the void left

by the displacement of the *nganga*? How far can Christian rituals fill the void left by the displacement of traditional rituals? Religious innovations such as Ephphata seem to constitute a response to the needs of those Catholics who although interested in spirit-healing want to keep their Catholic identity. Where such alternatives are not on offer, members of mission churches tend to resort to clandestine recourse to the services of African Independent Churches or of the new Charismatic Churches. The latter are all the more appealing in context of political unrest and material poverty since their concept of healing is broad enough to include idioms of empowerment, including material success and prosperity (Gifford 2004; Maxwell 1998).

CHAPTER SEVEN

EPHPHATA IN PARIS

The branch of Ephphata established in Paris is known within the movement as 'Ephphata-Paris', and I adopt this appellation in this chapter. It is worth mentioning at the outset that Ephphata-Paris is not the only branch of the movement in the West. Three years ago, a few former members of Ephphata-Paris who resettled recently in London launched Ephphata-London with the blessing of Hebga. The group is located within the francophone parish of London (*Notre Dame de France, Leicester Square*) and prays every Thursday evening. But after an enthusiastic start it is today plagued by leadership problems which Hebga is still struggling to solve. There are also new groups emerging in Berlin, Washington (D.C.), Atlanta, etc. I focus on Ephphata-Paris because it is the oldest Western branch of the movement.

The integration of African migrants in European societies is a function of multiple factors which besides religion include also race, class, ethnicity, education, etc. In the introduction to a book he edited in 1977 Watson dismisses both the 'assimilationist approach' (emphasis on 'race' and 'culture' factors) which dominated migration studies in the 1960s and the Marxist approach (emphasis on the economic factor) as equally reductionistic and simplistic. For him, it is important to pay attention to the complex ways in which the above factors, depending on particular circumstances, crisscrossed to determine the integration (or isolation) of a group in a given context. In this chapter which looks at the role of Charismatic Catholicism in the lives of Ephphata members in Paris, I take into account Watson's point in that by focusing on religion I am neither implying that it is the most important aspect of their lives as African migrants in Europe nor suggesting that it operates in isolation from other factors.

Talk of multiculturalism in Europe today means that migrants are no longer caught only 'between two cultures' (Watson 1977) but between many cultures, between many religions. The main question guiding this chapter is the following: why do some African migrants in Europe feel the need to establish or join Charismatic groups or churches? And in the specific case of Ephphata, what role does this movement play in the lives of their members in Paris?

African Christianity in the West

The earliest appearances of African religious forms in the West date back to the time of the transatlantic slave trade which occasioned the spread of African populations (and their rituals) to various parts of the world. The survival of elements of African religions among the descendants of African slaves in the Americas and the Caribbean has been extensively investigated by anthropologists, with some focus on their syncretistic dynamics and the related issues of continuities and discontinuities (Bastide 1978; Murphy [1988] 1992; Wafer 1991). One of the most documented cases would be the survival of elements of West African *Vodun* among descendants of black slaves in Haiti or Brazil. It has been shown that this creative and adaptive reconstruction of home religious forms abroad often plays an important role in the construction, maintenance and transmission of diasporic consciousness (Patterson and Kelly 2000; Byfield 2000; Dorsch 2005), in the sense that it contributes to the remembrance of Africa as homeland from a foreign land.

But the spread of African Christianity to the West is a fairly recent phenomenon and is essentially a function of the current globalization of Pentecostalism (Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Martin 2002; Anderson 2004). African churches in the West are either branches of churches already established in Africa or entirely new formations created by Charismatic members of the African migrant community. The appearance of African churches on the Western scene is obvioulsy a function of African migrations which, until very recently, largely followed 'the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism' (Adogame 2004: 495; see also Adogame and Weissköppel 2005: 3). Adogame further suggests that the first African churches to be established in Europe were the Aladura (Peel 1968) which emerged first in the United Kingdom from the early 1960s and then later in continental Europe. It is probably around the same time that Kimbanguism was established in Belgium and France among Congolese after being officially recognized by Belgian authorities in 1959. But,

> While Aladura churches represent the earliest forms of African religious creativity in Europe from the 1960s, African Pentecostal forms of Christianity emerging only from the 1980s and 1990s have come to dominate African religious geography in Europe. One explanation for this lies in the novel repackaging of their religious messages and the aggressive preoccupation with such issues as prosperity, employment and financial breakthrough. These indices have a ready appeal to a large cross-section

> of immigrant youths especially with the promise of rapid upward social mobility in failing state welfare systems (Adogame 2004: 501).

Also concerning the reasons behind the current mushrooming of African churches in the West, Hunt and Lightly (2001: 107), following their research on a major Nigerian Charismatic Church in Britain, helpfully remark:

> The evidence suggests that they are a product of *both* developments in West Africa, especially Nigeria (which contains near on one-sixth of the population of the African continent) and adaptation to Western society. … The doctrine and practices of such churches reflect means of coping with, and responding to, adverse circumstances while at the same time, translated into the British setting, they subsequently assist their immigrant black membership in adapting to a secondary range of social conditions.

Although the membership of these churches is in reality largely black, the intention of many of them is unequivocally missionary: "Just as European missionaries once believed in their divine task of evangelizing what they called the dark continent, African church leaders in Europe today are convinced of Africa's mission to bring the gospel back to those who originally provided it" (Ter Haar 1998: 1; Cf. also Adogame 2004: 505; Kounkou 2003). It is against this wider background of the growth of African Charismatic Christianity in the West that I situate Ephphata in Paris.

It was in the late 1980s that, encouraged by Hebga, a small group of Cameroonians living in Paris, came together to start Ephphata-Paris. But the prayer group had some difficulties taking off because most of these pioneers lacked previous Charismatic experience. The turning point came in 1993 when this early cell of Ephphata-Paris merged with another incipient Charismatic group made up of former members of 'Cana', a Charismatic movement equally based in Cameroon. In fact, Hebga had also been involved with the creation and animation of Cana in the early 1970s at the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University of Yaounde before deciding to launch Ephphata in 1976. 'Cana' was more youth-oriented whereas the majority of Ephphata members were adults. But, with time, 'Cana' and Ephphata parted ways and became two completely autonomous entities. 'Cana' knew some success, especially among university students. But from the late 1990s a succession of internal dissensions about leadership led to its decline which culminated in its suppression in some parishes, including the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University of Yaounde where it had been launched.

Here follows the testimony of B.N., the longest serving member of Ephphata-Paris and the current head (*berger*) of the group, who knew both movements in Cameroon before arriving in Paris in the early 1990s. He is now in his thirties, is married and recently finished a doctorate in biological sciences in Paris. He lives in the suburbs of Paris and is now searching for a stable employment. He says:

> In Cameroon I first joined Ephphata around 1982 in Edea [Fr Hebga's hometown] when I was still a teenager. My father was then the head of the prayer group in Edea and used to be a bit tough with me. I was not happy with the situation. I talked to Fr Hebga about it and he advised me to join Cana which had a group in the same parish. Let me say that Cana was almost like the youth branch of Ephphata. So, I joined Cana and remained in it until I left Cameroon in 1991. When I arrived in Paris, I was staying with my sister who had also been a member of Cana in Cameroon. We were both desperately looking for something to sustain our Charismatic identity. We got in touch with a number of Charismatic groups but we were not satisfied. I knew, for example, of the existence of 'Emmanuel' [A French Catholic Charismatic group] because we used to use their hymn books in Cameroon. In 1992, my sister and I started a Charismatic group in Paris based on our past experiences in Cana.
>
> The group, made mostly of Cameroonians, took off well. With the help of the priest in charge of the African Catholic community of Paris we found a place for our prayer sessions in the premises of a neighbouring parish (*Paroisse Notre Dame des Otages*). We did not know that Fr Hebga had launched Ephphata-Paris in the late 1980s. It was in 1993 that Fr Hebga, upon learning about our initiative, encouraged us to merge with Ephphata-Paris. So, he brought the two emerging groups together and from then on we began to pray together at *Paroisse Notre Dame des Otages* … (Recorded in Paris, 5th July 2006).

It is worth underlining the influential agency of Hebga in the emergence of Ephphata-Paris. He was able to convince his two young relatives heading their new Charismatic group to join Ephphata-Paris. Important also to note is the link of Ephphata-Paris with the African Catholic community of Paris which provides some form of institutional umbrella.

After the merging in 1993, Ephphata-Paris always held its prayer sessions within the *Paroisse Notre Dame des Otages* until two years ago when a new parish priest was appointed. The latter, without any explicit reason, asked Ephphata-Paris to vacate its premises. This sudden and unjustified ejection apparently had something to do with the anti-Charismatic attitude of the new Parish priest. Ephphata-Paris had therefore

to fall back on the African Catholic Community where it now holds its weekly prayer sessions every Friday evening from 7pm to 9pm. The 'lack of place of worship' (Ter Haar 2005: 167) is surely one of the major problems of foreign religious groups in Europe. Whereas Ephphata-Paris can take advantage of its Catholic identity to find a place, other religious groups in Paris usually have to hire a place of worship. For example, there is a place in the suburbs of Paris called *La plaine-Saint-Denis* where more than a dozen evangelical and Charismatic churches congregate every Sunday to hire rooms within the same building for worship. I visited the site on a Sunday and the atmosphere there is simply impressive with all the singing, dancing and preaching around the place.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that the integration of African religious movements in the West is also a function of the legislation of each state on religious matters. For example, "Whereas the secular French state discourages religious display, especially within the public space, the more community-oriented USA is far from opposed to religious expression in the public sphere" (Salzbrunn 2004: 468; see also Sabar 2004 on African Christianity in the Jewish state of Israel). Besides its Catholic affiliation, Ephphata is legally registered in France under a 1901 French law authorizing private associations (*Loi du 1er Juillet 1901 relative au contrat d'association*). But this legal existence does not give Ephphata access to any grants or privileges from the French state.

Although the legitimacy of Ephphata-Paris is contingent upon its affiliation with a Catholic institution in Paris, its structural organization depends entirely on Hebga who visits the group almost every year. He remains the main link between Ephphata-Cameroon and Ephphata-Paris. Major problems within the group are referred directly to him and he makes the necessary appointments. Besides its weekly evening prayer sessions, Ephphata-Paris also organizes yearly pilgrimages to major holy sites (they went to Lourdes in 2006) and holds quarterly workshops on a variety of Christian themes for formation of its members.

The governing body of Ephphata-Paris is hierarchically structured as follows: heading the group is a shepherd (*berger*) assisted by a deputy shepherd (*vice-berger*); followed by a general secretary, a vice-secretary general, a treasurer, a vice-treasurer and an auditor. Besides, various services make up the organizational structure of the movement: *service d'accueil et de logistique* which welcomes and guides newcomers; *service d'animation liturgique* which looks after songs and the ritual life of the

group; *service d'intercession* entrusted with the task of organizing special prayer sessions for the sick; *service de solidarité* in charge of mutual support among members of the group; *service de la formation* which plans recollections and workshops; *service de vente des produits derivés* mainly in charge of selling Hebga's booklets and current issues of Ephphata magazine (*Le Paraclet*) received from Cameroon; *Cercle des sympathisants* which, as we saw in chapter one, gathers all those who pray with Ephphata but are not full members of the group mainly because they have not yet received the baptism in the Spirit.

Those heading these services are all appointed by Hebga and are accountable to him. They normally meet once a month to discuss matters pertaining to the life of the group. By phone and by email Hebga is regularly in touch with them and settles major issues when they arise. In Paris, as in Cameroon, Ephphata often struggles with the issue of leadership because of frequent conflicts among those in power. Indeed, the short history of Ephphata-Paris has its own share of dirty politics in terms of informing, enmities, mutual accusations, etc. This struggle for power is partly a struggle for a better access to Hebga and his services especially when he is visiting Paris. For its expenses, Ephphata-Paris relies exclusively on the contributions of its members (about ten Euros per month) which are deposited in a bank account managed by the head of the group and the treasurer. The money is used mainly to hire places for meetings, to finance Hebga's visits to the group and to support Ephphata projects in Cameroon.

Membership in Ephphata-Paris

Ephphata-Paris has about two to three hundred members and sympathizers out of which between fifty to seventy attend the weekly prayer sessions. Most of them are Cameroonians, some of whom have been in France for several decades. A few are blacks from the French overseas; the two or three white men who occasionally show up at some prayer sessions are generally either husbands or boyfriends of Cameroonian women affiliated with the group. Concerning the religious background of the members of Ephphata-Paris, about 70 % are Catholics and 30 % Protestants from various denominations. Some Protestant members of the group end up adopting some of the Catholic prayers and ritual expressions, such as devotions to Mary or the saints, officially questioned by their respective churches. This form of *bricolage* suggests that

the religious practice of the laity does not always faithfully reflect the lines of demarcations officially drawn between churches.

The length of current membership in Ephphata-Paris varies from twelve years to a few months. The constant renewal of the membership of Ephphata-Paris is partly a reflection of the mobility of African migrants in the West and partly a function of the internal politics of the group. The fact that life in a city like Paris is very expensive and hectic does not encourage many Cameroonian migrants to settle there permanently. They are constantly searching for better opportunities which can improve their living conditions. This sometimes means moving to a different city.

With regard to how people come to know and join Ephphata in Paris, responses include:

> "I joined Ephphata in 1998 after talking to Fr Hebga who was visiting my junior brother with whom I was staying in Paris…"
>
> "I came into contact with Ephphata in 2001 at my sister's place where prayer sessions used to take be held. I was fascinated by songs of praise and decided to join."
>
> "I decided to join Ephphata after attending one of its prayer sessions held in the presence of Fr Hebga in May 2005."
>
> "In 2001 a cousin of mine told me about Fr Hebga who was visiting Paris at the time. Then one of Fr Hebga's aides took us to see him and he encouraged us to join Ephphata."
>
> "I first heard about Fr Hebga from fellow members of a rosary prayer group five years ago. But I didn't know whether he was white or black. It is after attending the Pentecost vigil of 2005 at which he was present that I decided to join Ephphata."

Many responses explicitly refer to the decisive influence of Hebga. Others imply some continuity with formal Charismatic experiences in Cameroon, including the influence of the family:

> "I joined Ephphata in Cameroon when I was still very young, through my family."
>
> "Already in Cameroon, I used to attend Charismatic prayer sessions. Then in Paris somebody told me about Ephphata, especially about Fr Hebga."

