Much has been written about the pioneers of the new wave of African Pentecostalism and the charismatic personalities who through their eloquence and spiritual insights have reached tens of thousands of listeners with their message from their stadium and megachurch pulpits. To analyse the speeches and the writings of Benson Idahosa, David Oyedepo, Mensa Otabil, Nicolas Duncan-Williams, Billy Lubansa, and other preachers in the premier league of successful pastors has been necessary in order to understand where inspiration for the revival has come from and to understand where the movement is heading. Somewhat less frequent have been studies of those who attend the rallies, pay the entrance fees, or donate money to pay the electricity bills and the jet fuel for the traveling superstar preachers. Equally limited focus was granted in the early years of Pentecostal studies to the pastors who felt a calling from God and devoted themselves to shepherd small herds of believers, with or without dreams of entering the stage of a megachurch. Yet these pastors have finally been the ones who have made Pentecostalism a lasting social phenomenon in Africa, and these shepherds are the personalities who represent the framework of the fastest-growing religious movement in the 21st century. These are the leaders who administer the religious communities on a daily basis, guide individuals through spiritual troubles and material difficulties, and are, in a way, the ‘to be or not to be’ of the future of African Pentecostalism. Recent studies have increasingly described the everyday life of the Pentecostal believers, and the angles of analysis have been expanded in order to cover more geographical ground and display various thematic approaches. The scope of this chapter is to add another brick to that wall by examining how Pentecostal leadership in a remote part of Francophone Africa, strongly influenced by Islam, is carried about by devoted individuals on the crossroads between tradition and modernity, between local and global influences, and between what has been and what is to become.
Emmanuel Ogono arrives in his old Mercedes, welcomes me, and guides me into his office at the Ngaoundéré train station. As Chef des resources humaines at Camrail, the French-owned Cameroon railroad company, Ogono has his own office and his own secretary. In addition, Ogono is, as previously mentioned, pastor at the Assemblée de Dieu Pentecôtiste du Cameroun church in Ngaoundéré and president of the association of Pentecostal revival churches, Corps de Christ (Body of Christ).

Ogono tells me that he was born into a Christian family in Bafia, in the central province of Cameroon, where his father was a catechist in the Presbyterian Church. Ogono went to church like ‘everybody else’ but says today that he did not fear God during those years: “I was there just like that.” When he was in the Protestant high school in Edea, some classmates tried to convince him of the necessity of leading a life according to the teachings of the Bible. Ogono subsequently bought a Bible and started to read it like a novel, without being much convinced by what he read. He tried to seek comfort in the Scripture when he was in trouble, but the Bible did not give him the answers he was seeking. Later he got married, found a job with Camrail in Douala in 1979, and had four children. At the age of 32, Ogono started asking existential questions concerning the life he was leading.

I already had a wife, I had four children, and I started asking questions about eternity … will it be with God or without God? I asked myself these questions all the time, I said ‘It is good, I work, I have a wife, I have children, but is it enough? What will happen if I die today?’ … I started once more to read my Bible, I went to church, but I have to say … something shocked me … my expectations were not met. When I went to church, the preaching did not touch my heart. I came, and I left as I arrived. There was nothing there that could touch my heart, in order for me to change. It was more like a club where friends meet, we sing, we pray, which is fine, and then we greet and leave, in order to have a drink somewhere. Something was missing.

Ogono once more tried to read the Bible; this time, the Spirit guided him, and he discovered new aspects of the old book. He had heard about the Pentecostal church that preached a different message, and he asked God if he should go there. He went to visit a Pentecostal church nearby and the message preached there really touched him.

The first time I went there, I have to be honest, I started crying. I cried because I saw my own misery. I asked myself: ‘How have I been able to offend God this way. How have I been able to rebel against my creator?’