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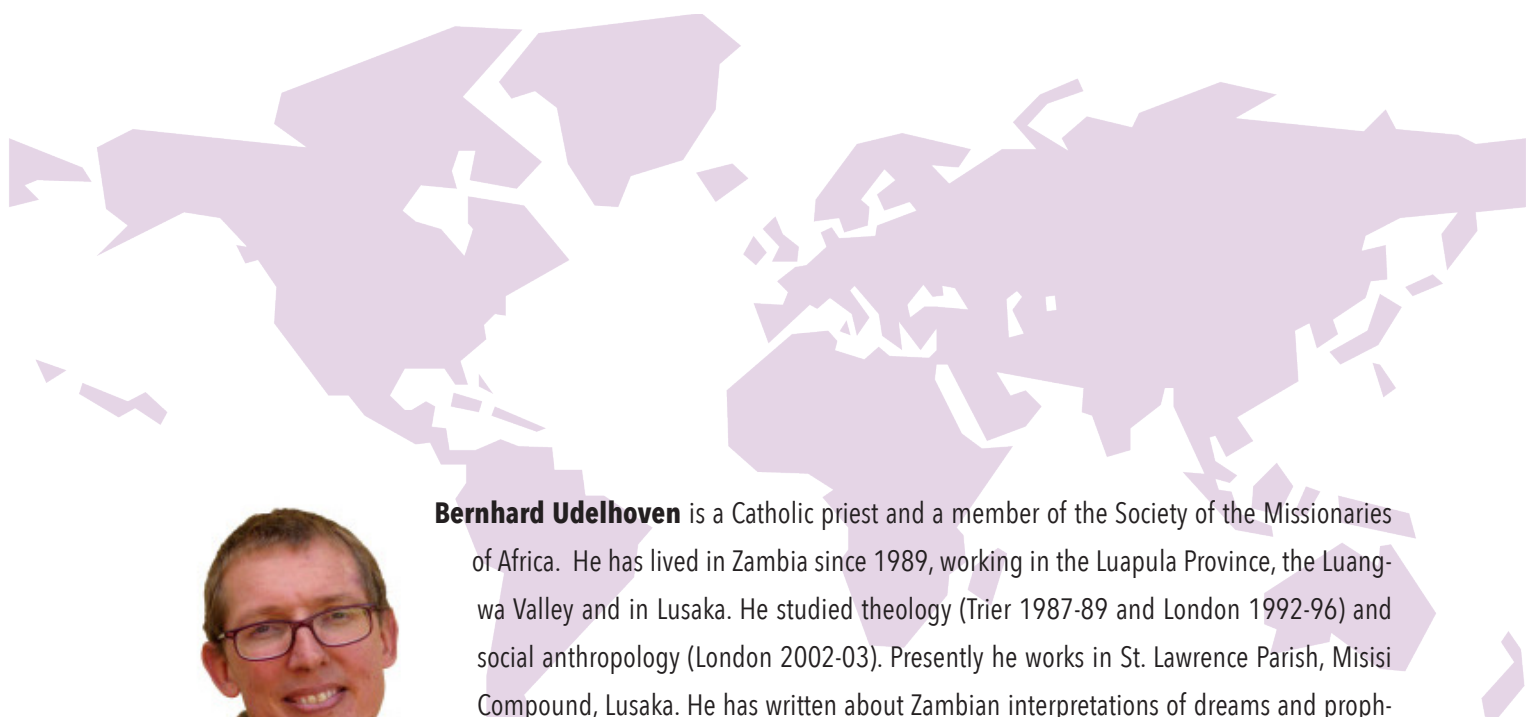
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The Devil of the Missionary Church: The White Fathers and Catholic Evangelization in Zambia¹



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The first missionaries of various Christian denominations arrived on the Zambian scene towards the end of the nineteenth century.² The fact that a hundred years later Zambia was declared by its president and constitution a “Christian nation,” and that the vast majority of the population considers itself today as Christian, speaks for the enormous success of the Christian missionary endeavor.

The missionaries, of course, did not arrive into a historical vacuum. Historians have written about the spiritual changes, innovations and insecurities that had accompanied Bemba religion and social life in the centuries preceding Christianization and colonization.³ Social and religious change also continued to mark people’s lives after the advent of the missionaries. People were drawn more directly into the emerging national and global schemes, bringing forth new concerns, ambitions and outlooks that went beyond the local scopes and the competence of the local spirits. Ideas of direct access to a God to whom all peoples are subject became more relevant.⁴

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- 1 This piece is a slightly edited version of the second chapter of Bernard Udelhoven, *Unseen Worlds: Dealing with Spirits, Witchcraft and Satanism* (Lusaka: FEZA Publications, 2015). The ebook is available for free download at http://www.fenza.org/unseen_worlds.html.
 - 2 Zambia became an independent nation state in 1964; it has not changed the boundaries that it inherited from the colonial state (Northern Rhodesia). When I extrapolate in this article the notion of Zambia into colonial and pre-colonial times, I simply refer to the geographical area within the boundaries of today’s state.
 - 3 For changes in Bemba religion, see Wim Van Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia: Exploratory Studies* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1981); and Hugo Hinfelaar, *Bemba speaking women of Zambia in a century of religious change (1892-1992)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 19-33. An example is the imposition of centralized chiefly rule and the corresponding infiltrations of religious traditions.
 - 4 Historians and sociologists have labored to deduce the reasons that favored the mass conversion to Christianity and Islam in Africa in the twentieth century. Robin Horton suggested that African religions contained already the seeds for their own transformation. The enlarging social and political factors in the twentieth century all over Africa favored the processes of conversion to the Christian and Islamic faiths with their universalistic explanations and global framework (Ruth Horton, “African Traditional Thought and Western Science,” *Africa*, 37 (1967): 50-72, 155-188.). Some scholars evaluate the massive changes through the lens of imperialism and Westernization that destroyed and distorted the African religious landscape in the time of colonialism and beyond. Others focus attention on African agency in the process of change and the roots inherent in African religions themselves that could give such changes their momentum and shape. (An example is Robert Strayer, “Mission History in Africa: New Perspectives on an Encounter,” *African Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (1976): 1-15, building on the work of Robin Horton and others.)

But what place would the African spiritual world attain in a global religion? And how did African Christians appropriate the missionary notions of the devil? By looking at the history of Catholic evangelization in Zambia on the example of the Missionaries of Africa (the “White Fathers”), I will draw out lessons that will be very relevant for our contemporary problems.⁵

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND GRAY ZONES

David Livingstone, the great explorer who foreshadowed the missionary enterprise, regarded many African spirits, for example the Bemba *ngulu*, as deities and compared their oracles with Old Testament prophecies. The Arabs disagreed with Livingstone, advising him they were neither angels nor gods, but devils.⁶ Missionaries of all denominations that came to the region after Livingstone forbade their Christians to seek direct contact with the spirit world outside the Christian paradigm. For the missionaries, such spirits were either demonic, or (much more often) phantasms based on “superstitious” illusions. In neither case should Christians invoke them.

However, gray zones became evident especially in the quest for healing, on which this book focuses. Christians, after all, were not excluded from becoming ill. The available options for healing passed mostly through local idioms. Few missionaries saw problems with strict forms of herbalism, but traditional healing was never limited to the application of a few roots or leaves. As a Bemba proverb says: “To dig for medicines, you mix it with God.”⁷ Medicines in local healing discourses often mediate with the spiritual world.