On the whole, most members of Ephphata-Paris claim that they came to know and to join the movement through personal contacts with current members (friends or relatives), especially when Hebga is visiting the group. Indeed Hebga's visits to Ephphata-Paris are often special

occasions on which current members invite friends and relatives to prayer sessions during which sacramentals and participants are blessed. Private healing sessions are also arranged for individuals or families. Most of the problems submitted to Hebga on these occasions are related to the context of migration. Indeed,

> Life is particularly difficult for African migrants, because of declining European economies, retrenched welfare systems, cultural gaps, xenophobia at individual and institutional levels, acute unemployment, police harassment and brutality, dashed hopes, stress, loneliness, extended family expectations from home, and mounting bills and mortgages. Under these distressing conditions, many Africans find spiritual, psychological and material succour in the church. Through elaborate rituals, a sense of identity, security and protection is provided for members (Adogame 2004: 505; Cf. also Ter Haar 1998)

This is true also of Cameroonian migrants in France, a number of whom are indeed *sans papiers*. The crack down of the French administration on the latter has been particularly harsh in recent years. Unsuccessful integration in the West can easily be interpreted in terms of bewitchment or in terms of evil blockages (*blocages*) from the devil and its agents. In response to my questionnaire, one of the members of Ephphata-Paris writes: "I joined Ephphata on the advice of another member. I was then suffering from demoniac attacks (*J'étais souffrant des attaques du démon*)." Ephphata, as other Charismatic churches, provides a space within which people can make sense of their misfortunes. In this sense, both in Cameroon and in Paris, Ephphata members share the same explanatory logic when it comes to interpreting misfortunes and coping with them (Cf. chapter three).

As already mentioned in chapter one, only those baptized in the Spirit are considered full members of Ephphata. This is true also of Ephphata-Paris which conducts a program every year to prepare its new members to the foundational experience of baptism in the spirit (*effusion de l'Esprit Saint*). As in Cameroon, the ceremony usually takes place on the eve of the feast of Pentecost, during a vigil mass ideally celebrated by Hebga. In 2005, for example, the latter was in Paris for the ceremony of baptism in the Spirit, which means that he was greatly missed by the movement in Cameroon. But in 2006, he managed to hold the ceremony in Paris a week before Pentecost so as to be in Mangen for the Pentecost vigil itself.

About the experience of the baptism in the Spirit, some of their testimonies read:

> "I was baptized in the Spirit in 1999 and feel more Christian than before. My commitment is now stronger. It strengthened divine power in me."
>
> "I was baptized in the Spirit two years ago. It was an experience of communion with my brothers in Christ."
>
> "I am not yet baptized in the Spirit, but am a candidate for this year. I look forward to it."
>
> "I was baptized in the Spirit in 2003. It strengthened my faith in the Church. The Holy Spirit really descended upon me on that night."
>
> "It is an unforgettable experience. Since that day I decided to really put myself at the service of God; once again he had strengthened me."
>
> "It was a marvellous experience. It completely turned round my spiritual life. I now have an intense spiritual life. I was baptized in the Spirit after having been delivered by Jesus Christ. My faith is stronger and I can now understand things happening in my life. I have learned to pray and to journey."

For many, therefore, the baptism in the Spirit is first and foremost a spiritual experience of communion with God, of deliverance and of spiritual empowerment.

About the role that Ephphata plays in their lives in the European context, as the following sample responses suggest, it provides for many a sense of belonging which is not only spiritual but also social.

> "In the context of Europe, Ephphata recreates for my faith a cultural and traditional milieu with which I am familiar. I feel more at home with my African brothers in general and with Cameroonians in particular. We sing in our African languages and I feel a sense of community. One feels less isolated for churches here in Europe are dull and less lively (*mornes et moins vivantes*)…"
>
> "With Ephphata one is no longer lonely (*on ne se sent plus seul*) here [France]"
>
> "Ephphata has brought me appeasement, joy, happiness in this country [France] of loneliness (*dans ce pays de solitude*); with the group, one is fulfilled, protected and loved."
>
> "Ephphata brings me joy, inner peace… sustains my life in the Church and keeps me open minded."
>
> "Ephphata helps me to grow spiritually and provides a space for life with my Cameroonian family at the heart of Paris."
>
> "Ephphata has given some self-confidence, spiritual comfort … I have learned to pray and to love prayer."

> "Ephphata has brought me joy, happiness, peace of heart; for prayer is the most important thing in one's life."
>
> "Ephphata brings me warmth, a lot of faith, love, forgiveness, sharing. I left most of my family in Cameroon, and I found it again here [France] with Ephphata in which I feel fulfilled."
>
> "Ephphata has brought me some rebirth (renaissance) in my life. It is important to join it. It is a tremendous help for the growth of faith."
>
> "Ephphata fosters solidarity among brothers and sisters in Christ. It brings us together to praise and glorify God…"
>
> "Ephphata brings me above all spiritual help, especially in this world given to materialism… It helps me to reach out to others. Humanly speaking, it is an enriching space of interaction…"

The recurrence of terms such as loneliness, solidarity, family, interaction, etc. is an expression of the migrants' experience of uprootedness and marginality in France. Confronted with the foreignness of culture, language, manners, food, etc., many African migrants experience some form of alienation (Hunt and Lightly 2001: 110) and loneliness (Goody and Groothues 1977) which tend to breed homesickness. African churches or groups offer a space for socialization, a social network for mutual support in order to cope with religious and social alienation in Europe.

It is known that the lives of African migrants in the West are often structured by networks of national, ethnic, religious, political and economic associations. In an article about African churches in Israel, Sabar (2004: 413) remarks that although this "Tendency may be attributed to exclusions and deprivations suffered by migrants in general", "it also owes something to the rich tradition of associational life in Africa which migrants brought with them in the process of migration." In the same line of thought, focusing on Nigerian churches in Britain, Hunt and Lightly (2001: 121–122) remark that

> The new churches provide a sense of ethnic identity and enrich a feeling of solidarity in British society. Although they are to an extent integrated at work and college with various other ethnicities and nationalities, Nigerian nationals are clustered together when it comes to religious gathering, finding solidarity and cultural relevance within a church of co-cultural, taking refuge from surrounding which may be hostile and demanding (See also, Ter Haar 2005: 177; Van Dijk 1997).

Also, as already mentioned in the introduction, African churches in the West are largely national or ethnic. This is true also of Ephphata which, although open to everybody in principle, is in reality mainly

Cameroonian, with a slight predominance of the Bassa ethnic group to which Hebga belongs. Some of the above responses explicitly refer to Ephphata as a kind of 'Cameroonian family' away from Cameroon. As alluded to earlier, there exists within Ephphata-Paris a support system, called *Service de Solidarité* and headed by a member of the group, which organizes moral, social and material assistance to members of the group in need. It facilitates the circulation of information about housing, jobs, official documents, bad news and good news, etc.

Ritual life in Ephphata-Paris

Weekly Prayer Sessions

The major ritual item in Ephphata-Paris is its weekly Charismatic prayer session held every Friday from 19.00 to about 21.00 pm, except on the last Friday of the month when the prayer session is replaced by a Eucharistic celebration. The format of these sessions matches closely the one of Ephphata-Cameroon outlined in chapter five and for that reason I do not dwell on it in this chapter. Indeed, what makes Ephphata-Paris a branch of Ephphata-Cameroon is not only Hebga's pervasive leadership but also this uniformity in ritual expression. I only underline a few striking contrasts between Paris and Cameroon.

First, the singing in Ephphata-Paris is predominantly in French compared to Ephphata-Cameroon where songs in local languages are much more common. This is not only because Cameroonians in Paris would be less familiar with Cameroonian songs but also because of the desire not to alienate the non-Cameroonian minority within the group. Secondly, the content of testimonies during prayer sessions in Paris often reflects the context of migration. In other words, they largely echo the struggles of migrants to cope with the hardships of life in Paris. For example, a lady (in her fifties from the French overseas) in deep financial troubles shared with the group on how she providentially got out of a problem related to her bills; a man in his forties, working on a doctoral book, was convinced that God was gradually helping him out of an academic misadventure; a girl in her late twenties who arrived in Paris recently with her boyfriend praised God for helping the latter to obtain his official documents (*papiers*) from the French administration. Again, the logic behind these testimonies is similar to the one discussed

in chapter five: people see God's hand in their successes and the devil's hand in their failures. Thirdly, compared to Ephphata-Cameroon, the aspect of intercession (special prayers for healing and deliverance) is underdeveloped in Ephphata-Paris. This is not for want of intercessors but mainly for lack of time and place. On the recently created website of Ephphata, one reads that intercessions in Ephphata-Paris are held twice a month depending on the needs (requests) of the members of the group. But it is not the case in practice mainly because it is not easy to find a place like Mangen in Paris for regular sessions of intercessions. In the past some members of the group used to make their homes available for intercession. But the practice did not last for long partly because the noise associated with these rituals occasionally triggers complaints from neighbours. Besides, life in Paris is so hectic that it is not easy for intercessors to be available for such rituals twice a month. Another important ritual moment in the life of the group is obviously the already mentioned annual ceremony of the Baptism of the spirit which usually takes place on the eve of Pentecost. It follows the ritual referred to in chapter five.

Therapeutic Sessions in Paris

From the 6th to the 12th of November 2006, Ephphata-Paris organized a series of evening talks on a variety of topics (the mission of a Christian in the world, the Eucharist, inner healing, the place of Mary in the Church, witchcraft and healing prayer, etc.) to mark the 30th anniversary of the founding of the movement. Since Hebga was to be present at the manifestation, I decided to pay a second visit to Ephphata-Paris with the hope of collecting some additional data on Hebga's healing ministry in the Parisian context. Indeed, besides the event, healing sessions were held in the house of one of the members of the group.

The sessions described here took place on the 8th of November 2006 from 9.00 to 12.00 noon. When we (the leader of Ephphata-Paris with whom I was staying and myself) arrived at the indicated house at around 9.00 am, Hebga was not yet around. But there were already seven people waiting for him in the sitting room. Tea and coffee were available for self-service. The leader of Ephphata-Paris introduced me to those present as a priest who will assist Hebga during the healing sessions. He then gave the following preliminary instructions:

Fig. 6. Fr Hebga during a visit in Europe

> Fr Hebga will be arriving soon. You will be received in turn in one of the rooms of this house. We thank our hosts for making their house available on this occasion. May God reward them for their generosity! You will be able to meet Fr Hebga individually to explain your problem. Members of the same family can be received together. When you go in there to meet Fr Hebga, speak loudly for his hearing is not good. Remember that it is not Fr Hebga who heals, but Jesus Christ. He is only an instrument in his hands. Jesus Christ heals you through your faith. For those who brought water, oil, salt, and other things to be blessed, this will be done after Fr Hebga has received everybody. So, be patient! … Let me say one last thing: these services are free of charge. But we welcome financial donations to support Fr Hebga's work since we do not receive grants from anybody. You understand that there are expenses involved in the organization of all these things. Please be generous! A basket will soon be available for free donations. … We are now going to pray while waiting for Fr Hebga.

A few minutes later, Hebga arrives and is led to the bedroom prepared for the reception of patients. There are already about 15 patients in the sitting room. I join Hebga in the reception room where, besides a bed, there are two chairs (one for him and the other for patients) and a small table. He removes his crucifix as well as his oil container from his bag and places them on the table. I take a seat on the bed behind him

and patients are brought in one by one. What follows is a description of a few cases. No major detail on the social background of patients is provided here for reasons of privacy to which people appeared to be more sensitive in Paris than in Cameroon.

Case 1. Facial problem, restless child, and fertility

Hebga: How can I help you?

> *Patient 1* (a young woman with her child): Father, I have a problem with one side of my face; some sort of facial paralysis (*paralysie faciale*). It started when I was still in Cameroon, that is about 15 years ago. When I came over here, doctors told me that it will take time to return to normal. But it has not yet happened. (*Pointing to the little boy*) He is my six year old child. He is very restless. I do not know what is wrong with him. Also, I would like to have a second child but I have not been able to conceive again.

Hebga: Do you have bad dreams?

> *Patient 1*: bad dreams?

Hebga: Yes, things like night rapes (*couches de nuit*) or night meals (*repas de nuit*)?

> *Patient 1*: Yes, I d ɗ

Hebga: That is probably part of your infertility problem. I have a booklet of mine on sale which gives indications on how to deal with those things. It tells you how to pray: first adore God and thank him for his blessings; then ask forgiveness for your sins before asking for any favour. I am sure it will help you. Did you bring sacramentals to be blessed?

> *Patient 1*: Yes.

Hebga: Good, they are very effective against those things. My aides will tell you how to use it.

Hebga then rises with his crucifix, prays over them with formula similar to those already described in chapter five, using healing passages from scriptures. They are then anointed with oil before leaving the room.

Case 2. Bewitchment claims

Next comes in a whole family: three mature women and two men. One of the women, the eldest, is visibly shaking and cannot stand or walk on her own. She is brought in assisted by her siblings. She is made to sit on the only chair available in the room. Others remain standing.

Hebga: Are you all from the same family?

> One of the women: Yes

Hebga: (pointing to the eldest): I can see that she is not well.

> One of the women: We are all sick?

Hebga: of what?

> One of the women: I mean, we are all challenged by her sickness. It is one of our uncles back in Cameroon who is doing this to us. He has decided to exterminate us. And we are all feeling it.

Hebga: You should not be afraid of him. Trust in God and pray. Think of the passion of Christ and ask him to protect you with his precious blood.

Hebga hands a bible to the leader of Ephphata-Paris who is assisting him and asks him to read the passage from Mk 2, 1–12, on the cure of a paralytic by Jesus. He then rises to pray over them in turn with his crucifix. He begins with the eldest on the chair saying:

> May a drop of the blood of Christ flows on you and cure you. May you be hidden in his wounds and be healed. Lord, Jesus Christ, do not allow evil men to harm your children. (*He moves the crucifix from the front head to the back of the neck while saying more prayers against evil forces*). A power came out of Jesus and cured all those who touched him. Lord Jesus, touch them and heal her from her paralysis.

He suddenly stops praying and says: "Her neck is very stiff and it is not a good sign. Usually maleficent substances are deposited around the neck. Did you bring sacramentals to be blessed." "Yes we did", they answer. He adds: "You will use holy oil to massage her neck until it become flexible again." Hebga then briefly prays over the other members of the family. His assistant anoints them with holy oil and they are dismissed.

Case 3. A young lady with a marriage problem

Hebga: Tell me your problem.

Patient 3: I have travelled from T…. [another French city] to meet you.

Hebga's assistant: Speak loudly!

Patient 3: I say that I live in T… I heard that you were in Paris and I decided to come and see you.

Hebga: I have just come back from T… where I always go once a year for a retreat.

Patient 3: Unfortunately, I was not aware of your presence there.

Hebga: There are many Cameroonians there; may be we should start another group there. So, what is your problem?

Patient 3: Father, I have been living with a white man now for a number of years, but he keeps on postponing our marriage. No civil marriage, no marriage in Church.

Hebga: What are his reasons?

Patient 3: He had a first marriage and then they broke up. Since then he says that he does not believe in God. He says that if God was good his first marriage would have lasted. But one day, he came across one of your writings in *Le Paraclet* and I told him that you are a Jesuit. He says that may be he will change his mind after talking to you. He says that Jesuits are the only open-minded people in the Church. So, Father, may be if you talk to him, he will change his mind and solve our marriage problem. That is why I travelled all the way from T… to see you.

Hebga: That is very interesting. He has respect only for Jesuits (*laughing*). Well, next time I come to T… we will arrange a meeting with him. May be it will help. In the meantime, get yourself a copy of my booklet with prayers against the forces of evil. There is a prayer in there on page 27 for marriage. It has helped a number of people.