The historian Markku Hokkanen analyzed the engagements of the Free Church of Scotland (tied to Livingstonia Mission) with local healing discourses. The Church outlawed for Christians any dancing and drumming for spirits, even for the sake of curing a sickness. Missionaries saw such dances as promoting both deception and idleness.⁸ However, when it came to classifying what constituted “un-Christ-

5 I, the author, am a member of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), proud of our missionary traditions that have marked me, and am not writing this chapter from an unbiased perspective.

6 Hinfelaar, “Bemba Speaking Women,” 34.

7 *Ukwimba akati, kusansha na Lesa*. (Bemba)

8 Hokkanen, “Quests for Health and Contests for Meaning: African Church Leaders and Scottish



tian practices” in the range of traditional medicines, amulets, charms and healing procedures, missionaries were not able to give clear answers, not even with the help of various commissions of inquiry attended by people considered as experts in this field. While everybody condemned medicines used with the intent to do harm, things were not so clear for medicines used for healing. African terminologies for what makes up a medicine or a charm were not identical with Western ones. While the missionaries regarded many African medicines as superstitious, they could not exclude the possibility that some medicines and practices were helpful to the people. Many times they worked. Alternatives were not available, and concepts of healing remained pluralistic in Christian contexts.

Official guidelines left the usages of terms like “charms” or “medicines” very vague, maybe intentionally vague, Hokkanen proposes, to make room for the local adaptation of Church policies. The African Christian elite negotiated the acceptance of some forms of medical pluralism that was realistic in their work on the ground. Not every healing method was condemned, though many cultural remedies interacted in one way or another with the spirit world that was far from being Christianized. Transformation of beliefs took place through specific engagements, when spiritual help was rendered (or not rendered) to troubled individuals. With this insight, I now look at the Catholic missions in Zambia, using the example of the White Fathers.⁹

Missionaries in the Early Twentieth Century Presbyterian Church in Northern Malawi,” *Journal of Southern Africa Studies* 33, no. 4 (December 2007): 738.

- 9 Hokkanen clarified in his study on healing contests in the Livingstonia Mission that the early missionary endeavor cannot be analyzed solely in terms of conflict between local and missionary outlooks. The missionary enterprise itself was plural (foreign missionaries, medical personnel and doctors, African church leaders and elders, evangelists, preachers, ministers and their families, but also differences in individual congregations), and so was – of course – the local scene. This point applies also to the White Fathers, on whom I focus in this article. While their decision-making process was highly centralized, they had to apply rules with the help of African catechists and teachers. Compromises on the ground developed naturally. Such compromises became transformative to local beliefs. The missionaries may have looked similar to each other with their beards and cassocks, but letters reveal different attitudes and heated controversies about appropriate pastoral approaches. See for example Louis Oger, “Our Missionary Shadow: A Series of Historical Flashes at the Occasion of the Centenary Celebrations of the Catholic Church in Zambia” and “Reflections on Second Evangelization,” *Archives of the Missionaries of Africa* (Lusaka: FENZA, 1993), 26, 54-55, 77 and letters of Joseph Dupont in the *Archives of the Missionaries of Africa*, FENZA, Lusaka.

INVOLVEMENT IN DISCERNMENT PROCESSES

The early White Fathers took the existence of the devil and of demons for granted. Though they made much room for the notion of superstition, they nevertheless believed that the devil was real, and so were demons. Such beliefs presented them with opportunities to take part in the discernment processes that surrounded people struggling with spiritual forces. An overlap developed between theirs and local beliefs. The Church had weapons against attacks by evil spirits, the most direct one being the prayers of exorcism. Where missionaries applied it, it aroused much interest among people. Bishop Joseph Dupont used it at the beginning of the twentieth century against a plague of locusts on the gardens of the mission (successfully). We do find some examples of exorcism in the diaries, when people called the missionaries to help in the struggles with evil forces. An event that occurred in 1911 was recorded by the White Fathers of Kayambi Mission:

Going through Musanya, the Fathers saw for themselves that the chief's houses were really haunted. In the course of his religious instruction, Fr. Marsan was not afraid of telling them that they were not tormented in their homes by the spirits of the dead on the prowl, but by the Devil himself. He added that they had nothing to fear, that the Devil's power came from God, and that the Devil had no power to take their lives away. While the Fathers were at supper, Musanya came to call them. The Devil had come. The priests made for the house where the Devil was busy, and found the children were being pinched, scratched, slapped. They felt the children with their hands, but did not find anything. They could hear the slaps, but did not see any striking hand. The children were shouting "*Nafwa*—I am dead!" The following day, in the same village, the chief called them again. This time the two priests shut themselves into the house and closed the door. Fr. Ducourant put on a stole, recited the prayer for the blessing of a new house, and sprinkled holy water around, then challenged Satan to manifest his presence. There has never been any strange happening since then in this house nor in the village.¹⁰

¹⁰ Kayambi Mission Diary, March 9, 1911.

The people of Musanya and the missionaries had different understandings about the nature of the force that was haunting the house. The priests taught them that the manifestations did not reveal the spirit of a dead person, but the devil. Nevertheless, the missionaries' prayers and approach seemingly fulfilled their purpose. The house remained quiet (at least the diary entry suggests this), and the priests gained the reputation that they had powers to deal with such forces. Many missionaries were certainly keen to show that there was superior power in the Christian faith — they were able to defeat witchcraft and evil spirits. On the other side of the coin, they themselves became also more easily associated with the occult world.¹¹

The process of Christianization, of giving meaning to religious concepts, was a two-way traffic. Missionaries and church officials sorted out the “pagan” notions of spirits and spiritual forces in view of their own theological categories; aspiring Christians in turn understood and appropriated Christian notions according to their understanding and experiences of the spiritual world. Differences in categories proved to be problematic in some circumstances. The White Fathers in Chilubula Mission recorded the following incident in 1904 (six years after the foundation of the mission):

Another case: a woman aged roughly twenty-five, from the Kifunge area, suddenly declares herself possessed by the spirit of a chief's spirit (“*mfumu ya mipashi*”). In other words one of the great spirits of the ancestors — one of the spirits the Natives consider as secondary divinities by the powers they attribute to them — has taken possession of her body and mind. She now gives orders to all around to bring her food and cloth. It is a real racket. We have her arrested for questioning, but all we can get out of her is: “*Ni Shetani* — it is Satan.” She pretended to be possessed by the Devil. After being condemned to pay five hens as a fine, she is booed by the crowd, for the people are in awe of those people turned instruments of the spirits, and they are very pleased to be rid of them. What is at the bottom of those so-called possessions by spirits?

11 Early mission diaries reveal especially the fear that people had of baptism (“baptism makes people die”), which made the missionaries more careful to administer baptism in danger of death. On the other hand, baptism with its aspect of cleansing became one of the main attractions of early Catholicism in many areas. Fear and attraction can be two sides of the same coin.

Most of the time, it is purely and simply a fraud, trickery, made possible by the credulity and superstition of the ordinary folks. It may be sometimes a case of hysteria. We must not exclude either the possibility of genuine cases of diabolical possession. The case of that woman mentioned above seemed to have been an attempt at a clever hoax, for the woman remained remarkably calm and composed under questioning.¹²

Here we have a case where a woman declared herself to be possessed by Satan (*Shetani*), whom she understood as “*mfumu ya mipashi*,” meaning “the chief of the spirits.” It seems that the event took place in the village on the mission ground in Chilubula itself, since the missionaries had the authority to judge the case and impose a fine. The missionaries had been teaching about the devil (*Shetani*) in the catechism classes. The woman seemingly associated *Shetani*, the new chief of the spirits, with the many ambivalent spiritual agents that possessed people frequently. *Shetani* for her fell into the class of spirits related to the royal ancestors or of the *ngulu* spirits (spirits connected with awe-inspiring monuments of nature, or spirits vaguely connected with past or present peoples). Such spirits could make a person upon whom they befell sick, but could also become a valuable resource for the community by bestowing extraordinary abilities of healing, prophecy or divination. For this, they needed to be respected, and the possessed woman demanded this respect. Missionaries on their part investigated this type of possession in terms of their own categories. Since the experience of the woman did not fit the pattern of what they expected from genuine demon possession (as defined by the Roman ritual traditions), they either saw it as a hoax or as a form of hysteria shaped by superstitious concepts and understandings. In the quotation, the missionaries distinguished three types of possession:

- Real demonic possession (which could be answered by means of prayer and exorcisms);
- Faked possession to gain attention or privileges (here the best answer was to slap a fine on the person to bring her back to her senses, as the above example

12 Chilubula Mission Diary, February 1904.

shows); and

- Imagined possession, due to superstitious beliefs.

It seems that the people who had settled on mission territory (mostly young people — and sometimes former slaves freed by the missionaries) sided with the missionaries in this case. Many of them were looking for a break from the past, and were unwilling to give the woman privileges because of her status of being possessed by a spirit. The incident is an early example of the suppression (fining, punishing) and of the silencing of experiences with interfering African spiritual realities that was to accompany the missionary endeavor. But the quotation also shows that the devil was becoming a flexible category of thought, appropriated in different ways.

This incident happened at a time when there was much discussion among the missionaries themselves about the use of exorcisms and blessings. While some early missionaries made ample use of prayers of blessings, other missionaries feared that such an approach fostered superstitious beliefs in magical objects, leaving people trapped in their fears. Worse still, those with extraordinary powers of healing and blessings could also bring curses, when angry. The healer of one person or group may be the witch of another person or group. The careful approach that downplayed spiritual powers was to gain the upper hand, while rituals and blessings outside the church came to be much discouraged.¹³ Fearing misunderstandings, missionaries stepped on the brake and avoided exorcisms and personal initiatives of blessings. Instead, priests encouraged people to strive for a firm integration into the sacramental life of the Church, which was enough to safeguard the Christian from the enemy's attack.

ABODES OF THE DEVIL

When the missionaries arrived, Catholic theology of the time did not leave much room for salvation outside of the Church.¹⁴ The realm outside the Church was

13 Oger, "Une ombwe dans les Missions: la sorcellerie lieu meconnu de la rencontre du Christ dans la foi," trans. Maurice Gruffat, *Archives of the Missionaries of Africa* (Lusaka: FENZA, 1995); Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia: 1895-1995*. (Lusaka: Bookworld Publishers, 2004), 75.

14 The word "Church" in the Latin Christian maxim, "*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*" (outside the Church there is no salvation), was understood commonly as referring strictly to the Catholic Church in its

tainted by the devil. The missionaries brought with them a worldview where the Kingdom of Satan stood in opposition to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. If someone did not belong to the latter (were not firmly rooted in the Church), chances were rather high that this person somehow belonged to the former. Every evening the White Father missionaries prayed for the peoples of Africa to be freed from the grasp of the devil:

Do not suffer, O Mother of Mercy, that these unfortunate children should continue to fall into Hell, in spite of the merits of Jesus Christ and the cruel death He suffered for their salvation... Send into these abandoned districts legions of holy missionaries to wrest them from death and from Satan and to bring them into the fold of your Holy Church.¹⁵

Missionaries did not necessarily uphold the link between the devil and paganism in particular reference to African cultures. Some of the early missionaries were vocally skeptic and sarcastic about their own contemporary “enlightened” European culture, against which they compared the Zambian cultures favorably. They warned about the destructive influences on African cultures of “so-called civilization.”¹⁶ They judged the connection of the devil to pagan cultures in reference to the Church: inside was God, and outside was the devil—whether in Europe or in Africa. Institutions like polygamy were more closely linked to Satan since they made a person unfit for the sacramental life of the Church on a permanent basis.¹⁷

denominational dimension. Some official documents had also affirmed that those who had not yet received the Gospel could be related to the Church in various ways and thus be able to obtain salvation, if they were not culpable for their exclusion (for example Pope Pius IX, in *Quanto conficiamur moerore*). Such documents, however, made it look rather difficult not to be culpable for the error of exclusion.

- 15 Quoted in Hinfelaar, “Introduction to the History of the White Fathers in Zambia,” Archives of the Missionaries of Africa (Lusaka: FENZA, n.d.).
- 16 See for example the writings of Fr. Emile Foulon [1899-1906], “Fr. Foulon tells his story,” ed. and trans. M. Gruffat, Archives of the Missionaries of Africa (Lusaka: FENZA, 2001).
- 17 Concerning attitudes of early missionaries towards African cultures see Brian Garvey, *Bemba and Church: Religious and Social Change in South Central Africa, 1891-1964* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1994), 45, 111; and Oger, “Une ombwe dans les Missions,” 69. Bishop Dupont, as we know from his letters, was fighting against an opinion that he found among a number of missionaries to see the African world outside the Catholic gate as contaminated by the devil and by sin. On the other hand, a number of missionaries marvelled at the closeness of African culture to the Biblical message (see for example the entry of Kayambi Mission Diary, September 11,

The occasional references to the devil in the mission diaries (often as poetic allusions at the occasion of liturgical feasts about the defeat of the devil) bring across the image that the missionaries have penetrated the devil's strongholds. The devil kept people hostage by means of pagan culture, religions and rites.¹⁸ The insertion of the Catholic Church into the country was breaking up the empire of the devil, who was resisting and putting up a fight.¹⁹ Some diary entries acknowledge that the devil has preponderance in the country and owns many dwellings; he will be made to flee, defeated by the Church.²⁰ Baptism especially is a defeat of the devil and liberation from his slavery;²¹ in the baptism promises, the catechumens renounced Satan and all his deeds publicly and with a loud voice. During Easter of 1907, for example, when catechumens were baptized after many years of preparation, the missionaries of Kayambi recorded that

The Devil must be grinding his teeth as well as plugging his ears not to hear the joyful Alleluia of the faithful. He must be terribly vexed that he no longer holds absolute sway over this country. He must be shocked to witness the enthusiasm of the people for the Christian faith, their fear to fail the exam, and their joy, expressed in boisterous singing and dancing, when they are admitted, either to baptism, or simply to the next step in their formation.²²

The young people turn away from Satan with eagerness. ... Satan is still strongly entrenched in positions that will be impregnable for a long time to come, but

1895).