Hebga asks his assistant to read psalm 20. He then rises and prays over her with his crucifix. She is anointed with holy oil and is dismissed.

Case 4. A young woman with two kids

Patient 4: Father, a few days ago, this my two year old daughter had a nightmare in the night. She woke up in the middle of the night and began to shout that she was seeing *joujou* [term for ghosts] and since then

she does not want to sleep in the bedroom anymore. So I have to spend the night in the sitting room with her and it is not easy since I have just had another baby.

Hebga: Is the baby well?

Patient 4: Yes, but he has been very weak.

Hebga: Are the children baptized?

Patient 4: No!

Hebga: Then, you should baptize them. It is good for their protection. Go and see the parish priest of the area where you live and get them baptized. Then at home, pray regularly using psalm 35. Sprinkle your house with some holy water and some holy salt. I will bless them after receiving all the patients.

Then he asks his assistant to read the biblical passage in which Jesus expresses his affection for children: "People even brought babies to him, for him to touch them; but when the disciples saw this they scolded them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it'" (Lk 18, 15–17). Then a prayer is said over them with a crucifix, they are anointed and dismissed.

Case 5. A case of possession

The day before, Hebga had been to this lady's house to bless it and to pray over her. I had the chance to speak to her about her case before Hebga prayed over her for a second time.

What is your problem?

Patient 5: Father, I am possessed.

How did it begin?

Patient 5: I got it from my sister.

How?

Patient 5: One night, I got a call from my brother-in-law who is from Congo (DRC). He insisted that I should come over to their place to see

my sister who was not well. She was possessed. I found it strange because I do not communicate with him that much. But he insisted. So I went over there and I found my sister in a very bad shape. So, I decided to pray over her. I laid my hands over her and prayed. That is how her possession moved from her to me.

How is she now?

Patient 5: Now she is well and I am possessed. I am sure they tricked me, especially her husband. He had brought some stuff from Congo for her to drink and I warned her against it. But she did not listen to me. Father Hebga prayed over me yesterday with some of his assistants and he will do it again everyday until his departure. It is not easy. Before Father Hebga arrived, I had seen two other priests. The first, a Cameroonian priest settled here in Paris who asked us 150 euros for the healing session. I discovered afterwards that he is a crook and I stopped seeing him. The other is a white priest, member of *Congregation de St Jean*. But he is too busy and in two months, he has seen me only twice.

The second healing session for the above patient took place in my presence. She was sitting on the chair facing Hebga.

Hebga: How do you feel?

Patient 5: There seems to be a slight improvement. But I had a terrible night. I still feel as if there are horns or roots all over my body.

Hebga: They are beginning to reveal themselves.

Hebga rises and prays over her with his crucifix on her cheek and ear:

Behold the cross of the Lord! Begone, you adverse powers! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered, the rod of David … (*Then he recites the following Gospel passage over her*): "Pilate had then Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. Thy kept coming up to him and saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' and slapping him in the face" (Jn 18: 4–5). (*The patient starts shaking her head and is held by Fr Hebga assistant*). Lord, deliver your servant from the hands of evil powers. (*The crucifix is moved to her chest..*) I command you unclean spirit, whoever you are, along with your all your allies attacking this servant of God, that you depart. If you persist in harming her, you will be destroyed by the power of God. Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! At the name of Jesus, all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and every tongue should acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord… (Phil. 3, 10–11).

Hebga then asks his assistant to anoint her with holy oil. She quickly recovers from a feeling of faint and is asked to come back the next day for another session.

Case 6. Two Protestant brothers

Two mature men walk into the room and one of them, the main patient, gets the seat.

Hebga: What is the problem?

> The patient's brother: My brother has just come out of the hospital. Two days ago, he started vomiting blood.

Hebga: What did the doctors say?

> The patient's brother: They were not able to diagnose anything in particular.

Hebga: Do you sleep well?

> *Patient 6*: I sleep well. Father, both of us are Protestants. I am in charge of one of the main Protestant organizations in Paris. But last week, just before I felt faint, I met a retired pastor that we had voted out of office. We had a short conversation during which he threatened me. I suspect it has something to do with it. That is why we decided to come and see you.

Hebga asks his aide to read Psalm 54. Then he prays over them before they are anointed with oil. At the end of the morning, before going out to bless sacramentals and other objects including mobile phones, jewels, watches, car keys, medicines, etc., Hebga had received about thirty people. The pattern of the therapeutic encounter appears to be the following:

a) Diagnosis through a short dialogue between Hebga and the patient
b) reading of the corresponding biblical passage,
c) healing prayer with the laying on of hands and the Crucifix
d) anointing of the patient with holy oil

Compared with therapeutic practices in Mangen described in chapter five, it appears that there are no notable differences as far as the content of the therapy is concerned. The content of some misfortunes, of course, is specific to the Western context, but, in terms of causality, witchcraft-related suspicions are still predominant.

Integration or demarcation?

Although the few anthropologists who have written on African Charismatic churches outside Africa generally agree that these communities are "designed basically to cope with life crisis resulting from the transition from one social world to another" (Ter Haar 2005 [1995]: 165), they tend to differ on the issue of whether, in the context of migration, their rituals serve the purpose of demarcation or of integration. Ter Haar (ibid.: 184–185; see also Ter Haar 1998: 69), for example, concludes her study of African Charismatic communities in the Southeast district of Amsterdam as follows:

> For African Christian communities in the West, however, in present-day conditions, it runs against their interests to emphasize their Africanness as it helps to put up barriers rather than remove them, also considering their obvious presence as black people among whites. Instead in their own discourse, they put great emphasis on the universal values, particularly stressing concepts of mutual love and unity… *Rather than functioning as demarcation*, ritual behaviour of African Christians in the case we have examined is a symbol for communication with the Dutch Christian community as they try to *communicate* to them their identity as Christians and their need to be incorporated into the wider Christian community in the West (my emphasis).

On the other hand, writing about African Christianity in Israel, Galia Sabar (2004: 432) underlines the following paradox:

> African churches in Israel were similarly engaged in the 'Politics of recognition', but only to a limited extent. By keeping a low profile and restricting their political activities largely to the human—as opposed to civic—rights of their communities, they seem to have foregone in advance any over claim to communal legitimacy in the public sphere. … *Paradoxically, the African churches in Israel ultimately reinforced the insulation and isolation of the African migrants. The churches became islands, albeit bridges to Israeli society*, as well as to home (my emphasis).

My position in this chapter is fairly critical of Ter Haar's integration argument and closer to Galia Sabar's. Because the very fact that these African migrants feel the need to create their own ritual spaces, instead of simply joining the existing Christian communities, seems to indicate some form of demarcation. In other words, the peculiarity (emphasis on the 'African' factor) of ritual expression in many African Charismatic churches, instead of facilitating communication with Europeans Christians, tends to isolate them from mainstream European churches. First of all, most African Charismatic churches in Europe as men-

tioned earlier are predominantly national or even ethnic (Hunt and Lightly 2001: 121–122; Adogame 2004: 499; Ter Haar 2005 (1995): 167; Sabar 2004; Van Dijk 1997). They are either Ghanaian, Nigerian, Ivorian, Cameroonian, etc., following in many cases the ethnic origin of the founder. Moreover, whereas many Africans easily join Charismatic groups founded by Europeans, the reverse is seldom true: African Charismatic movements attract very few Europeans. This makes the demarcation between African Charismatics and European Christians even more conspicuous in spite of the shared Christian identity. Another element that, I think, Ter Haar seems to overlook is the fact that one of the main reasons given by many African migrants for joining these churches is that they do not feel at home in European churches. It means that they are not simply looking for something Christian. They are also looking for an environment in which they can feel at home, a religious community which is "likely to express their interests and sentiments" (Hunt and Lightly 2001: 106).

In the case of an African Catholic Charismatic movement (such as Ephphata) in Europe, there are many levels to this demarcation: demarcation of Charismatic Christianity within mainstream Catholicism as highlighted in previous chapters; demarcation of Catholic Charismatics from other Pentecostals; demarcation of Catholic Charismatics among themselves including the demarcation of African Catholic Charismatic from European Catholic Charismatics, etc. But, of course, demarcation does not mean isolation, for all these differentiations operate within a common Christian framework which allows for some amount of intra-denominational and inter-denominational communication. But, in my opinion, this communication is rather marginal in the lives of most individual denominations. They are often limited to occasional ecumenical gatherings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PARADOXES OF AFRICANIZATION

Since Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Roman Catholics have been encouraged to think in positive terms about other religions, including African religions. In the African context, the effect has been to promote what is called 'inculturation': It can be broadly defined either as the 'Africanization' of missionary Christianity or the 'Christianization' of African cultures and religions depending on one's the starting point. But what do we really mean today by 'African religions' and 'African cultures' in a postcolonial context? Who are the African partners in the so-called 'dialogue' between African cultures and Christianity? This chapter critically explores the ideological framework of Hebga's healing practice. The latter is determined, as I showed in chapter three, by the translation of local idioms of misfortunes into a Christian language. This experiment in cultural translation which also involves healing rituals is rooted in the discourse of inculturation of which Hebga himself is a staunch advocate. In historical context inculturation is a postcolonial discourse of resistance to the symbolic violence of colonial evangelism; therefore its affinities with other Panafrican movements of cultural renaissance such as *Négritude*, *Authenticité*, etc. (Lado 2004, 2006). This chapter formulates an anthropological critique of the discourse of inculturation in the light of various experiments including Hebga's idea of the africanization of Christian healing in Africa. It is argued that in practice inculturation fails to Africanize. In other words, although in theory inculturation advocates the rediscovery of African cultural values, in practice it paradoxically pursues the missionary policy of dismantling what is left of African traditional cultures and religions.

From Cultural Violence to Inculturation discourse

The second wave of Christian missionaries, following some Portuguese pioneers in the sixteenth century, reached sub-Saharan Africa during the 1800s. When they arrived, they were confronted with two major

religious forces: African religions and Islam. Here I am concerned only with the encounter between Catholicism and African religions. In fact in most of the areas where these missionaries settled the Islamic influence was not generally strong; it was African religions that were still holding together the social and political fabrics as there was no clear demarcation between religion and culture.

Early Christian missionary activity in Africa was both ethnocentric and iconoclastic in its attitudes towards African religions:

> … neither in the nineteenth nor in the early twentieth centuries did missionaries give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent; its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness, and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home (Hastings 1967: 60).

Such attitudes are partially accounted for in historical context. Firstly, missionaries were children of an age in which early travellers' accounts "based on inaccurate information and cultural prejudice … made African religions appear to be a morass of bizarre beliefs and practice" (Ray 1976: 3). Evolutionist theories portrayed African religions as primitive, as merely the first stage of the evolution of human religious history; and such ways of thinking remain influential long after they have become discredited among scholars. Secondly, Western Christianity itself was being challenged in the nineteenth century by the disruptive waves of rationalism and secularism. It was therefore rather on the defensive, and not in a position to be open to dialogue with religious 'otherness'. Thirdly, the evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa took place within the context of colonisation which was essentially a violent enterprise. Besides, "Missionary societies tended to work in areas where their home governments were directly involved" (Mugambi 1989: 14), behaving often as cultural agents of their own nations. Indeed, in the 19th century, Christianity reached black Africa as part of the Western campaign of 'civilization' supposedly meant to 'redeem' the 'dark continent' from the claws of ignorance and devilish superstitions (Bediako 1992: 225). The commitment of missionaries not only to the preaching of the Gospel but also to the implantation of schools and hospitals, was part of this encompassing programme of elevating the 'primitive' African to the level of the 'civilized' Westerner.

In such a context of unequal power relationships, a genuine dialogue between Christianity and African religions was simply not possible. The missionary had come to give and not to receive; Africans had nothing to give but everything to receive. Just as civilization meant substituting African cultures for Western cultures, evangelization came to mean replacing African religions with Christianity. Overzealous missionaries went as far as destroying traditional ritual places in an attempt to persuade the evangelized that their old ways were worthless. In this early phase of Christian missionary activity, genuine dialogue with African religions was never envisaged, and the more recent movement towards africanization is in part a reaction against this violent, contemptuous past.

Hastings (1989) roughly distinguishes five major periods in the history of relationships between Western Christianity and African cultures. The first period, brief and perhaps more hypothetical than real, is "that of the meeting of African culture and Christian gospel in a genuinely pre-colonial situation" (ibid: 21). During the second period African cultures are still predominant but are "now being vociferously challenged by a gospel coming culturally from without" and backed by powerful colonial institutions. The third period, which covers roughly the first half of the 20th century, corresponds to the heyday of colonial domination and to the flowering of Christian institutions in Africa: "The missionary appeared to himself and to the observer to be sitting self-confidently enough, authoritatively, almost astride the broken if still pulsating wreckage of tradition" (ibid.: 23). The fourth period, the turbulent years of decolonization, was marked among other things by calls for African cultural renaissance. Religion becomes also "a prime area for the implementation of a program of cultural authenticity" (ibid.). About post-colonial Zimbabwe, for example, Randolph writes that "Since the war there is a great trend towards traditional religion and away from Christianity as a 'foreign' or even 'colonialist' religion" (1985: 121; see also Lan 1985). This period of resistance is characterized by a fierce critique of missionary Christianity resulting in calls for the advent of an 'authentic African Christianity'. It is in this context that the discourse of inculturation emerged. The following statement from an African theologian better depicts its spirit of resistance:

> Let us only observe that in their sensitivity to the social and cultural "conditions of production" of any theological discourse, African theologians lament the cultural imperialism of certain of their Western colleagues who, without batting an eye, and even explicitly defending their

> view, assign an unmerited priority to European culture as the locus of human universality (Mushete 1994: 19).

These observations capture the state of mind of most African theologians who have written on inculturation.

From the preceding considerations it appears that the discourse of inculturation originated among theologians grappling with the challenges of cultural pluralism and relativism for Catholicism in the modern world. Most theologians hold today that the Belgian Jesuit, Joseph Masson, at the time professor of theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, was most probably the first to use the term *inculturer* in a theological sense (Masson 1962; see also Shorter 1998: 10; Londi Boka 2000). This was in a 1962 article which argued for the necessity to promote a *catholicisme inculturée*, especially in non-Western countries. Before him others had used such terms as 'indigenization', 'adaptation', etc. to describe similar processes. During the second Vatican Council, the terminology of inculturation did not find its way into the official documents which instead used the term 'adaptation', a term subsequently criticised by theologians as ethnocentric. It is in the late 1970s that the word 'inculturation' began to appear in the official documents of the Catholic Church (Shorter 1988: 10) and this marked its endorsement by the Catholic hierarchy.

The fifth period, the present one, is described by Hastings as dominated by pessimism, stagnation and a loss of confidence in cultural solutions. But, taking a less pessimistic view, I think that this last period has seen, at least in the Catholic Church, the refinement of the discourse of inculturation as well as its endorsement by Rome as a priority in the evangelization of Africa (John Paul II 1995: 78). It has also seen the development of Black theology in South Africa as part of the struggle against Apartheid. In contrast with cultural theology, of which inculturation is the main component, Black theology is "more concerned with present politics than past culture" (Hastings 1989: 32). The same could be said of the theology of liberation borrowed from South American theologians which seeks to address present social, political and economic injustices in Africa (Ela 1988).