- 18 E.g. Kabunda Mission Diary, April 22, 1941. When drums were beaten during the whole night just next to the Mission station on the occasion of a dying man in the last stretch of his illness, the diarist noted: "The Baushi stick to their old beliefs and customs, unable to see that the Devil is pushing them around and leading them straight to hell."
- 19 When no porters signed up on the feast of the birthday of Mary (1899), when the missionaries needed them urgently, the Kayambi Mission Diary comments: "The Devil was trying hard to save his Empire." (Kayambi Mission Diary, September 8, 1899). Note that many statements about the devil in the mission diaries were made on liturgical feast days that celebrated the devil's defeat.
- 20 Chilubula Mission Diary, March 30, 1902 (Easter; "... for we are convinced that the universal veneration of Christ's mother will mark the end of the Devil's preponderance in this country..."); see also October 31, 1902 of the same diary.
- 21 Lubwe Mission Diary, March 23, 1913.
- 22 Kayambi Mission Diary, March 31, 1907. See also Lubwe Mission Diary, December 25, 1911. Baptism frees the pagan from the slavery of the devil.

even those positions are breached through in several places. ... The Devil won't easily give in, there are still very hard times ahead, but there is no doubt of what the final issue will be: the victory of the Cross.²³

The passage suggests that the history of evangelization is determined by a battle between God's grace and the devil's obstinate resistance. Some diary entries admire the faith of the early African Christians who overcame many obstacles and much opposition.²⁴ Many were convinced that the victory of the Christian faith was inevitable. On the other hand, the missionaries saw the devil as pulling strings in the background when scandals arose among the Christians, when some slid back into polygamy or marital unfaithfulness,²⁵ when expansions of the rival Protestant Churches challenged the missionaries' advances,²⁶ and when cultural traditions and customs proved more persistent than anticipated.²⁷ Bishop Larue (bishop in Chilubula 1913-1935), for example, asked his priests to counter the lack of people's

23 Chroniques Trimestrielles (Quarterly Reports), 1907-1909, commenting on the above entry (Kayambi Mission Diary, March 31, 1907).

24 See for example the report of Kayambi mission, dated 1904 in the Chroniques Trimestrielles (Quarterly Reports) 1890-1905, Nyasa Vicariate 59, no. 108 (July 1904). The missionaries in this report pondered on the strong faith of their Christians, the popularity of the sacraments of confession and of the Eucharist, and on the trust of pagan people in the missionaries in times of sickness and for settling disputes.

25 Chilonga Mission Diary, March 30, 1902 ("The Devil does not waste time to play havoc in our small Christian community by creating scandals. ... One of our first six Christians has been convicted of adultery. May the Lord have mercy on him!") See also the entry of February 15, 1913 of the same diary, and Chilubula Mission Diary, October 31, 1902.

26 Minga Mission Diary, August 11, 1923 or Lubwe Mission Diary, August 6, 1933. The former entry reads: "Seeing the large number of people who are turning their backs to Protestantism and flocking to us, we cannot abide by the decision of the Magistrate of Fort Jameson without betraying their trust. It was to be expected that the Devil would do all in his power to block our advance, for he definitely feels that his kingdom is seriously threatened in this part of the world."

27 Chilubi Mission Diary, November 7, 1921 or Chilonga Mission Diary, March 1935. The latter reads: "The people living in the Nsenga are the BaKunda, and their language is Cibisa. They give the consonant 's' a buzzing sound. They are all animists. The spirits are in the centre of their worship. They are addicted to customs we are tempted to attribute to the devil, like abusive beer drinking ... lascivious dances, adultery, and polygamy. They are miles away from our polished Christian civilisation. But as human beings, they are kind and pleasant, and they showed themselves very hospitable towards our catechists." The former quotation refers to a battle of catechists with their own communities, who teased them with provocative and sexualized dances: "People recently danced immoral dances before the eyes of the catechists while nagging them to do anything about it and at the same time making all sorts of nasty remarks about their virility. The Devil is still fighting rearguard battles very efficiently."



“fear of God” (as he perceived it) through the stressing of judgment and eternal punishment.²⁸ Missionaries were supposed to counteract a lack of thought about life after death.²⁹

Some missionaries who were to leave a lasting impression on people (for example the famous Father “Kolibo”)³⁰ made much use of the image of the devil to make people reflect about the consequences of immoral actions. People remembered details of his fiery instructions and sermons for decades to come, and sometimes applied his images of the devil to concrete misfortunes that happened to lapsed Christians. Bishop Larue (maybe more than other bishops) promoted an approach marked by judicial and legal consideration, drawing out the convergences and incompatibilities of Christian and cultural norms. Hugo Hinfelaar wrote that

Many marital customs and the initiation rites of the women were scrutinised and declared to be pagan. A list of sins was drawn up that allegedly offended the commandments of God and of the Church and were regarded as something to be confessed during the sacrament of confession. The stress tended to be on hell and the power of the devil. This negative approach became oppressive.³¹

Hinfelaar, however, also notes that this negative approach to culture was not universal. Another approach and active interest in African culture developed among White Fathers that became a hallmark for them. The classic “White Father’s Bemba Dictionary” is an example of this interest that was applied with attention to detail. The process of studying the language and local culture brought to many missionaries an appreciation and a love for the traditional wisdom. This also brought them closer to local cultural authority figures. Hinfelaar writes that

28 Garvey, *Bemba Dictionary*, 91.

29 See for example the writings of Father Nicolas Garrec (writing in the 1920s). “As for doing good, the elderly people are want to say, ‘we did not even think of it, we had no time for it, nor did we speak of resurrection and of a world to come. We were just living our lives where we were, living through the events of every day. We were only concerned about war, food, witchcraft, and women... We thought only of ourselves.’”

30 Jean-Marie Colibaut, 1880-1954, who lived in Zambia from 1907 until his death in 1954.

31 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 121.

In the 1930s there emerged a more open approach to traditional wisdom, the proverbs and the sayings of the peoples in Zambia, as this came to be regarded as a preparation for the coming of Christ's message. Later on, this traditional culture was to underpin Catholic catechesis that adapted it as much as possible to the teaching of the Church.³²

Missionaries' studies of African culture proceeded from a certain angle, for the service of evangelization, as a "tool box" to explain the gospel and to root catechism into people's life. This also brought an interest into the conflicting areas. Studies and inquiries were repeatedly commissioned to scrutinize pagan rites (including the secret puberty rites) and to draw out where they were incompatible with Christian thought. Missionaries were often very uncomfortable with practices exhibiting sex. The problem was that "good traditions" and "bad ones" were subtly woven into each other. Taking out the "bad" elements (as evaluated by the priests) could destroy the rites altogether or turn them into dull and unexciting enterprises.³³

Missionaries' positive interest in local culture made it no longer possible to identify the realm of the devil plainly with non-Christian practices. If culture contained both good and bad elements, which were not easily separable, then the devil's connection with non-Christian practices also became less specific, more vague and indirect. While the devil remained associated with the realm outside the Church still for years to come, the missionaries rarely saw the devil as directly possessing people in a way that necessitated a formal exorcism. Furthermore, according to Catholic doctrine, the devil cannot take away the freedom of people to choose what is good.

32 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 430. "This negative approach to culture and custom was not universal. For some missionaries the key word had become adaptation, i.e., some of the traditions could be adapted to the teaching of the Church. However, the local culture was seen as being at the service of Christian evangelization and there was as yet no equal dialogue between the tenets of African traditional religion with those of Christian religion." (122).

33 Even when inculturation theology enabled later generations of missionaries to acknowledge the presence of divine wisdom in cultural traits and to build more actively on cultural rites, the elimination of "bad elements" from the "good elements," orchestrated by outside decrees, could cripple the Christianized rites. For example, the removal from initiation rites of all the elements that were classified as bad (beer, punishments, nakedness, sexual commentaries, obscenities, the use of medicines to increase sexual attraction and potencies, etc.) also took from the rites many life-energies, turning them somehow into uninteresting, catechetical endeavors. After the church rites, people still wanted the real thing – performed secretly away from the eyes of the Church.



In the traditional Catholic paradigm, the devil is the hidden spiritual agent in the background; he does not appear in the foreground, and if he does, it is very rare and exceptional. The devil for the missionaries was a feared spiritual agent with a theological significance. He was also an explanatory and/or poetic category for people's resistance and cultural entrenchments. He was rarely an agent whom one would encounter face to face as in forms of direct possession. The concept of widespread demonic possession that needed to be addressed through exorcisms would come only much later, in the charismatic and Pentecostal approaches.

'YOU CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS'

The early missionaries stressed a very long catechumenate. People who sought baptism had to make a choice in life: one cannot serve two masters. Spirits other than God had to be renounced.

As we know today, people lived with a complex and changing world of spirits, with many regional differences, when the missionaries arrived on the scene at the end of the nineteenth century. Different types of spirits were associated with local or regional shrines, chiefly cults, ancestors of one's own lineage, the dead belonging to a hostile environment, spirits belonging to fearsome places or foreign peoples, and spirits able to teach extraordinary crafts; spiritual forces were subtly woven into specific relationships. Spirit possession referred to distinct issues and phenomena, depending on the types of spirits that afflicted a person. Also the ancestors embodied a part of themselves in a newborn child, connecting intrinsically to his/her soul. Some spirits were dangerous for outsiders but beneficial for insiders. Others could transform the person they befell into a "wounded healer," a prophet or a diviner. Some spirits could be manipulated through the forces of witchcraft.

The missionaries did not experience these spirits themselves; they studied and classified them according to their nature ("good spirits," "bad spirits") that they perceived from people's descriptions, which placed the spirits on a more abstract level.³⁴ Catholic theology of the early missionaries used concepts of scholastic the-

34 Although the White Fathers became known for their efforts and pride in learning the local languages and customs, the earliest missionary writings show little awareness about the distinctions among the spirits – which they lumped together into one group of evil spirits that afflicted people

ology going back to Thomas Aquinas to understand and classify the spirit world. Their concepts defined angels as spiritual, non-corporal beings with superior intelligence, whose knowledge is not tied to the senses. They can see in a flash of time many of the divine truths. If they turn against the will of God, then their decision is permanent; angels cannot change their mind. Either they are with or against God and his plans. There is no middle ground for spirits in this theology. For the spirits that interfered with the lives of people, if they were real and if they were a hindrance to the acceptance of the Gospel, they belonged to the devil. The Aristotelian philosophical principles that provided the foundations for scholastic demonology and angelology were foreign to the people to whose concepts they were applied. Their own concepts were embedded in relational understandings of reality and human life.

While the missionaries associated some spirits with the devil, calling them demons, they placed most spirits into the world of superstitious beliefs where they existed only in people's imaginations. Such beliefs were associated with the devil only in an indirect way: the devil held people captive in fears produced by this world of false beliefs. In any case, people troubled by such imaginary spirits were not qualified to be subjected to the formal rites of exorcism. They were left alone with their spirits in the hope that better education would eventually liberate them from their entrenched superstitious beliefs. Where people could be entertaining real spirits (the missionaries left that possibility open), they were engaging demons and needed to be excluded from the sacramental life of the Church. This extended also to a spiritual relationship with the ancestors, who—outside the realm of the Church—continued to secure blessings for their descendants, but not without making concrete demands by enforcing taboos and demanding offerings for recognition.

Conflicts developed through people's integration into earthly authority structures of kings, chiefs, headmen, family heads or ritual specialists, whose sources of power

(see for example the writings of Emile Foulon (1871-1907)). Nicolas Garrec, writing between 1910 and 1920, drew out detailed distinctions of the spirit world and followed Bemba categories of thought in his descriptions. Edouard Labrecque and others would present in the 1930s elaborate materials concerning Bemba religious concepts. Missionaries' knowledge of local concepts evolved with time.

were never understood in purely secular terms. Authority in Zambia always had spiritual dimensions.³⁵ Royal shrines and traditions continued to stand out as visible focal points for the spiritual authority of chiefs, which was connected to the protection of the land and its fertility, thus also underlining their position in a changing world. Along riverbanks, lagoons and forests, forces of nature were appeased by the invocation of the ancestors of specific clans by their descendants who held ritual authority over these territorial stretches. Where young people asked the White Fathers for religious instruction in their villages, this could imply a potential political assault on the village authority structures upheld by the ancestral spirit shrines (*mfuba*; singular: *lufuba*), which were ridiculed or even destroyed by the catechists, teachers and their followers. Hence, the policy of the White Fathers to seek permission first from the headmen, who were in turn often office bearers of a chief.³⁶ Missionaries arrived on the Zambian scene when memories of war and an extracting slave trade were very much alive. The survival of individuals and of groups within the upheavals of the 18th and 19th centuries depended on having the right set of loyalties.³⁷

In Bemba-land the conflict between the different sets of authorities became marked when, in 1931, Bishop Larue (Vicar Apostolic of the Bangweolo Vicariate) wrote a strong letter to all Christians (he meant Catholics) and catechumens, forbidding them to attend any form of prayer that “worship the spirits of the dead.” He referred in this letter to prayers organized by the Bemba paramount chief for the fertility of the land through the intercession of the ancestors (*ukupepa imipashi* — understood by the Bishop as ancestor worship), and placed participation in such prayers under the sanction of excommunication. According to Louis Oger (a

35 The same applies for wealth. See for example Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 114-139.

36 See for example incidents recorded by Garvey, *Bemba Land Church*, 79, 100. Audrey Richards acknowledged the loss of spiritual authority of Native Authorities at the expense of missionary interests (Audrey I. Richards, *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (Oxford, 1939), 362; Garvey, *Bemba Land Church*, 82). Acts of respect towards the spiritual world of clan ancestors was termed idolatrous (Garvey, *Bemba Land Church*, 110).

37 People who had hands, feet, ears or noses cut off served as living reminders of the terror that awaited people who undermined the authority of chief or king, or the values on which society depended.

historian of the White Fathers), this letter alienated Bemba chiefs from the White Fathers for decades to come.³⁸

UNDERGROUND RELIGION

When the missionaries tried to appropriate for the Church ritual authority over all spiritual aspects of life, they pushed underground other ritual authorities, who thereby however did not cease to exist. An example was the establishment of an underground chiefly cult right at Ilondola Mission in the aftermath of the letter of Larue. Chiefly authority, to be effective, needed to reach into every single village through the headmen and multiple sets of ritual authorities. Louis Oger described how chief Nkula secretly appointed a traditional priest to the newly established Ilondola Mission, who was to become one of the main catechists:

Chief Nkula knew he could not indefinitely refuse Fr. van Sambeck permission to open a station at Ilondola. He then made plans to establish his own *shima-pepo* [priest; literally: “father of the prayers”] at the mission station itself and he carefully prepared his man for this delicate function, as one of the elders explained to us many years later. This man chosen by the Chief to perpetuate traditional religion side by side with Christian Religion followed the normal catechumenate for admission into the Catholic Church — he was a Protestant — and was baptised. Then he was appointed headman of the village in the immediate neighbourhood of the mission station. In the meantime the Chief’s