Inculturation experiments: Africanization or de-africanization?

Translating God

For the purpose of communication many early Western missionaries in Africa learned and mastered local languages. Some developed an alphabet, and then the very first dictionaries of African languages, all of which led to translations of the Bible (mainly by Protestants), of catechisms and of hymnals. But because language is the home of culture, these translations blended not only different languages but also different cultures or cosmologies. Missionaries had to find (or simply invent) African concepts suitable for the translation of Christian concepts such as God, Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, angels, saints, purgatory, hell, etc. And thus, for all that these early missionaries regarded African religions as worthless, they paradoxically retained concepts from these religions to translate the Christian concepts.

Concerning, for example the concept of God, Hastings rightly wonders,

> When the so-called 'high God'—*Mulungu*, *Mwari*, *Leza*, *Katonda*, *Kwoth* or *Nyame*—was worshipped, was Yahweh in truth being worshipped and was such worship truly salvific? How far could the whole wider complex of pre-Christian religious ritual and belief—focused so often upon ancestors or hero-divinities—form part of the salvific relationship between God and human beings? Possessed of his or her own religion, a world of spirits leading up to 'Spirit', did the African need Christ at all? (Hastings 1989: 90).

Through these kinds of translation, missionaries were already (often unconsciously) initiating a profound but ambiguous interaction between African religions and Christianity. A number of anthropologists have discussed similar linguistic and cultural ambiguities related to the various attempts to translate Christian terms into African languages (Lienhardt 1982; James 1988; Meyer 1994) and recent critical anthropology (Fabian 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Asad 1993) has also highlighted the politics of any process of cultural translation, some of which refer directly to persisting asymmetries between Western cultures and the cultures of former colonies in the present global cultural economy.

Catholic saints and African Ancestors

Recently, in the name of inculturation, some African theologians have attempted to move this 'dialogue' to a different level by comparing African ancestors with Catholic saints (or with Jesus Christ) through the category of mediation. For example, in 1986 Dieudonné Watio (now a Catholic Bishop in Cameroon), presented to the Department of Religious Studies (*Sciences des Religions*) of the University of Paris-Sorbonne a doctoral thesis on the cult of ancestors among the Ngyemba.

The Ngyemba are a subgroup of the Bamileke ethnic group which lives in the Western part of Cameroon. Their local religion is centred on the veneration of ancestors. When French missionaries arrived among the Ngyemba in the early years of the 20th century, they chose the Ngyemba term for supreme being (*Sse*) to translate the French term *Dieu*. But at the same time they rejected the practice of the veneration of ancestors as idolatrous. This eclectic, selective and, in certain aspects, arbitrary approach did not prove to be an effective way of engaging African religions. In fact they were unconsciously tearing apart the religious system of the Ngyemba by attempting to dissociate in people's minds and lives their supreme being (*Sse*) from the veneration of ancestors. Such a dissociation could not but be artificial.

Bishop Watio draws an analogy between Catholic saints and the role of ancestors in Ngyemba spirituality, and makes all due qualifications. But at the end of his comparison, he makes the following suggestion:

> I hope, then, that the Church can gradually accept the possibility of acknowledging that Christians can invoke their ancestors too, just as they invoke the Christian saints: having recourse to them as mediators and intercessors with God at difficult moments, and this without fear of possible excommunication on the Church's part. I have already stressed that the cult of ancestors is not idolatry, but rather an expression of filial piety. It seems to me that if a good catechesis about the mediation of saints and ancestors were to be given to our Christians, and if for its part the Church could accept the need to look more seriously into the cult of the ancestors in order to capture better its spirit and actual function, then Christian recourse to and invocation of the ancestors would be possible, just as it is now for the Christian saints (Watio 1986: 361–362; my translation)

Other African theologians, such as Charles Nyamiti and Benezet Bujo, have rather chosen to explore the analogy between Jesus Christ and African ancestors, but on the condition that the African concept of ancestor be 'purified' of its 'negative' connotations. In their attempts

to fashion Christological titles consonant with African religions and cultures, Nyamiti (1984) speaks of 'Christ as our Ancestor' and Bujo (1998) of Jesus as 'Proto-ancestor'. At the beginning of the Congolese rite for the Mass, approved by John Paul II in 1988 after more than a decade of experimentation, both the saints and the local ancestors 'who searched for and served God with an upright heart', are called upon to join the congregation for the sacrifice about to take place. Such *rapprochements*, unthinkable in the early decades of African Christianity, are now common in African theology and pastoral practice. Scores of doctoral and masters theses have been written on similar analogies between African rites of passage and Christian sacraments, or between African religious symbols and Christian symbols. African bishops monitor such work closely, and occasionally clash with theologians on some of these issues.

Nevertheless, what is at stake here is patchwork, and its dominant thrust is assimilationist. The purpose is not to encourage any sort of mutual enrichment between two equal partners, but rather to assimilate into Christian liturgy or doctrine values and symbols thought to be 'authentically' African… For all this is happening is that Christians are talking about African religions. There is no room for the African religions to talk back. Isn't it misleading to call such a procedure 'dialogue'?

African religions have neither books nor schools of theologies; they have never fostered speculative thought. They are sets of rituals and beliefs enacted on specific occasions for specific pragmatic interests. They are not religions of a 'credo' inviting assent. This lack of speculation in African religions makes it very difficult to envisage a genuine doctrinal dialogue with Catholicism. It is African theologians who are the ones dissecting these rituals and beliefs, and then making theories out of them for the purpose of developing an African Christian theology. The enterprise is surely highly questionable; it amounts to imposing on these religions an intellectualist attitude proper to Christianity. There is some danger that the current fashion for inculturation and assimilation may be masking just another disguised form of cultural violence. In other words, inculturation looks in practice as a process which further uproots what remains of African religions, as de-africanization.

Grape wine or millet beer

A number of African theologians have also called for the Africanization of the celebration of the eucharist. As a result of this, a number of experiments have been made here and there, especially in the areas of colour symbolism, music, and the order of the mass. The most outstanding outcome so far remains the approval in the 1980s by Rome of the already mentionned Congolese ritual of the mass. But the Vatican and some theologians are still divided over the issue of whether wheat bread and grape wine should be replaced with local food stuff. So far, the Vatican is opposed to the idea, arguing that by choosing to incarnate himself in these substances Jesus was making them normative for his disciples. But the advocates of the inculturation the Eucharistic meal questions the existential meaning of the symbolism of wheat bread and grape wine for those African Christians who grow neither grapes nor wheat. They claim that what is at stake here is not only symbolic alienation but also economic dependency, for most African Catholic communities have to import these products for the liturgical use. One of the African theologians writes:

> In black Africa, we ask God for food in the Lord's Prayer—the fruit of our land and of our culture; but at the Lord's Table, we use a food that is the fruit of another land and another culture. Our difficulty in translating the names of imported Eucharistic elements into our local languages is a measure of the foreignness of the Eucharistic liturgy in our African communities. … Instead of reproducing a style of celebration marked by a foreign culture, our Christian communities should strive to create, in the Spirit, our own way of manifesting the One who has the power to free us through the gift of his Body (Ela 1988: 49).

For the purpose of illustration, I now considered a case study put forward by René Jaouen (1995), a French catholic priest who was a missionary for more than three decades among the Giziga people of Northern Cameroon. He is one of the major proponents of the inculturation of the Eucharistic meal and my attempt to summarize here his dense argument goes with the risk of oversimplifying it. The traditional religion of the Giziga revolves around millet which is their main existential symbol. For them, millet is not only food that nurtures life, but it is life itself. It is something 'sacred'. Jaouen looks first at the place of millet in the traditional religion of the Giziga. For him, the millet is the most central 'sacrament' of their religion (ibid.: 6), their primordial means of communion with the sacred. Jaouen also

looks at the myths and the annual rituals of the Giziga in relation to their daily life. In one of the myths, millet is portrayed by the Giziga as the only source of life for human beings struggling to survive after the retreating of the supreme divinities into the skies. Jaouen interprets this myth as accounting for the passage from nature to culture through transgression: the state of culture being that in which the Giziga have to rely on the culture of millet for their survival. Here millet, the staple of the Giziga, is seen as the symbol of life, as life itself. In the land of the Giziga, "*Le mil est donc le moyen et le symbole de la vie*" (ibid.: 43). Jaouen further remarks that every stage of the process of growing millet, from sowing to harvesting, is marked by a ritual. During these rituals, the millet is personified: it is spoken to, listen to, consoled, encouraged, reassured, honoured and beseeched (ibid.: 84).

Considering this central place and role of millet in the symbolic universe of the Giziga, the question raised by Jaouen is whether the celebration of the Eucharist can touch the hearts of the Giziga without drawing on this symbol. Why impose on them foreign religious symbols such as wheat bread and grape wine when their traditional religion provides equally meaningful alternatives? For Jaouen, the use of wheat bread and grape wine within a culture based on millet is "*l'indice d'une aliénation culturelle et religieuse*" (ibid.: 7). But Jaouen himself remarks that there are no Giziga words corresponding to the English words: bread and wine. So, he had to make some choices in favour of symbolic translation. This resulted in translating 'bread' as *af* (Giziga word for their millet staple) and wine as *mbazla* (Giziga word for the locally brewed millet beer) [ibid.: 146]. As one can see, such a translation is determined by Jaouen's own theological orientation. Writing on similar translation among the Uduk of Sudan, James has rightly remarked: "The translations produced by the missionaries reflect their doctrinal position as much as they reflect what might have been embedded in the moral theology of biblical times or those cultural sources from which the texts of the Bible itself were originally drawn" (James 1999 [1988]: 223). The ambiguity of Jaouen's translation of bread and wine in Giziga language pertains to the fact that it invites the Giziga to attribute to foreign wine the name of their local beer and to foreign wine the name of their millet. It suits Jaouen's doctrinal orientation, but does it really meet the religious aspirations of the Giziga?

One major anthropological problem with Jaouen's approach (as with the overall programme of inculturation) is that it tends to undermine the ability of African Catholics to domesticate foreign symbols. Al-

though I sympathize with his concern about cultural alienation, his overall argument tends to suggest that people can find meaning only in symbols born out of their own cultures. And this is what I call the essentialist temptation. After all, the circulation of symbols across cultures is a fact of human history and I do not think that African history is any exception. Most of the main crops treated as indigenous today in Africa were introduced on the continent through the transatlantic slave trade between the 15th and 19th centuries. African "diets and foodways have, indeed, been influenced by the "Westernizing" forces of the market place, missionary education, and both colonial and postcolonial agricultural development strategies" (Freidberg 2005: 22–23). Obviously, there are crucial structural issues of justice and food security associated with these colonial and postcolonial processes (Ela 1988: 87–101) which require attention. But it is a fact that wheat bread and grape wine are now available in most African cities where the consumption of wine has become associated with elite status and prestige. For example, writing about drinking patterns in Cameroon today, Igor de Garine remarks that

> In terms of modern progressive scale of values, prestige increases from the consumption of local beer to local alcohol, to manufactured beer, to imported wine and spirit—the more expensive, the stronger, and the more foreign the better. Cameroon ranks high for champagne consumption (de Garine 2001: 15).

Having said this, anthropologists have also shown that the adoption of foreign food in a particular society does not necessarily result in the homogenization of related symbolic values. There is still room for distinction between 'foreign' food and 'local food'. In present day Cameroon, for example, it is not rare to hear people distinguish between 'white man food' and 'real' food (meaning local dishes). In this sense, the cultural value of wheat bread and grape wine in sub-Saharan Africa is surely different from what it is in a Mediterranean context. Carole Counihan remarks, for example, that bread is the most important food in Sardinian diet; she even describes it as a 'total social fact' in the sense that among Sardinians, "bread is a nexus of economic, political, aesthetic, social, symbolic, and health concerns" (1999: 29). Another example comes from Sutton who underlines the centrality of bread in Greek diet: "Bread is the basic staple in the Greek diet, and no meal would be complete without bread to accompany it. … Bread, of course, has deep religious significance for Christian populations. On every day level, bread is constantly moving back and forth between home and

church" (2001: 33). This cannot be said of present day sub-Saharan Africa, in spite of the wide consumption of bread in this continent. In this sense, the question of the advocates of the inculturation about the religious value wheat bread and grape wine in an African context is worth asking. But by making a direct connection between foreign food and cultural (and religious) alienation, some of the theologians of inculturation undermine, in my view, the historicity of African societies.

Eating and drinking, as many anthropologists have pointed out, is also a generational issue. Many young Africans today do enjoy eating bread and drinking wine. Besides, wheat flour is widely used in African households today for a variety of purposes, including the making and selling of doughnuts as a source of income for many poor women. There is no reason, therefore, to think that Africans Catholics will not progressively domesticate wheat bread and grape wine in the ritual context, and thus transform the foreign into the familiar. After all, this has happened elsewhere. For example, Ellen Messer (2004: 185) shows how as a result of the colonial encounter, the people of Oaxaca (Mexico) introduced Hispanic food items in their religious rituals. Of course, it is not my intention to exonerate missionary Christianity and colonization from its ethnocentric policies in Africa. I am just pointing out, as other anthropologists have done before me, that when writing about African Christianity, It is partial to

> Take the accomplished domination of the colonized as a point of departure, and to focus merely on the suppression and alienation brought about by Western influences in general and Christianity in particular. … African Christianity is not merely an extension of the missionary impact, but a continuously developing product which is shaped by a great number of experiences (Meyer 1999: xix).

These experiences include the creative agency of African Christians.

On the other hand, the Vatican's position, according to which wheat bread and grape wine cannot not be changed, because supposedly chosen by Jesus himself, is equally based on an essentialist understanding of Christianity. It also undermines the historicity of the Eucharist, especially the way in which its celebration has changed in the course of history. For example, early celebrations of the Eucharist were actually part of a real meal. But "for a long time the symbolism of a true meal has been abandoned for communion with bread alone" (Ela 1988: 49); also notable is the change from the use of real bread to that of small round white hosts. In fact, the question of inculturation of the Eucharis-

tic meal is not only about whether some features of this meal can be changed, but also about who is allowed to change what.

Africanizing ritual healing

On the specific issue of ritual healing in African Catholicism, Hebga (1991: 65) frames the challenge as follows:

> The general attitude of Christian missionaries to African treatment of sickness was and remains negative: a mixture of disdain for 'all this primitive hotchpotch', and horror at 'pagan superstitions'. … On the whole African clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, adopted without further ado the approach of their foreign masters. … Syncretistic healers have rebelled against the canonical sanctions hurled at them, taking with them in their revolt numerous followers who are more sensitive to spiritual healing than theological and disciplinary discourse. It is no longer possible to dodge the work of discernment and adaptation that is necessary. And the question has to be asked: do traditional African rites have to be Christianized, or is it enough to inculturate the official rites handed on by the Western churches?