38 See Les Petites Nouvelles et Renseignements, 1928-1937, Bangweolo Vicariate, trans. Maurice Gruffat, Archives of the Missionaries of Africa, no. 26 (dated February 2, 1931), (Lusaka: FENZA, n.d.) This letter, combined with the exasperating behaviour of the German priest in charge of neighboring Malole Parish towards both colonial administration and chiefly authority, also caused Chief Nkula to withdraw his permission to open a mission station in his country, according to Oger, “Our Missionary Shadow,” 6-7, 58-61; Oger, “Une ombwe dans les Missions,” 22). Oger’s analysis that takes account of the religious conflicts concerning chiefly ambitions at the onset of indirect rule is for me more convincing than Gordon’s recent claim that Chief Nkula withdrew the permission because he feared the witchcraft of the White Fathers (David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Ohio University Press, 2012), 50-51.) The ailing Chief Nkula arguably feared the paramount chief Chitimukulu and the interference of the White Fathers into the royal duties more than the (alleged) witchcraft of the missionaries. The District Commissioner of Chinsali in his Memorandum of February 7, 1934 cited White Fathers’ policy on divorce as the reason for Chitimukulu to prevent Nkula from allowing the White Fathers in (Oger, “Our Missionary Shadow,” 248).

shimapepo endeared himself to the missionaries, for he turned out to be a fervent Catholic, and very active at the service of the Church and the Christian community. The long and short of it is that Father Superior summoned him to the Mission, where he became his right hand man in the life of the parish. When the time came to choose a new headman for Ilondola Village, Father Superior proposed his candidature to Chief Nkula, who was only too happy to oblige. Thus it was that, from 1934 up to 1991 when we finally discovered what was going on, a member of the family of this *headman-cum-shimapepo* had been exercising the function of priest of the traditional cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land in the shadow of the Catholic Church, whether he was headman or not. Thus it was that for fifty-seven uninterrupted years two cults — should I say two systems? — had been maintained in function side by side without any trouble at all.³⁹

We could draw out similar points also for other peoples in Zambia. The secret Nyau society of the Chewa—incorporated into chiefly authority structures—reached into nearly every village, constituting an alternative religion that came “over-ground” when local authority needed to be asserted. The incoming Ngoni, who had conquered big parts of Chewa territory in the nineteenth century, feared the secret Nyau structures as much as the Christians did. The Nyau continued to affirm, against the invaders, the religious role and importance of the Chewa ancestors in regards to the upholding of morality, fertility and territorial landmarks. The Ngoni felt in charge, yet had no religious roots. The Chewa way of safeguarding their religious authority over the land was to take it to a hidden level, to which neither the Ngoni nor the missionaries in subsequent times had access. The Christianized Ngoni became natural allies to the Catholic Church in the fight against the Nyau, though not only out of Christian motives.⁴⁰

39 Oger, “Une ombwe dans les Missions,” 22. He refers to a similar case along the Luapula (Lufubu), documented by Ian Cunnison, where the chief secretly entrusted to one of the catechists the task of being the guardian of the tomb of an important Lunda prince of the past, who was invoked to prevent disasters of hurricanes and thunderstorms. (Quotations from Oger’s work and from the Mission Diaries do not contain italics in the original. I have added italics in all quotations for vernacular terms.)

40 In earlier centuries, the Chewa had themselves been an invading agricultural people. Unlike the Angoni, however, they had managed to form with the indigenous peoples a ritual symbiosis to

Where there was no open clash of authority, different religious systems coexisted rather peacefully next to each other. Many people participated in both, non-exclusively, depending on the situational needs. Village life had multiple sets of contesting authorities. For example, it continued to be marked by festivities that accentuated prolonged rites of initiation (puberty rites where notions of womanhood and manhood, a people's values, authority structures, spiritual concepts and beliefs, and ideas of possible punishments from the spirits were passed on to the next generation. According to Church teaching in the time of Bishop Larue, the clapping for ancestors during these initiation rites bordered on idol worship. By nature, initiation rites are secret and hidden from the eyes of the uninitiated — they easily went underground. The instructors of the initiation rites came to church on Sundays, while playing a very different religious role during the rites, which they carefully kept away from the eyes of the Church.⁴¹

Open ancestor shrines disappeared from Christian villages. However, the ancestors did not disappear with the shrines. In dreams and in times of life-crisis they continued to be strong markers of identity. The personal shrines of individual specialists, blacksmiths, hunters and diviners that individuals used to enhance their personal crafts and gain esoteric knowledge also went underground. Such cults of tapping into occult forces were by nature hidden ones. The Church could not be part of this realm. Even ordinary people were often suspicious about esoteric knowledge gained for private purposes, which was easily associated with the practice of witchcraft. Going underground often increased their attraction, especially in times of crisis when one needed extraordinary help — at any cost. Different forms of securing hidden spiritual interventions for protection, for business, for finding marriage partners or for securing their faithfulness, continued to develop. This quest could have dangerous consequences for others. Such powers, with a close connection to sorcery, needed to be controlled. Since they did not fall under the authority of the Church, nor of the state, traditional authorities (chiefs) and healers

gain access to the religious fertility structures over the land. (Personal communication with Toon van Kessel, St. Lawrence Parish).

41 Missionaries, while forbidding for their Christians the participation in highly sexualized dances, with which they felt uncomfortable, did not always recognize the inherent religious nature of many dances. They would have forbidden the dances on religious grounds, had they realized!



claimed this space for themselves. People settled disputes that arose in the trials of occult practices with the help of the chiefs' courts, or headmen, diviners and healers who knew about this world, outside the realm of the Church.

Also, people with *ngulu* or *myela* (which I refer to as “nature spirits”) opted for less visible signs of their spiritual status; many people with such spirits were active church members. The old landmarks and shrines (at waterfalls, old trees or caves) lost much of their ritual appeal. Nevertheless, dietary and sexual taboos and cooking practices in reference to the spirits unfolded in the domestic realm. Spirits continued to punish their hosts for trespassing on their rules and taboos. Sometimes, this was an occasion for divorce from an oppressive marriage, at other times an occasion for renegotiating existing authority structures within the family. They could bestow on their hosts faculties of healing, of divination, of detecting witchcraft and prophetic gifts. Christians were not allowed to entertain *ngulu*. Edouard Labrecque, a White Father who was commissioned to write up treatises on Bemba customs for his fellow missionaries, wrote that

The cases of “kuwilwa” or spirit possessions (falling in a trance, writhing on the ground, foaming at the mouth) may be genuine enough, but they are usually pathological cases (epilepsy and unsettled state of the nervous system). It is not totally impossible, however, that Satan, the Father of all lies, may be involved in some cases (diabolical possessions).⁴²

Since missionaries rarely exorcised *ngulu* spirits (most of the time they thought they were just imagined) and did not otherwise engage with them, the Church excluded itself from the discernment process that accompanied possession by such spirits (causes of sicknesses, prophecies, dreams). It was left to other ritual specialists, away from the eyes of the Church.

In many ways, the *ng'anga* (the traditional healer, shaman or diviner) became the alternative to the priest or missionary — which did not prevent Christians from

42 Edouard Labrecque, *Customs of the BaBemba and of the Neighbouring Tribes*, ed. M. Gruffat, trans. M. Gruffat, Archives of the Missionaries of Africa (Lusaka, FENZA, [1931-1934] 2001), 101. Labrecque (1895-1984) worked in Zambia from 1922 to 1952.

seeking help from both. Most missionaries considered diviners, shamans and healers as charlatans. If they had real divining powers or intimate knowledge of people beyond natural faculties, then such powers pointed directly to the devil.⁴³ Christians who consulted a diviner were barred from the sacraments for a number of reasons. From a spiritual point of view, access to knowledge through means of divination ran against the teaching of the Bible and of the Church. From a social point of view, the consultation of a diviner often culminated in concrete witchcraft accusations with the consequence of broken families. From a medical point of view, the practice of healers was often incompatible with the models of modern health care. People, however, connected with the ng'anga on a different level than with the Church. Extended rites of healing manipulated a spiritual world that connected with the human soul through dancing and singing, dreams, medicines from animals and plants cut and rubbed into the body, and rituals performed at significant places. This symbolic universe often remained more meaningful to people, as it was intimately linked to the human body and their understanding of health and sickness.

UPROOTED CHRISTIANS

From the viewpoint of scholastic theology, it was a reasonable and necessary demand of the Gospel that one cannot serve two masters. The early Christians would publicly, loudly and proudly deny, in the baptism promises, the abstract devil and all his demons, and would be sincere in those promises. Few, however, linked these promises to their own experiences with the spirit world. The spirits with whom people struggled were different from the demons they denounced. Spirits were interwoven into concrete life-situations from which it was difficult to escape. Christians with ngulu (or *mashawe* in other cultures) felt themselves to be victims of such

43 While diviners were largely seen as charlatans by the missionaries, the diaries mention instances where the missionaries regarded the diviners' intimate knowledge of people as coming directly from the devil. "How does one become a witch or a witchdoctor? It is simply a matter of cunning and daring. What looks like magic and sorcery to a credulous Native is in fact a clever trick, which an incredulous European would quickly discover if he were allowed to attend the consultation. But there are certainly real diabolical interventions: in other words I am convinced that some witchdoctors have, in some circumstances, direct contacts with the Devil." Foulon, "Fr. Foulon tells his story," 53. See also a number of diary entries that refer to the devil's presence in the procedures of the *bamucapi* witchfinders (Lubwe Mission Diary, September 28, 1934, and other texts).

spirits. They obeyed the spirits since the spirits punished them for not adhering to their commands and taboos. People who did not pass through the puberty rites were not considered as true women or true men, and sometimes did not consider themselves such either; they were regarded as a bad omen for the whole clan and despised as slaves.⁴⁴ People not going to the diviner could be looked at as cowards who kept their eyes shut, fearing to confront the witches. Alternatively, they were themselves regarded as witches. Not to give due respect to the ancestors could provoke disastrous consequences not only for oneself but also for the family. Many understood it as an act of ungratefulness for the gift of life.

Some people managed to follow a Christian way of life and to renounce their ties to the ambivalent spirit world, often with costly personal consequences. Mission diaries contain entries about uncompromising individuals and saints, who lived out of their new faith and passed it on to their families, even against accusations of disloyalty and witchcraft. Many Christians, however, were not attuned to viable alternatives when it came to subtle questions that posed themselves to those who remained “in the world.” They had to live life with their families, obey their local authorities and live out their cultural values. Could a Christian take part in pagan dances, sometimes highly sexualized, when drumming was often associated with the spirit world? Could a Christian protect his/her child and family from contact with (sexual) pollution that was understood to bring death? And could a Christian participate in funeral rites, which had clear references to the spirit world that slowly transformed a departed family member into an ancestor, followed by inheritance-rites, and rites that brought back the soul of the dead to the family? Common hunting, pot-making and beer-brewing traditions, agricultural duties, or the cooking of food with the many taboos surrounding salt and fire, were all connected to the world of the ancestors and spirits. How could one abstain from them all? Missionaries themselves realized that their Christians led a double religious life. The French missionary (White Fathers) Nicolas Garrec, writing before 1920,

44 See Nicolas Garrec, “The Lubemba of the years 1910-1920 as seen through the writings of Father N. Garrec,” ed. M. Gruffat, trans. M. Gruffat (Lusaka: FENZA, 1999), 47. Thera Rasing investigated in detail the concerns around the implications of Christians participating in initiation rites, and of Christianizing such rites. (Thera Rasing, *The Bush Burnt, the Stones Remain: Female initiation rites in urban Zambia* (Leiden: LIT Verlag, 2001).

expressed the missionary experience of an uphill struggle forcefully:

Our Christians may no longer go openly to venerate the spirits (*mipashi*) ... All the customs of the BaBemba are rooted in pagan beliefs, and they are still faithfully observed by all the Christians, because deep down they still share those beliefs with their pagan counterparts, even in the villages of the Mission Compound, and there is nothing anybody can do about it. I have found out that paganism was most lively in those villages, and among those families, which had the reputation of being one hundred percent Christian. Those Catholics who are the loudest in claiming that the past is for them dead and buried are probably those who are the staunchest conservatives and the most active in preserving the beliefs and customs of their ancestors.⁴⁵

For the converted Christians, the world of spirits did not come as a theoretical world — as the one renounced at baptism — but was enshrined within the concepts of the human body and often validated by individual experiences. The theological concepts provided by scholastic theology did not start with human experiences but with the abstract nature of the spirits. This theology proved to be too blunt to deal with such a complex spiritual world in which people lived, and which was subtly woven into relationships between individuals and families. Sure, some spirits were good, while others were malicious and bad (or at least ambivalent). Often, however, the goodness or badness of a spiritual force depended on the side from which one was looking. In Bemba culture, for example, the soul of a departed person usually became a benevolent spiritual agent for his/her family, a *mupashi*; a newborn child in this family would inherit its name and character. What was a *mupashi* for the family members was (and still is today) experienced as a polluting shade to the remaining spouse, a *cibanda* clinging to the spouse's soul as a meddling spiritual force related to death. He/she needs to be cleansed from the *cibanda* by the late spouse's family, to whom the dead fundamentally belongs. Whether the spirit is experienced positively (e.g. a *mupashi*) or negatively (e.g. a *cibanda*) depends in this case on the kinship link through which one is related to the departed person.

45 Garrec, "The Lubemba of the years 1910-1920," 65.

Catholic theology proposed that a Mass said for the dead would take care of all the spiritual concerns about the dead person. Nevertheless, very few Catholics asked for a Mass or trusted that this would cleanse the remaining spouse from the *cibanda*. It is too closely tied to the authority of the family of the dead person; they alone can cleanse the remaining spouse from this spiritual reality, because washing away the *cibanda* through extended rituals goes hand in hand with negotiations between the two affected families. This includes speaking about remaining grudges, failures, property rights and the welfare of the children. A Mass or other prayers in church could not do this. The *cibanda* was (and is) not an abstract ghost but linked to the demands within concrete relationships.

The *ng'anga*, the diviner, remained a master of seeing through relationships, and no church in Zambia managed to make him/her redundant — except those who integrated *ng'anga* figures into their structures (examples are various Zion, Mutumwa, and Mizimu Churches, and to an extent also the Mutima Church).⁴⁶ Early anthropologists like Audrey Richards — working in the 1930s — hinted at the irony in Zambia's religious history that the spread of Christianity, against all its good intentions, did not help to diminish fear but instead increased spiritual insecurity in Zambia. In her functionalist analysis, she proposed that such spiritual insecurity was triggered by a breakdown in traditional sets of relationships and mutual obligations that were in turmoil in the new political conditions brought on by the colonial regime. The traditional *ng'anga*, the healer and diviner, was needed more now than before.