Hebga is rightly regarded as one of the pioneers of the idea of African theology. Indeed, he was among those African priests who, while studying in Paris in the 1950s, launched the ongoing debate on the 'africanity' of Christianity through the collection of essays entitled, *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent* (1956). In this book, Hebga's contribution, suggestively entitled *Christianisme et Négritude*, concludes with a programmatic statement about reconciling *Négritude* with Christianity (Hebga 1956).

This plea for the advent of an authentic African Christianity has remained at the heart of the thinking and writings of Hebga. In his book, *Émancipation d'Églises sous-tutelle*, he stigmatizes what he describes as *néocolonialisme spirituel* (Hebga 1976: 43), meaning the chronic economic, structural, theological, and cultural dependence of African churches on Western churches. But Hebga is keen on insisting that the autonomy of African churches he is advocating is not synonymous with breaking away from Rome. For him it is a matter of acknowledging the right for African Christians to bring about forms of Christianity at the same time 'African' and 'Catholic'. Although he does not say much on how to achieve this new synthesis, his writings have been provocative enough to anger some members of the Catholic hierarchy both in Cameroon and in Rome. The aforementioned book actually cost him his teaching position at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. His critics accused him of being maliciously one-sided in his evalua-

tion of missionary Christianity, deliberately choosing to focus only on the mistakes of missionaries, thereby unfairly ignoring the sacrifices made by many of them for the spread of the Gospel in Africa. In 1977, Hebga published another book entitled *Dépassements* in which he tried to respond to some of his critics who besides doubting his loyalty to Rome had portrayed him as anti-white. The tone of this second essay is less polemical and displays a deliberate effort on Hebga's part to reassure his critics that his understanding of inculturation is not schismatic, but simply a plea for unity in diversity. For him, although the Catholic faith has to be the same everywhere, it is compatible with a diversity of cultural expressions (Hebga 1977: 58–60). Selected titles of his articles such as 'Worthy and unworthy churches' (Hebga 1984) or 'From the generalisation of one triumphant particular to the search for true universality' (Hebga 1979) encapsulate his discourse of resistance, resistance against what he perceives as the imposition of Western cultures on African Christians in the name of the 'universality' of the Catholic Church. As he puts it,

> Even at the dawn of the third millennium, the attitude of official Christianity remains ambivalent: in words very universalist, in practice it is dominated by a triumphant and intransigent particularism. … Who will save us from philosophical, juridical and cultural Westernization, erected into the providential path towards salvation in Jesus Christ? (Hebga 1984: 48)

On the specific issue of the inculturation of Christian healing in Africa, Hebga has an article entitled 'Healing in Africa' (1991). Its outline is typical of most writings on inculturation. The first section entitled 'The nature of treatment in Africa' is introduced as follows: "To understand healing in Africa it is necessary to consider it in its own framework, in its socio-cultural context, and not through the distorting lenses of foreign anthropologies or cultures, set up as a universal norm of reference" (ibid.: 60). Again, the language of protest and resistance is manifest. In this first section, Hebga describes what he sees as the 'African' conception of life, sickness and healing. The second section entitled 'African treatment and Christianity' seeks to "investigate the relevance of the Christianization of African therapeutic rites and the inculturation of the official rituals received from the Western churches" (ibid.). About this relevance he writes:

> It is imperative to integrate some of our major therapeutic rites into the Christian panoply being used among us. In fact the specific needs which gave birth to them are still there in our society, and we do not have

> the impression that they are effectively met by the contribution of the sacraments and sacramentals, rich though this may be. The reason for this feeling of dissatisfaction with the spiritual means put at our disposal by the Church is that they do not mention our ills by name or the forces that act upon us. The cultural framework of their application is alien to us. … It would not even be enough to recite a gospel or ritual prayer over the sick, or to invoke the powerful name of Christ over them. In addition, it is necessary to name explicitly in a loud and intelligible voice the formidable forces of the *famla*, the *kon* or the *nson* to ward them off (ibid.).

Hebga goes on to suggest how a Basaa rite of purification (*likan li bihut*) from incest pollution could be Christianized. He summarizes the traditional rite as follows:

> This rite, the *Likan li bihut*… should take place in public, preferably at a crossroads, in the presence of the families of the offenders and the leading figures of the village. The officiant offers as sacrifice a ram and a sheep, and pairs of birds, lizards, centipedes and insects. Those involved in the incest are asked to repeat their criminal act before the audience so that it will be for ever impressed on their consciences. Then the entrails of the sacrificed animals, mixed with different barks and herbs, are applied still burning to the bodies of those concerned by the officiant, who pronounces several times the ritual formula, 'Ban on the genitals, ban on the vulva.' The audience, the utensils and the places are sprinkled with the blood of the victims (ibid.: 67).

About the Christianized version of the above ritual, Hebga suggests the following experiment:

> I work in the utmost secrecy. I invite the offenders to take account of the gravity of their fault and to repent of it before God and before their families or their representatives. Then I read a penitential psalm, and kinsfolk are sprinkled with holy water and then anointed with holy oil blessed for this purpose. Thenceforward purified and taken in charge by the Lord, they no longer have to fear the consequences that popular belief attaches to incest; physical and social decline, a curse on posterity, and so on. To my knowledge persons thus reconciled with God and with family society do not feel the need to resort to traditional rite or to any maraboutage (ibid.).

It is obvious that in the Christianized version traditional symbols and figures are replaced by Christian symbols. Animal sacrifice and other features such as the repetition of the incest act, the publicity of the rite, etc. are left out 'for reasons of Christian morality' (ibid.: 66). This cautious selection is not unrelated to 'authorizing processes' at work in the Catholic Church and about which he remarks: "Given the centralism of the Catholic Church and the existence of a universal ritual for

Fig. 7. Fr Hebga (right) posing with a local dignitary after being honoured with a traditional title (of which he bears the insignia) among the Bamun of Cameroon

the whole of the Roman communion, Africans should never dream of obtaining the right to create entirely original rituals" (ibid.: 67).

To date, the most important document from Rome featuring a statement about dialogue between Catholicism and African religions remains John Paul II's post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995: §67), in which one reads the following:

> With regard to African traditional religion, a *serene and prudent dialogue* will be able, on the one hand, *to protect Catholics from negative influences which condition the way of life of many of them* and, on the other hand, to foster

> the assimilation of positive values such as belief in a Supreme Being who is Eternal, Creator, Provident and Just Judge, values which are readily harmonized with the content of the faith (my emphasis).

I will return to the politics of inculturation in a later section. For now, suffice it to say that Hebga's resistance is subversive of established practices only to a certain point. Indeed, compared to the dissent of African Independent Churches, his is rather a conservative form of resistance, a resistance from within.

About the relevance of the inculturation of Western Christian rites, Hebga is of the opinion that African Catholics should be allowed by Rome to "adapt prayers, objects and gestures borrowed from other civilizations to their own needs" (Hebga 1991: 68). He further remarks that "while the Catholic Church in Africa is still taking its first tottering steps….numerous dissenting or independent churches have long experience in this area from which we can benefit" (ibid.: 69). He goes on, as one of the pioneers in this experiment in ritual creativity, to describe how he proceeds, for example, to purify villages considered dangerous because of sorcerers and other soothsayers. He suggests the following prayer entitled 'prayer of deliverance for an infested village' for the ritual of purification.

> Lord, you are the Father of all, you do not want the death of sinners but that they may convert and return to life. So we do not ask you to destroy our enemies, the sorcerers and sorceresses bent on doing evil, but to prevent them from doing harm. Inspired by Satan and by other evil spirits, they sow sickness and death; by poison and evil they destroy the health of the people, the fields, trade, and the understanding and peace of families. Others infest houses, dwellings and entire villages. Lord convert these servants of evil and death, and pardon them. But if they refuse and are bent on destroying your children, may their own evil deeds return against them, so that he who kills by the sword (Matt. 26. 52). … Lord, destroy the reign of Satan in this village. Tear it from the darkness of fetishes and sorcery and introduce it into Christ's kingdom of light… (ibid.: 68–69).

This prayer seeks to associate 'sorcerers and sorceresses' with the reign of Satan and evil spirits thereby blending aspects of African cosmology with Biblical cosmology. Is this syncretism or synthesis?

Shorter (1988: 13) correlates the distinction between acculturation and inculturation with the distinction between syncretism and symbiosis as follows:

> When we speak of inculturation, we are referring to a phenomenon that transcends mere acculturation. It is the stage when a human culture is

> enlivened by the Gospel from within, a stage which presupposes a measure of reformulation or, more accurately, reinterpretation. … Acculturation may lead merely to a *juxtaposition of unassimilated cultural expressions*, coming from various directions or origins. This may lead, further on, to a form of *syncretism*, in which an illegitimate symbiosis occurs that is harmful to authentic Christian meaning. It is only when there is a truly critical *symbiosis*, and the Christian experience is really integrated, or—to use the term favoured by Pope Paul VI—'transposed', within the local culture, that we can speak of inculturation in the strict sense (my emphasis)

In other words what inculturation hopes to achieve is not 'a juxtaposition of unassimilated cultural expressions', not 'a form of syncretism', but 'a critical symbiosis.' It is obvious that in theological circles such a distinction is not neutral. The context suggests that behind it there is a deliberate attempt to demarcate the *bricolages* of the Catholic Church from those of African Independent Churches pejoratively labelled as 'sects' by the former. But Stewart and Shaw (1994: 11) have suggested that,

> As anthropologists, we would probably label many instances of inculturation 'syncretism' in so far as they involve the combination of diverse traditions in the area of religion. Representatives of the Catholic Church would immediately dispute this usage, however, and reserve 'syncretism' for a narrower (and altogether negative) subset of such syntheses where they perceive that the Truth of the Christian message is distorted or lost.

Inculturation, according to these authors, would fall under what they call syncretism 'from above' as contrasted with syncretism 'from below', "each representing different poles in a field of power" (ibid.: 21). With syncretism 'from above', "we have the imposition of religious synthesis upon others by those who claim the capacity to define cultural meanings" (ibid.) whereas syncretism 'from below' implies the fact that religious converts are not passive recipients of religious imports (Neckebrouck 1994: 94–95). They are also 'cultural brokers' in their own right.

The ongoing secularization in Western societies has shown that synthesis between cultures and religions are very unstable. And so theologians of inculturation need to take into account the tension between 'stability and process' inherent in intercultural processes: all religions are syncretic and syncretic combinations are transitory (Stewart 1995: 30–31). Pope John Paul II (2003: 7) lamented the split between Christianity and mainstream culture in contemporary Europe and called for a renewed inculturation of Christianity in Western societies. He writes:

> I would like to mention in a particular way the *loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage*, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history. It is no real surprise, then, that there are efforts to create a vision of Europe which ignore its religious heritage, and in particular, its profound Christian soul, asserting the rights of the peoples who make up Europe without grafting those rights on to the trunk which is enlivened by the sap of Christianity (my emphasis).

Here appears the horticultural metaphor of 'grafting' culture onto the stock of the 'Gospel truth'. But the concept of 'Gospel Truth' as it is used in the discourse of inculturation is difficult to specify. Because every version of Christianity is always at any time a historical phenomenon, "it is not clear where the 'culture-free gospel' ends and [where] Western culture begins" (Uzukwu 1994: 97). The idea that one can distinguish in this process of acculturation what is distinctively cultural from what is distinctively religious is highly debatable; for religion is always already a social as well as a cultural form (Geertz 1993 [1973]). It is indeed important to recall that the idea that religion can be differentiated from other spheres of life is a product of recent Western history, a product of the Western process of secularization. Asad rightly points out that, "The insistence that religion has an autonomous essence—not to be confused with the essence of science, or of politics, or of common sense—invites us to define religion (like any essence) as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon" (1993: 28).

Knowledge, Power and cultural globalization

Writing about the Catholic Church in Africa, Pope John Paul II (1995: 78) remarked that "the challenge of Inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values". I have already discussed the ambiguities of the essentialist understanding of the 'Gospel message' with regard to the inescapable historicity of Christianity. I now consider the relevance of the concept of 'authentic African values' in a postcolonial Africa. Again, this sort of terminology betrays an essentialist perspective on collective identities, a perspective which is not uncommon among a number of African theologians. For example, Tchibangu (1987: 33) and Mulago (1965) have

suggested that 'Africanity' or 'Africanness' can roughly be defined by the following elements: (a) cultic veneration of the ancestors; (b) belief in the existence and power of mystical forces that influence the lives of human beings; (c) a life-centred philosophy of life; (d) a sense of solidarity that characterizes relationships with fellow human beings and the universe, etc. This approach is predicated on a presumed cultural unity of Africa.

Moreover, "who determines the 'true values'…of these cultures, and by what criteria can such a determination be made?" (Collet 1994: 29). This question refers to social processes of decision-making governing this cultural experiment. In other words, who controls the process and for whom? Indeed, in terms of relationships between Rome and African Catholicism, inculturation is also a question of who is allowed to do what and by whom. The Catholic hierarchy, controller of 'authorizing processes', requires that inculturation be done without 'compromising' doctrinal orthodoxy. It is obvious that 'orthodoxy' is also inherently a political concept for it encapsulates power relationships, including the relationship between knowledge and power. In Africa, lay Catholics hardly study theology because until very recently it was taught only in seminaries to candidates for the priesthood. One implication is that the clergy ends up monopolizing the kind of theological knowledge which is important for doctrinal debates. Consequently, the large majority of African Catholics cannot actively take part in the debates concerning their religious practice. Besides since priesthood remains everywhere an option only for male Catholics, women in Africa are almost completely excluded from the production of theological knowledge. Because of this, inculturation in Africa is almost exclusively a masculine discourse. Here, one monopoly breeds many others: priestly monopoly of 'religious intellectualism' (Weber 1963: 118) leads to the priestly monopoly of doctrinal interpretation which goes hand in hand with the priestly monopoly of religious power. In other words, there is a strong link between theological knowledge and power in African Catholicism. This power is directly related to "the authorizing process by which 'religion' is created" (Asad 1993: 37), to the issue of "how (religious) power creates (religious) truth" (ibid: 33). In the Catholic Church in general, there is a strong connection between its understanding of 'truth' and its hierarchical structure: one's ability to produce doctrinal 'truth' depends also on one's position in the hierarchy.

Indeed, it would be a mistake to assume that the theologian of inculturation is the spokesperson of the laity. Not only are their interests

different, but the reality is that of asymmetrical power relationships between them. On this, Hufford rightly remarks:

> In the study of spiritual beliefs, the political interests of the scholarly community and those of believers are substantially different, and in some respect antagonistic. … The cultural authority of scholars, the complex language used in scholarly discourse, and the esoteric nature of academic channels of communication render academic interpretations of the beliefs of ordinary people generally inaccessible to those being studied (Hufford 1999: 298).

There are other reasons why 'dialogue' is not a realistic description for Christianity's engagement with African religions and cultures today. In the current postcolonial context, it is quite difficult to identify who it is with whom Christianity can undertake such a dialogue. It is no easy matter to locate African religions today; moreover postcolonial Africans have very complex attitudes towards them.

African religions are obviously not dead. But they have been destabilized, first by colonial forces and secondly by globalization processes, and are desperately seeking new anchorages. In many places, what remains of them today are mere bits and pieces of beliefs and practices which have somehow survived into the postcolonial context. When African nations first became independent, there was much talk about restoring the 'authenticity' of African cultures disrupted by colonial forces. But the reality was more a matter of political legitimation of bloody dictators as violent as the colonial regimes they were replacing than of genuine concern about collective identities. It is very difficult to identify the real representatives of African religions who could indeed act as partners in a dialogue with Christianity. In rural areas they may have remained fairly influential, but in the cities their credibility has been seriously undermined by money-minded charlatans commercialising bits and pieces of rituals in the name of African traditions.

Many African Christians today still have one foot in African religions and the other foot in Christianity. This divided loyalty represents one of the major challenges facing the Christian Churches in Africa today. Another fact is the growing ignorance of young Africans in the cities about African religions. More attracted to Western styles of life, they tend to associate African traditions with the so-called 'backwardness' of village life. Yet, in many cases, their parents still maintain ritual ties with the village, especially in times of existential uncertainties. In the event of a terrible misfortune they may visit a diviner first before

turning to a priest. Both the older and the younger generations are often uncertain about what is and is not permissible for Christians.

Before its encounter with Islam and Christianity, Africa knew almost nothing of wars of religion, of proselytism, or conversion in the Christian sense of the term. There may have been religious interchange, as a result of ethnic groups borrowing beliefs and rituals from one another, but one was automatically initiated into the religion of one's ethnic group. Ethnic groups, and still more families, all shared the same religion. In postcolonial Africa the situation is different. What remains of African religions now coexists with a variety of forms of Islam and Christianity. African ethnic groups, African families, are now pluralist. It is not uncommon to come across African families in which the mother is Catholic, the father adheres to an African religion, one son is a Jehovah's Witness, a daughter a Pentecostal, and another son a Muslim. The potential for conflict here is obvious. When misfortune strikes, the father may choose to offer a propitiatory sacrifice, while the Catholic mother insists on having a Mass said. Some may indeed see no problem with the combination, as long as the practices work. Many African Christians are in Church in the morning and at the diviner's place in the afternoon. There are serious questions here about the depth of people's faith, and about the quality of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Why do they still miss their traditional rituals in spite of their Christian belonging?

The standard answer given to this question by African theologians is that the evangelization of Africa was not sufficiently respectful of African religions. It avoided proper interreligious dialogue and therefore failed to reach the hearts of the evangelized. The solution to the problem lies in an ever more vigorous inculturation. By bridging the gap between Catholicism and African religious values, this inculturation will progressively unify people's religious experiences. But in my opinion, this explanation is problematic, for several reasons.

In the first place, the history of religions shows that divided religious loyalty, or a lived religious syncretism, is always a temptation in any context of religious pluralism. If such divided loyalty is indeed a problem, it is unfair to attribute it to the violent missionary policies of the past. Lived syncretism has more to do with people trying out other gods when they feel that Christianity has let them down, and tends to occur in times of crisis. The Old Testament prophets often complained about the unfaithfulness of Israel when the latter flirted with foreign divinities or idols in times of crisis:

> Wine and new wine take away the understanding. My people consult a piece of wood, and their divining-rod gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have played the whore, forsaking their God. They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and make offerings upon the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good (Hosea 4:11–13).

African Christians go through similar temptations in times of misfortune. It is indeed important to remember that African religions are predominantly pragmatic; they are problem-solving sets of beliefs and rituals which promise immediate returns, whereas the mainstream Christian churches insist on faith and hope. It is therefore no surprise that charismatic or neo-Pentecostal churches are having some success in Africa today. This is partly because of their focus on a pragmatic Christianity that promises immediate benefits (healing, success, prosperity, jobs, etc.) in a context of dire poverty (Gifford 2004).

Another reason why 'more inculturation' is not a productive strategy for African Christianity today is that it leaves unaddressed the central reality of Africans' cultural experience today: the experience of multiculturalism resulting from current processes of globalization (Lado 2005). This is a point on which African Catholicism should learn from the experience of European Catholicism. The centuries of 'inculturation' in Europe have not prevented the advent of a culture that is post-Christian, and in many respects secularised. The marriage between a mainstream culture and a religion is not indissoluble. The deeper and more unsettling point, one which advocates of 'inculturation' as a pastoral strategy need to come to terms with, is the shifting nature of any human culture. Given this nature of culture, the product of any attempt at inculturation is bound to be an unstable mixture.

From the preceding analysis, inculturation appears as a strategic attempt by the Catholic Church to control the process of acculturation generated by the Christian encounter in non-Western societies. This encounter has indeed generated many forms of religious bricolages both within and outside mission churches. The question is: how far can these processes be controlled from above? How subversive of 'authorizing discourses' can the religious agency of the masses be? About the complexity of any process of acculturation, Shorter (1988: 7) helpfully remarks:

> Culture itself comes into existence through collective processes, and the encounter between cultures is likewise a collective process largely beyond

> the scope of individual human choice. It is, of course, an encounter between two different sets of symbols and conceptions, two different interpretations of experience, two different social identities. Unreflective and unprogrammed though it may be, the encounter is fraught with complexity. Its consequences can be discerned post factum at the conscious level, but many of the conflicts it engenders are worked out at the subconscious level.

The advocates of what Mbembe (1998: 57) has called *théologies de l'identité et de la différence* will need to heed the fact that 'Culture is not an add-on extra' to social activities and historical upheavals but "is built in to these activities and to our capacity for sociality—that is, of relating in mutually intelligible ways to others, including our 'nastier' warlike capacity for making enemies" (James 2003: 5). By abstracting cultures from the historical and social matrix which makes them dynamic, the discourse of inculturation treats them as if they were museum artifacts. An essentialist approach to inculturation such as the one I have discussed in this chapter fails to take seriously the historicity of African societies.

CHAPTER NINE

ANTHROPOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICA

About six decades ago Evans-Pritchard wrote the following on witchcraft among the Azande:

> They do not profess to understand witchcraft entirely. They know that it exists and works evil, but they have to guess at the manner in which it works. Indeed, I have frequently been struck when discussing witchcraft with Azande by the doubt they express about the subject (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 82).

In other words, the interest of Azande in witchcraft is more practical than speculative. I witnessed the same pragmatic attitude towards witchcraft among Hebga's patients: they take its existence for granted and are more interested in how to deal with it than in how it works. In fact, in the context of Southern Cameroon, people are rather reluctant to speculate on the mechanisms of witchcraft for the general understanding is that only a witch really knows how it works. In other words, if you know how it works then you must be a witch. That is one of the reasons why Hebga is not only admired but also feared by some of his clients: his power to bless and to cure is also seen as the potential power to curse. As we saw earlier in chapter five, Hebga reinforces this perception of himself in the way he threatens to strike those accused of witchcraft practices or misconduct in Ephphata.

Hebga, on his part, does not only believe in the existence of witchcraft; he has developed a theoretical interest in the issue which seeks to legitimate his practice. In other words, besides being a religious practitioner he is also a scholar with academic credentials which includes, as mentioned in the first chapter, a doctorate in philosophy from *Université de Paris-Sorbonne*. This chapter focuses on his attempt to use Western philosophical tools to argue for the plausibility of witchcraft beliefs. Hebga's discourse is one of protest against what he perceives as the ethnocentric arrogance of Western rationality against African beliefs and practices. I locate this discourse within the framework of what Mario Sáenz (1999: 312) has called 'post-Cartesian testimonials', meaning anticolonial discourses of resistance. He writes:

> I choose to call such discourses of resistance post-Cartesian testimonials, for several important reasons: first, they arise out of the conditions of colonization imposed by so-called modernization; second, they plant themselves on the reality of colonization and neocolonization to be fought and overcome, and do not try to revive a lost "pre-Cartesian" world; and third, they challenge the Cartesian dualism, individualism, and universalism that have conquered and colonized otherness, while offering an alternative vision of rational life.

Hebga's own critique of 'Western' dualisms is part of an argument which holds that the intelligibility of witchcraft beliefs is plausible if considered in the light of a pluralist understanding of the human person shared by many African cultures, instead of taking 'Western' dualisms as the universal benchmark of rationality. On this issue, anthropology intersects with philosophy not only in Hebga's argument but also in anthropological literature interested in the limits of Cartesian dualism from a cross-cultural perspective.

Although I am sympathetic to the idea that representations of personhood are context-bound, and for this reason incommensurable, I argue that Hebga's essentialist bent tends to exaggerate the contrast between the West and Africa and fails to take into account the ongoing reconfiguration of African beliefs following the colonial encounter. I further discuss current relationships between philosophy and anthropology in postcolonial Africa in the light of the following observations of Lambek (1998: 106):

> It is all the more critical today that we contribute to the task of widening the horizons of academic philosophy, providing diverse cultural material to think about and to think with. At the same time, philosophy can help reduce anthropologists' naiveté and both refine and expand the questions we ask of our material. Together we ought to be able to move beyond both ethnographic particularism and academic philosophy's arguably ethnocentric embeddedness in Western concepts. Despite the long-standing existence of Asian philosophies and the recent emergence of a vigorous professional African philosophy (…), the questions—can there be a transcultural or pluralist philosophy (not to speak of a global one) and, if so, what would it look like?—have hardly begun to be addressed.

This chapter comprises three main sections: the first is an overview of the Cartesian dualism; the second briefly outlines Hebga's critique of 'Western' dualisms; the last section is an assessment of Hebga's position.

Cartesian Dualism

It is worth mentioning at the outset that Descartes is not the inventor of the body/soul dualism. It came from Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle and found its way into scholastic philosophy and theology through influential Christian thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. In other words, Descartes reformulated a concept which had existed for centuries and there are many ways in which his dualism differs from that of his predecessors (Morris 1991: 11). The Cartesian dualism is singled out here as the prototype of 'Western dualisms' partly because it has had 'such a profound influence on Western thought' (ibid.: 6). Indeed Thomist dualism, which is a Christian domestication of Aristotelian dualism, has had an enduring influence on mainstream Western Catholic theology in the light of which missionaries evaluated African traditional beliefs and practices. Indeed as Bordo (1993: 14) rightly notes,

> Mind/body dualism is not mere philosophical position, to be dispensed with by clever argument. Rather, it is a practical metaphysics that has been deployed and socially embodied in medicine, law, literary and artistic representations, the physiological construction of the self, interpersonal relationship, popular culture.

René Descartes, a 17th century philosopher, is widely regarded not only as the founding father of modern philosophy (Morris 1991: 6) but also as one of the main precursors of the 18th century Enlightenment movement. He sought to develop a new philosophical system based on no other authority than reason, hoping thereby to arrive at certain knowledge of self, of God and of the world. The Cartesian dualism is understandable only against this background of modern rationalism. Briefly stated, this dualism refers to Descartes' idea that the human person is a composite being consisting of two distinct substances: a body and a soul; but only the soul constitutes its real essence. He arrives at this conclusion after an elaborate and complex deductive argument in which the existence of the self is deduced from the reflexive act of thinking. Indeed Descartes regards the assertion, 'I think, therefore I am' as the first 'certain, clear and self-evident' truth of his philosophical system:

> But immediately afterwards I noticed that whilst I thus wished to think all things false, it was absolutely essential that the 'I' who thought this should be somewhat, and remarking that this truth, '*I think, therefore I am*', was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions

> brought forward by the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy for which I was seeking (Descartes [1637] 1911: 101).

But he does not content himself with knowing that he exists. He wants to know what sort of being he is. From his *cogito* (I think) he concludes that he is a 'thinking thing' (*res cogitans*). He further argues that if he is a 'thinking thing' then what makes him what he is (his essence) is his soul on which depends the thinking. He writes:

> From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this 'me,' that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and is even easier to know than is the latter; and even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is (ibid.).

In this statement, Descartes clearly affirms that the identity of the self is defined by the soul and not by the body since the soul is that by which I am what I am. The soul is here closely associated with thought as its primordial faculty. Moreover, the case for the demarcation of the body from the soul is strongly made.

Elsewhere, Descartes uses the concepts of extension and non-extension to further highlight the contrast between the body and the soul. For him, the immaterial soul is unextended whereas the material body is extended (made of parts and structured by time and space):

> And although possibly (or rather certainly, as I shall say in a moment) I possess a body with which I am very intimately conjoined, yet because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, in as much as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I (that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am), is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it (ibid.: 190).

But how does Descartes maintain such a sharp distinction between the body and the soul without denying their interaction? In his work, *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes remarks: "In order to understand all these things more perfectly we must know that the soul is really joined to the whole body, and that we cannot, properly speaking, say that it exists in any one of its parts to the exclusion of the others, because it is one and in some manner indivisible" (ibid.: 345). It is not clear what he means here by the 'the soul is really joined to the whole body' for he goes on to state that "although the soul is joined to the whole body, there is yet

a certain part in which it exercises its functions more particularly than in all others" (ibid.). This part of the body, he claims, is the brain; not even the whole brain but a small pineal gland located in the middle of the brain. The interaction of the body and the soul through the brain is the source of experiences such as appetites, passions, sensations, etc. This leads Morris (1991: 12) to suggest that in essence Descartes presents us not with a dualism but with a tripartite schema: body, soul, body/soul interaction (experience). Lambek, who is of the opinion that the body/mind distinction is not peculiarly Western, argues that "the mistake of Cartesianism lies not in its dualism, not in distinguishing mind from body, but in assuming that the relationship between them is one that can be definitely and unilaterally established" (1998: 110). But although Descartes acknowledges the interaction of the body and the soul, for him, only the latter constitutes the essence of the self. The body associated with the material world is likened to a machine which disintegrates at death to set the immortal and immaterial soul free.

Descartes struggles to reconcile the idea of a sharp distinction between the body and the soul and that of their complete union and interaction. It is worth mentioning that although Descartes' rationalism was critical of the foundations of the dominant scholastic philosophy and theology of his time, he was very careful not to upset the ecclesiastical authorities. As Morris puts it, "Although a loyal Catholic all his life, Descartes feared the censure of the Church, and on hearing of the condemnation of Galileo, he withheld publication of his *Treatise on the Universe*…." (1991: 7). In other words, he tried as much as possible not to propose a version of the body/mind dualism that could be seen as heretical. In fact by maintaining that a human being is composed of a material body and an immaterial soul created by God he was not departing from orthodox medieval Catholic theology rooted in works of Thomas Aquinas. But a major novelty in Cartesian dualism is his mechanistic conception of the human body (*corps-machine*) and of most of the human mind, with "only self-consciousness and volition falling outside the mechanistic paradigm" (ibid.: 13). This implies profound divergences between Thomas Aquinas and Descartes not only on the natures of the body and the soul but also on their mode of union.

Hebga (1998: 49–69) amply explores the subtleties of these divergences as a prelude to his critique of what he calls *dualismes occidentaux* and which include Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes and Bergson. He concludes that in spite of their common commitment to the unity of the body and the soul, none of them manages to transcend

the body/soul dualism (ibid.: 67). I now turn to what Hebga sees on the one hand as the limits of 'Western dualisms' and on the other hand as the resources of 'African pluralism' (*pluralisme africain*) in his account of the rationality of witchcraft beliefs.

Hebga's Critique of 'Western' Dualisms

Hebga holds that there is no reason why a Western dualist conception of the person should be considered more rational (or universal) than an African pluralist one. For him, what we have in both cases are local metaphysical ethnotheories which may be taken, as suggested by Lambek and Strathern (1998: 13), as "a regular starting point for the investigation of embodied practices." Hebga does this by predicating the plausibility of witchcraft beliefs and practices on a pluralist conception of the person predominant in many African societies (Hebga 1982: 131–132). In terms of the ethnographic substantiation of his argument, Hebga cites from existing literature a dozen ethnic groups from different African regions to show the predominance of a pluralist concept of the human person in the African setting (Hebga 1998: 90; see also Dieterlen 1973). His data include some of the major ethnic groups represented in Ephphata (Basaa, Ewondo, Duala, etc.) and feature the following differentiations:

> Basaa: *nyuu* (corps), *mbuu* (souffle), *titii* (ombre), *nnèm* (cœur)
> Ewondo: *nyol* (corps), *evundi* (souffle), *nsimsim* (ombre), *nnèm* (cœur)
> Duala: *nyolo* (corps), *mudi* (souffle), *edingè* (ombre), *mulema* (cœur)

How then does such a pluralist conception of the person make witchcraft beliefs more plausible?

First of all, Hebga is critical of the Cartesian mechanistic view: instead of seeing the above constitutive elements of the person as distinct parts that can be clearly demarcated, he conceives them in terms of different capacities of the same agent. In other words the body, the soul, the breath, the shadow, the heart, etc. should not to be seen as different parts of a machine but as different angles of perception of one and the same person. On this he writes:

> Body, breath, shadow, heart, and so on are in no way the elements, the components of an entity. We might call them instances of the person, levels of being of which each one is the entire person from a particular point of view. The body is not a thing, but the manifestation, the epiphany, of a person during his or her earthly life and in the beyond. The breath is

> the same person alive, and the shadow the human being considered from the aspect of agility—others would say of immateriality (Hebga 1991: 61; cf. also 1973: 50).

This line of thought is critical of attempts to separate the material aspects of the person from the spiritual, the bodily from the psychological, the emotional from the rational, etc. Inspired by the cosmology of the neo-evolutionist French philosopher Theillard de Chardin (for whom matter and spirit may just be different aspects of the single stuff of which the universe is made) and by Einstein's theory of the transformation of matter into energy, Hebga argues that the heterogeneity between the material (body) and the immaterial (soul, spirit, shadow, etc.) is overstressed in dualist perspectives. For him, "*Si donc le cosmos est structurellement énergétique et relationnel, il s'ensuit, à mon sens, que l'homme est structurellement énergétique et relationnel. Mieux, il est énergie et relation*" (Hebga 1998:185). So, from an ontology of the cosmos as energy and relation Hebga derives an ontology of the human person as energy and relation. In other words fluidity between the different aspects of the person takes precedence over demarcation. What about the link between this conception of the person and the rationality of witchcraft beliefs?

Western anthropologists do not always refrain from voicing their skepticism about the existence of witchcraft. Let us recall in passing Evans-Pritchard's skeptic comment on the witchcraft-substance among Azande: "The physiological condition which is said to be the seat of witchcraft, *and which I believe to be nothing more than food passing through the small intestine*, is an objective condition, but the qualities they attribute to it and the rest of their beliefs about it are mystical. *Witches, as Azande conceive them cannot exist*" (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 63; my emphasis). Where Azande elders see a witchcraft-substance, Evans-Pritchard sees only 'food passing through the intestine'. Elsewhere Jackson (1990: 60) is puzzled by "the absence of any skeptical attitude towards shape-shifting among the Kuranko with whom" he discussed it. Although the skepticism is shared today by some African intellectuals who in the name of scientific rationality now associate witchcraft beliefs with 'ignorance' and 'superstition', Hebga's clients still include, as I mentioned earlier, university lecturers, biomedical doctors, pharmacists, priests, nuns, etc.

Early Christian missionaries and colonial administrators had thought that Western education coupled with the wonders of medicine and technology would progressively wipe out witchcraft beliefs and practices in Africa. This is not happening. It is a further indication that ear-

lier attempts to explain witchcraft by opposing it to science in terms of the irrational versus the rational are most probably mistaken (Kapferer 2003). In the field I witnessed several instances in which the persisting skepticism of most Western missionaries on the plausibility of witchcraft beliefs is often explained by people in terms of ignorance: "*L'homme blanc ne comprend pas ces choses-là*". In a parish where a white priest operates alongside a black priest, people will tend to reserve their witchcraft issues for the latter. Instead of disappearing, witchcraft beliefs are being adapted to the postcolonial context through a complex process of translation. Peter Geschiere (1997; 2000) has helpfully investigated the ongoing adaptation of witchcraft beliefs to African modernity, especially in the particular context of Cameroon. He accounts for this cohabitation between witchcraft and modernity in terms of some affinities inherent in the two concepts and related processes: idea of accumulation which mediates between witchcraft and capitalism, fluidity and indeterminacy of both concepts, anti-community dynamics of both processes, etc. (Geschiere 2000: 16). Whereas Geschiere underlines the economic idiom of witchcraft discourses in modern Africa, this book explores the role played by Charismatic Christianity in the reconfiguration and perpetuation of witchcraft beliefs in postcolonial Africa, especially within African Catholicism. How does Hebga go about arguing for the plausibility of these beliefs?

Let us consider the belief, widespread in the southern part of Cameroon (and in West Africa in general), that some witches have the power to travel in the night without their bodies to harm their victims (Hebga 1979: 108). The night rapes referred to in chapter six would belong to this category. Hebga's overall position is that a dualist framework, such as that of Thomas Aquinas or Descartes, cannot account for the plausibility of such a belief. His grounds are that a Cartesian mind would tend to interpret the above belief in terms of the soul leaving the body, which in this framework equals death. It is therefore no surprise that early missionaries and colonial administrators labelled witchcraft beliefs as irrational. Whereas, claims Hebga, in a pluralist framework such as that of the Basaa of Cameroon it is not the soul which leaves the body in bed and wanders in search of human prey; it is the whole person in one of its capacities since the wandering element remains in touch with the body (ibid.: 110). Although the theoretical and institutional framework of Hebga's argument is continental philosophy (metaphysics), his overall approach is heavily interdisciplinary for he draws on a variety of other disciplines including physics, mathematics, psychology and

anthropology. Since the latter is familiar with the issue of the rationality of witchcraft beliefs there is room here for an anthropological assessment of Hebga's point of view.

Between Universalism and particularism

Hebga's investigation of the link between indigenous conceptions of the human person and related religious or cosmological beliefs is something with which many anthropologists are familiar. For example, Lambek and Strathern suggests that 'local ethnotheories of bodies and persons' be taken as 'a regular starting point for the investigation of embodied practices' (1998: 13; see also Karp 1980). In the same line of thought, concerning the comparison of belief systems across cultures, Overing (1985: 18) underlines the necessity to take into account the 'different metaphysical accounts about the world upon which' they are based. Moreover, Hebga is not alone in proposing a context-bound intelligibility of witchcraft beliefs. For example, the anthropologist Michael Jackson seeks to account for the intelligibility of the belief in shape-shifting among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone by grounding it on their ontology and worldview, especially the bond of kinship that, they believe, exists between persons and totemic animals. As he puts it,

> Rather than think about shape shifting in terms of such antinomies as true/false, real/illusory, objective/subjective, rational/irrational, I began to explore the grounds for the possibility of the belief—the conditions under which the notion of shape-shifting could be entertained as reasonable and made intelligible, and, most important, realized…as a sensible truth (1990: 63).

Also, Hebga is not the only one to underline the relativity of the Cartesian body-dualism. In recent anthropological theory, the latter has been variously criticized, especially among medical anthropologists dealing with cross-cultural perspectives on the notion of the person and the related concepts of sickness and healing (Sheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 6–7; Lambek and Strathern 1998; Sáenz 1999; Parkin 1985; Csordas 1999).

But it is one thing to suggest there is some link between local conceptions of the human person and witchcraft beliefs, it is another to gloss it in terms of rationality because of the 'ambiguity of the notion of rationality in Western thought, as it is variously defined in recent debate on the topic' (Overing 1985: 8; see also Hobart 1985: 108; Jarvie 1984).

Tambiah remarks that "In a general sense many of the modern philosophers, be they logical positivists or 'ordinary language' philosophers, or of some other persuasion, share a conception of rationality that minimally identifies logical consistency and coherence as its distinctive feature" (1990: 117). But it is important, as a number of anthropologists have pointed out, not to predicate social practice on logical consistency. People can and do live with contradictions. I concur with Joanna Overing on this when she writes: "What is the place of the unreasonable, the contradictory, the emotional, and the chaotic in human social life? We tend to see these factors as having at least as much influence as reason over behaviour and thought, and thus as topics for study as the 'reasonable' in cultural life" (1985: 6; see also Parkin 1985). For example, Evans-Pritchard pointed out in his study of Zande witchcraft beliefs that Azande do not necessarily perceive logical inconsistencies as proofs of the irrationality of their system: "Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them" (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 24–25). And even when the problem is forced upon them in one way or another, inconsistencies are explained away by invoking external interferences with the system. As Evans-Pritchard puts it, "Paradox though it be, the errors as well as the valid judgments of the oracle prove to them its infallibility. The fact that the oracle is wrong when it is interfered with by some mystical power shows how accurate are its judgments" (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 330).

This is an instance of 'cognitive conservatism' which, according to Horton, is characteristic of 'traditionalistic' cognitive systems (Horton 1967; 1982). Karl Popper (1963) would have claimed that because Zande witchcraft beliefs are not open to falsification, they are neither rational nor scientific. Such claims presuppose the existence of a universal criterion of rationality, something which is not obvious to a number of philosophers and anthropologists. Hobart remarks that "An equally thorny patch for rationalists is what they mean by 'reason' and 'rationality'. They are remarkably loth to define them; and when they do they usually disagree. This is not surprising, as great champions of reasons from Descartes to Leibniz or Kant differed so deeply over what reason was and could do" (Hobart 1985: 108).

R.A. Schweder (1991: 114) notes that universalism, evolutionism and relativism are the three dominant anthropological perspectives on the diversity of human cognitive systems:

> Universalists are committed to the view that intellectual diversity is more apparent than real, that exotic ideas systems are really more like our own than they initially appear. Evolutionists are committed to the view that alien ideas are really incipient and less adequate stages in the development of our own understandings. Relativists are committed to the view that alien idea systems, though fundamentally different from our own, display an internal coherency that can be understood but cannot be judged.

Dan Sperber (1982: 152), on his part, identifies in the history of anthropology four major approaches to 'apparently irrational beliefs': the first, now old-fashioned, claims that "these beliefs are genuinely irrational and the product of some pre-rational mental processes"; the second is cognitive relativism according to which, "people of other cultures 'live in other worlds', so that what is rational in their world may well appear irrational in ours"; the third, intellectualism, maintains that these beliefs are 'less irrational than mistaken'; the fourth, symbolism, views them as "indirect expression of cosmological observations, or metaphysical concerns, or classificatory schemas, or moral values, or social relationships, etc".

Hebga is surely not an evolutionist. The contrast he maintains between 'Western concepts' and 'African concepts' seems to locate his position within the relativist framework. But his is not a consistent relativism since his argument includes the use of 'Western' theoretical tools to account for the plausibility of 'African' beliefs. Furthermore, as most philosophers, he does hold that reason is a universal human faculty, even though his argument seems to suggest that rationality is context-bound. The inconsistency of Hebga's relativism is partly due to his attempt to use an anthropological approach to argue a philosophical point. He is apparently struggling here with the problem of "How anthropology might continue to bring cultural difference to the attention of philosophy without advocating a simplistic relativism" (Lambek 1998: 104). About the difference between anthropological concerns and philosophical concerns, Overing remarks that "The anthropologist deals as a matter of course with multiple theories of mind and knowledge, while traditionally many philosophers have been concerned with one, and one moreover that equates truth with value-free facts about the material world" (1985: 4). For Overing, one of the main tasks of anthropology is to explore 'particular rationalities' and not to rank them. She also advocates the idea of contextual rationality: "The notion of rationality as decontextualized thought, the idea of objec-

tive cognition which places thinking outside the realm of intentions and morality, is a barren one which at the same time frames the questions about human activity in a very peculiar and ultimately pointless way" (ibid.: 14; for a similar critique the idea of universal rationality see also Hobart 1995: 106–108). In the same line of thought, Raymond Firth argues that the anthropologist is primarily concerned with intelligibility and not with rationality. He writes:

> Where elements of status involvement or strong reactions of grief or anger enter into conduct, it seems pointless to debate whether or not such conduct is rational. What does seem significant is whether it can be intelligible, i.e. capable of being understood by an anthropologist from another cultural setting but with curiosity to enquire as to its meanings. … I do not think it [rationality] to be the prime issue, and would give preference to intelligibility. For while rationality is the imputation of a quality to mental process, intelligibility is the imputation of a relationship between authors of mental process in its behavioral manifestations. And it is in relationship between anthropologist and people studied—a two way process—that much of our concern lies (1985: 33).

In other words anthropology and sociology do not dwell as much as philosophy does on the epistemic status of the beliefs they investigate. Their approach requires some form of relativism described by Barnes and Bloor (1982: 23) as follows:

> Our equivalence postulate is that all beliefs are on a par with one another with respect to the causes of their credibility. It is not that all beliefs are equally true or false, but that regardless of truth and falsity the fact of their credibility is to be seen as equally problematic. The position we defend is that the incidence of all beliefs without exception calls for empirical investigation and must be accounted for by finding the specific, local causes of this credibility. This means that regardless of whether the sociologist evaluates a belief as true or rational, or as false and irrational, he must search for the causes of its credibility.

In this sense, by predicating the plausibility of witchcraft beliefs on African ethnotheories of the person Hebga successfully makes a case for their intelligibility but not necessarily for their veracity. He notes himself that 'African' pluralist perspectives are no more and no less verifiable (*ni plus ni moins vérifiable*) than 'Western' dualisms, for they are all context-bound metaphysical systems (Hebga 1982: 131). This kind of relativism is not scarce in anthropology for, as Geertz rightly remarks, "it is by way of the idea of relativism, grandly ill-defined, that it has most disturbed the general intellectual peace" (Geertz 2000: 44). But both anthropologists and philosophers point out that there are many

forms of relativisms some of which are thought-provoking: "That some concepts are relative in this way to context is undeniable. That *all* are, and more particularly the basic category of thought themselves, is the challenging thought" with which contemporary epistemology is still grappling (Hollis and Lukes 1982: 7). For example, Lambek and Strathern are both critical of some recent forms of relativism which go as far as questioning the 'comparative ambitions of anthropology as a social science'. I find compelling their argument that 'anthropology is *always* comparative' and 'incommensurability does not always imply incomparability':

> Rather than seeing languages and cultures as discrete, enclosed, and entirely self-affirming worlds, we assume that language is open to the world; in conversation speakers continuously address incommensurables, making an effort to compare their concepts or thoughts, standards or problems, with those of their interlocutors even when, and perhaps especially when, they cannot be submitted to a common measure. The relativist view of bounded cultural wholes breaks down once we treat historicity seriously (1998: 21).

Hebga's approach to this problem is not unrelated to the ongoing debate on the relationship between anthropology and philosophy in postcolonial Africa.

Anthropology and Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa

Hebga, as a postcolonial intellectual, complements his practical interest in witchcraft with a theoretical one. This extensive theorization of local beliefs by Africans themselves, with some focus on their internal consistency, is one of the effects of the colonial encounter and has resulted in a literature of resistance which seeks to defend the 'rationality' of African cultures and religions against what is perceived as Western ethnocentrism (Tempels 1959; Mbiti 1969; Idowu 1973; Gyekye 1987; Magesa 1997). The literature attempts to "outline what is thought to have been traditional African religious philosophy, seen as a world-view, or as an 'underlying cultural unity'. … These texts are often written by priests or religiously inclined academic philosophers, and thus African culture and thought is often equated—as elsewhere—with specific people's religious cosmologies" (Morris 1994: 120). Hebga's theological and philosophical discourse is part of this literature of resistance. Hebga is one of those African scholars who without denying the diversity of

Africa hold that it makes sense to speak of 'African Culture' as different from 'Western Culture'. For him, although such concepts imply some generalization, they are nevertheless justified because "*elles affirment une unité globale, tendancielle et, comme il a été dit à propos de la pensée occidentale, une unité de convergences caractéristiques, qui n'exclut pas totalement la divergence et la dissimilarité*" (Hebga 1998: 29). As mentioned in my discussion of inculturation in the preceding chapter, contemporary anthropologists are rather critical of such an essentialist approach to culture.

First of all, although it can not be denied that the body/mind dualism has had an enduring influence in the West, essentialist formulations such as Hebga's tend to underplay developments within philosophy and social science over the past hundred years or more: "They ignore the many critiques of the dialectics of the Enlightenment—positivism, Cartesian rationalism, and bourgeois individualism—that have been formulated in various ways by writers in many fields, including Hegelian-Marxists, existentialists, pragmatists and many sociologists" (Morris 1994: 17; see also Morris 1991). For example, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological critique of Cartesian dualism is an integral component of the Western philosophical tradition. As mentioned earlier, Descartes held that "the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and is even easier to know than is the latter." For Merleau-Ponty such a description is erroneous for it fails to heed the fact that every human experience is anchored to incarnate existence which precedes thought and grounds it. In other words, it is not because I think that I am; but, on the contrary, I think because I am. What is being affirmed here is the subjectivity of the body and its immediate presence to every human experience. The body is constitutive of the openness of human beings to the world because human existence is 'always already' (*toujours déjà*) incarnate existence: "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962: 146). The contrast here between Descartes and Merleau-Ponty is manifest. Whereas the former defines a human being only by his or her soul and relegates the body to the status of a machine, the starting point of the latter is human incarnate existence of which body and mind are only two equally constitutive moments. For Merleau-Ponty I am not a soul who simply happens to have body; I am a body as well as a consciousness. His critique of Descartes is clearly spelled out as follows:

> Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts. …

> The psycho-physical event can no longer be conceived after the model of Cartesian physiology and as the juxtaposition of a process in itself and a *cogitatio*. The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external acts, subject and object, brought together by an arbitrary decree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence (ibid.: 89).

This critique, I think, has been acknowledged within Western scholarship as a valid attempt to overcome the Cartesian dualism. By showing the limits of Cartesianism within the Western context itself, it renders problematic attempts to reduce Western conceptions of the person to one single model.

Secondly, after the colonial encounter, I am not sure it is helpful to think about Africa today in terms of antinomies such as traditional versus modern, Africa versus the West, illiterate versus literate, etc. Africa and the West are today interconnected in complex ways manifest not only in macro-political and cultural processes but also in individual lives structured by multiple arenas. Hebga himself is no exception: he is at the same time a Basaa who believes in the existence of witchcraft, a Catholic priest who uses Christian rituals to counter witchcraft, an academic philosopher who teaches Western philosophy, a Cameroonian citizen, a founder of Ephphata with sections in Europe, etc. Multiple arenas imply multiple belongings and complex interconnections (Hannerz 1996). In Hebga's mixed cultural baggage Africa intersects with the West, pluralism with dualism. As a philosopher defending a particular idea of Africa, he rejects dualism; but as a Catholic priest he is bound to operate within a framework which is predominantly dualist, for normative Catholic theology is still scholastic.

Thirdly, some African scholars (Eboussi 1977, Towa 1981, Hountondji 1983) have pejoratively labelled as 'ethnophilosophy' (as opposed to 'universal' philosophy) attempts, such as Hebga's, to base 'African philosophy' on African ethnography. For them African 'ethnophilosophers' are mistaken in conflating philosophy and ethnography, in reducing philosophy in Africa to an impersonal permanent collective thought supposedly shared by all Africans ('the myth of unanimity'), in essentializing both African cultures and Western cultures by downplaying their internal diversity and their historicity, in exaggerating the contrast between Africa and the West. African 'ethnophilosophers' have responded to their critiques by arguing that the latter are mistaken in adhering to a Western definition of philosophy by taking Western philosophies as the benchmark of rationality, in naively fostering the

idea that there is no such a thing as 'universal' philosophy. For them, all philosophies are ethnic (situated in time and space), including Western philosophies (Hebga 1982a). About this debate which has divided academic philosophers in Africa for the past three decades, Morris (1994: 122–123) thinks that "the right approach to the study of African cultural systems steers between the extremes of Tempels' monism and Hountondji's skepticism. It accepts the existence of specific cultural schemas, pertaining to both particular societies and to Africa as a whole, but recognizes the diversity of opinion and belief within these cultures." That there are similar cultural traits across Africa is undeniable, but I doubt there is any such thing as a 'specific, permanent, metaphysical substratum' that underlie all African cultures and to which all Africans adhere. Postcolonial Africa is a mixed bag.

CONCLUSION

Catholic Domestication of Charisma in Africa

Ephphata, a charismatic movement, has been explored in this book as an instance of religious innovation and resistance in the recent history of African Catholicism. It is a contribution to the study of religious movements in Africa with a focus on the paradoxes of localization in a postcolonial context.

With regard to the history of Ephphta I have highlighted its international trajectory, showing how its founding in Cameroon in the mid-seventies was a direct consequence of Hebga's experience of the Catholic Charismatic movement in North America. About what he terms 'charismatization' of mainline churches in Ghana, Omenyo (2003: 19) remarks:

> The charismatic renewal groups for a long time have generally been on the fringes of the mainline churches up to the 1960s. The mainline churches responded to the charismatic experiences with much skepticism and coldness. Charismatics were looked down upon in the mainline churches and labeled as fanatics and they faced stiff opposition from church leaders for introducing extraneous and exotic practices and doctrines into their respective churches. This compelled some to break away to form their own independent churches. Nevertheless, there has been a consistent and unrestrained quest by a good number of members of the mainline churches for charismatic experiences, in spite of distractions from the leadership of the mainline churches. The irony of the matter is, since the 1970s, charismatic experiences have been gradually moving to the core of the mainline churches.

Although this is a fair description of the trajectory of the Charismatic movement in most mainline churches, I do not see Charismatic forms of Christianity becoming dominant in the Catholic Church partly because of the inherent tension between charisma and institution.

In his typology of authority (charismatic, traditional, legal-rational), Weber underlines the personal character of charismatic authority, in

the sense that "the social relationships directly involved are strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of charismatic personal qualities" (1978: 246). There is no doubt that many are attracted to Ephphata by the charismatic authority of Hebga in the Weberian sense of the term. Weber goes on to remark that "in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in *statu nascendi*. It cannot remain stable, but become either traditionalized or rationalized or a combination of both" (ibid.). Two main factors have determined the 'routinization of charisma' in Ephphata: the growth of the movement and concerns about its future. With the numerical growth and geographical expansion, Hebga needed to structure the movement. This meant creating offices through which he could share his authority with some of his lay assistants. These offices and the related regulations are described in the statutes of the movement. But, due to constant leadership problems, the implementation of the statutes is still subject to the overriding charismatic authority of the founder.

I have also argued that religious innovations such as Ephphata are especially welcomed by those African Catholics who although attracted to Pentecostal elements are eager to keep their Catholic identity. A number of scholars have suggested that the success of Charismatic movements and churches in Africa is due to the fact that, more than mainline churches and like African Independent Churches, they "scratch where the African is itching most" (ibid.: 7). They are said to be "on to something that the historic churches have not yet discovered which speaks to epistemology and ontology, the questioning, the hopes and fears of Homo Africanus" (Pobee 2001: ix). They claim that the historic churches "in their phase of decline will do well to learn for their revival and renewal" (ibid.: x; see also Anderson 2001). Even Hebga once wrote that "While the Catholic church in Africa is still taking its first tottering steps towards a non-sacramental diaconia of the sick, numerous dissenting and independent churches have a long experience in this area from which we can benefit" (Hebga 1991: 70). From this, it is tempting to jump to the conclusion that by accommodating Charismatic Renewal the Catholic Church is learning from African Independent Churches. But is this really the case? I do not think so! It is indeed important to keep in mind, as I have shown in the case of Ephphata, that Charismatic Renewal in African Catholicism, has its roots not in African Independent Christianity, but in Western Pentecostalism. In other words, Hebga got the inspiration to found Ephphata not from an African Independent Church but from a North American Catholic

Charismatic group. Although he received the baptism of the Spirit in a classic Pentecostal Church (Assemblies of God), he currently has no contacts with Pentecostal churches or African Independent Churches. His ecumenical connections are limited to Protestant mission churches.

The extensive study of ritual performances and therapeutic strategies in Ephphata has shown how they are firmly rooted in the mainstream Pentecostal dualist cosmology (forces of good vs. evil forces). Catholicism is not impervious to external religious influence and its domestication of charismatic practices is an instance of the direct influence of Pentecostalism on Catholicism in spite of enduring unfriendly relationships between these denominations. It is also important not to overlook what the recent forms of Charismatic Christianity, including Ephphata, have in common with African Independent Churches: democratization of the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, democratization of the interpretation of the Bible, spontaneity and enthusiasm in worship, taking the devil (including witchcraft) seriously, ritual response to misfortunes interpreted as works of the devil, etc. Given these basic commonalities, one could say with regard to mainline churches that those of their "Christians missing a stronger sense of religious feeling and visible, miraculous, manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, no longer need to leave their traditional denominations in favour of Pentecostalism" (Väkäkangas and Kyomo 2003: 1). It is indeed the case that mainline churches have lost many of their members to African Independent Churches and to the new Charismatic churches. Therefore, in a way, it is in their best interest to introduce Charismatic practices and discourses in their ritual life. But depending on their respective levels of institutionalization, "the mainline churches tend to put a check on the enthusiasm of Charismatics within their framework" (Omenyo 2003: 13).

The international dimension of Ephphata is not limited to its North American roots. It concerns also its establishment in the West. I have looked at its Parisian branch as an instance of the growth of African Christianity in the West. Ephphata, like many other African charismatic movements in Paris, offers to African migrants some space for ritual demarcation in the host society, a space within which some specific religious needs can be addressed. With a particular reference to localization processes and discourses in African Catholicism in general and in Ephphata in particular, I have attempted to illustrate the argument that there is globalization without localization. The syncretism of misfortune narratives, Hebga's typology of spirit possession, the diabo-

lization of aspects local religions, ritual practices, therapeutic strategies and inculturation discourses and experiments show an enduring contrast between Africanization from the grassroots (creative agency of the masses) and Africanization 'from above' (creative agency of the religious elite). It appears that whereas the former is spontaneous and pragmatic the latter is more discoursive, programmatic, reactionary and checked.

The book portrays Hebga not only as postcolonial religious practitioner but also as a postcolonial scholar torn between Westernization and africanization. His attempts to strike a balance between his two cultural heritages are fraught with ambiguities and paradoxes both at the discoursive and practical levels. He exemplifies the dilemmas of many contemporary postcolonial African intellectuals: what does it mean to think and live as an African today in the context of globalization? Answers to this question have tended to oscillate between the two extremes of afrocentric essentialism and assimilationism which, I have argued, are not viable solutions to the identity problem in postcolonial Africa. In the preface to the second edition of his book *De la Postcolonie*, Achille Mbembe argues, and rightly so, that Afrocentrism and all its variants are not the way forward for Africa because it is reactionary, victimizing and unproductive. By overstating the particularity of Africa with regard to the rest of the world afrocentric discourses fail to heed the basic anthropological fact that human beings are both different and similar. Emphasizing the violence of the West on Africa, they overlook the ongoing violence of Africans on fellow Africans. For Mbembe, the way forward is the recognition of our common humanity as the basis of an *éthique du prochain* (Mbembe 2000, xi) indispensable for a viable cosmopolitanism. He speaks of 'afropolitanism' as a way of being 'african' open to the difference of others. I share this line of thought which is critical of postcolonial cultural essentialisms and which underlines the historicity of African societies.

The trajectories of new Christian movements in the recent history of Africa (Peel 1968; Martin 1975; Binsbergen 1981; Comaroff 1985; MacGaffey 1986; Anderson 2001) show that three main scenarios are possible after the death of a charismatic leader: either the charisma is routinized, or it is fragmented into competing groups claiming each to be the true inheritor of the charisma of the founder, or it simply dies out. Among the principal motives underlying the transformation of charisma in the event of succession, Weber notes: "(a) the ideal and also the material interests of the followers in the continuation and the

continual reactivation of the community, (b) the still stronger ideal and also stronger material interests of the members of the administrative staff, the disciples, the party workers, or others in continuing their relationship" (Weber 1978: 246).

Hebga's concern about the future of his movement has led him to seek, both in Cameroon and in Europe, the legal recognition of the Ephphata and to ensure the legal protection of its property. But this in itself is not enough to guarantee the survival of Ephphata as a Catholic movement, as the Church authority still retains the right to suppress it in the event of serious trouble. In the absence of Hebga, unsympathetic Church authorities might decide to take advantage of the asymmetrical relationship between the clergy and lay Christians to crack down on the movement in a situation of internal conflict. So, given both the recurrence of leadership problems within the movement and the current hierarchical arrangements in the Catholic Church, I do not see Ephphata surviving after Hebga without any overriding clerical supervision. And even in the event of such a clerical succession, there is no guarantee that the successor will command the same authority, especially if he does not affirm himself as a successful healer. Another possibility is that considering what has happened in other mainline churches (Meyer 1999; Väkäkangas & Kyomo 2003), under pressure from Church leaders, some influential members of the movement may attempt to break away and form new groups within or outside the Catholic Church. These processes of split or transformation of the original charisma may lead to the progressive disappearance of Ephphata as an international network of branches under the authority of a single authority. But pockets of the movement are likely to survive here and there, especially where the clergy is sympathetic to Charismatic Renewal.

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