Also the authority of parents over their children was vested with spiritual properties; parents could bless their children but could also curse them. The paternal aunt, who was often a ritual authority figure in families of matrilineal societies, made her authority felt in family matters when marriages were negotiated or children raised. When people left their homes to seek employment elsewhere, the ancestors

46 The renewed Bemba Catholic rites and prayers at funerals (*Amapepo ya kulosha*) of the Interdiocesan Pastoral Co-ordinating Team take account of this issue at various stages of the rites, including the *isambo lya mfwa* (the family meeting with the remaining spouse), the *bupyani bwe shina* (inheritance of the name – given to a relative of the deceased with similar character traits, who may take over some public functions of the deceased), and the *kupasa icililo* (official end of the funeral), offering prayers and Christian reflections for each stage.

lost much of their impact — not because Christians renounced them in solemn declarations in church, but because new life-situations had made them redundant. On the other hand, an urban family may have been grounded in the Christian faith for many years, but the occasion of a visiting relative could bring back the whole weight of tradition and obligation. Out of nowhere and to the puzzlement of the priests, such Christians again embraced beliefs that they seemed to have long ago rejected. The spirit world was far from being static. Some spirits lost out to new social conditions, while new spirits and concepts, never heard of before, came to make their impact felt in new social situations. Where the churches and modern state institutions were absent from puberty rites, cleansing rites, healing rites or rites for protection against the consequences of trespassing important taboos, cultural ritual specialists could act with little supervision or peer review.

DEALING WITH WITCHCRAFT

A human person was supposed to be healthy, prosperous, living in harmony with the community and a good influence on society. Christians and non-Christians alike shared this basic outlook. When things were not working out, when disaster struck (death), or when sickness triumphed over attempts of healing, things were obviously not as they were supposed to be. Concepts of evil were tied to interpersonal relationships — a witch was responsible for the afflictions in the community. Witchcraft could be acquired or inherited. Missionary studies attest that in pre-colonial times some forms of witchcraft could not be redeemed. The character of the witch was inherently bad, and the community had to make sure that a person was totally destroyed for fear that the spiritual substances enshrined in the body could be passed on or be reincarnated. We have accounts of various forms of poison ordeals narrating how convicted witches were killed and burnt to ashes, sometimes with extensive rituals, and their families sold into slavery (hence the association of slaves with witchcraft).⁴⁷ This view contrasted with the Christian faith that never

47 See for example Foulon, "Fr. Foulon tells his story," 26-27; Garrec, "The Lubemba of the years 1910-1920"; Labrecque, *Beliefs and Religious Practices of the Bemba and Neighbouring Tribes* (Language Centre Ilondola ed.), ed. Louis Oger, trans. P. Boyd, Archives of the Missionaries of Africa (Lusaka: FENZA, [1931, 1934] 1982), 28-29. Some images of witchcraft that are persuasive today may have conserved for us experiences with the slave trade of generations of people whose life-forces, work and livelihoods were cruelly extracted to feed the insatiable hunger for resources



excluded the possibility of repentance even for the worst sinner (or witch); Catholic theology — at least since the European witch-craze — was very careful not to make direct, definite and eternal connections between an individual person and the devil. Early White Fathers bought slaves and resettled them on Mission grounds; their descendants sometimes remained associated with witchcraft for generations to come.⁴⁸

Witchcraft was a pastoral problem from the first days of missionary endeavors, and people were rarely happy with the way missionaries dealt with it. The following entry was recorded in the diary of Santa Maria of Chibote in 1903, just a few months after the opening of the mission station:

The children in our boarding (*barza*) came to tell us about a man in the village who is ready to submit to the trial by poison. In the following morning, at the time of the public prayer, we warned the people that, if the villagers were to go through with the trial, we would send a report to Kampanda and ask that policemen be sent to arrest the man responsible for it. Later we were told of the motive behind the whole affair. ... The man under accusation demanded that he be taken through the trial by poison to prove his innocence. Our decision ran contrary to the feelings of the people. Nobody was pleased. Our people are convinced that the poison made with the bark of a certain tree (probably of the *stephanotis* family) mixed with droppings from hens and dogs is an infallible

in other continents or the desire for wealth and power of neighboring chiefs and allies. The ideas are widely shared in Africa that victims of witchcraft have to work as zombies in the fields of the witches, draw customers to the witches' businesses and no longer have personal willpower; the soul of a bewitched person becomes the slave of the witch. Such images may attain their persuasiveness in modern experiences of exploitation, as a number of authors suggest (Mark Auslander, "Open the Wombs!': The Symbolic Politics of Modern Ngoni Witchfinding," in *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, "Introduction," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa*, eds. J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony," *American Ethnologist*, 26, no. 2 (1999): 279-303; etc.) They may also have roots in memories or echoes of the slave trade. (For histories of Christianity in Zambia, see John Ragsdale, *Protestant Mission Education in Zambia 1880-1954* (Susquehanna University Press, 1986); Hinfelaar, *Bemba Speaking Women*; or Gordon, *Invisible Agents*.)

48 Oger, "Our Missionary Shadow."

way of proving or disproving the innocence of a person under a serious accusation. This person is declared guilty if he fails to vomit the mixture. In that case, he will fall down and writhe, and the spectators will fall on him with their spears and axes and hack him to death, and his corpse will be cremated.⁴⁹

The man above wanted to prove his innocence through the poison ordeal, which the missionaries prevented by force, threatening to involve the colonial powers which had outlawed witch finding. The accusers and the accused saw themselves in need of a forum in which one could prove or disprove witchcraft. The accusers wanted this forum to stop witchcraft attacks on their families and punish the guilty. The accused also wanted it in order to clear their names of the crimes of witchcraft that would continue to stick to them, turning them into outcasts in their own families. Church and colonial powers outlawed the poison ordeal, while also being unable and unwilling to deal with the witchcraft or to acknowledge it. A forum for dealing with witches was established with the ng'anga the traditional healer and diviner, who fitted into the authority structures opened by chiefs, headmen and family heads. Operations of the ng'anga changed to fit the new circumstances. To avoid arrest, witch finding had to stay vague, or it had to be done away from the realm of the state under supervision of parallel authorities in a space constituted by chiefs and headmen.

Dialogue about witchcraft was not taking place between ritual authorities and the

49 Chibote Mission Diary, July 17, 1903. The text goes on to explain beliefs that people held, like the belief of witches to change into lions and other animals to kill their victims. It finishes with the assertion that people do not know of natural causes of misfortune; any sickness or evil that befalls a person is seen as a result of witchcraft of people who hate and who harm. The original translation reads "witchdoctor" instead of "witch." Usually the pejorative term "witchdoctor" referred not to the witch but to the healer/diviner who discerned the forces of witchcraft, though the figure of the "witchdoctor" also had a certain association with the occult, including the forces of witchcraft. The quoted text, however, seems to refer to beliefs concerning the workings of the witch, not the "witchdoctor". The missionaries regarded such beliefs as superstitious; nevertheless, some diary entries show that early missionaries did believe in the existence of spiritual forces of witchcraft, in rare cases. See for example the following diary entry: "Fr. Tanguy came back from the Nsumbu today. He came into close contact with witchcraft in the course of this pastoral journey. He came to realise with a shock that witchcraft was the Devil's way of keeping the people under his thumb in a state of real slavery. He understood how true it is to say that Christ came to free Man. Christianity is liberation." (Chilubi Mission Diary, February 18, 1916. See also Foulon, "Fr. Foulon tells his story," 53.

missionaries. Hugo Hinfelaar writes in the *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia* that

The missionaries regarded themselves as sons of the Enlightenment. After many centuries of witchcraft accusations in Europe, most people there had finally rid themselves of this scourge by a more rational approach. “Witchcraft does not exist,” they preached. “It is caused by a fear of the unknown that will be taken away by modern science. Witchcraft is mere superstition.” Whether this was of any use to the people in the villages, in particular to the women, remains very doubtful. They were of the opinion that by not being able to take cases of witchcraft to a court of law, be it civil or ecclesiastical, evil beings could have their own way without any social control. As there was no room for discussion of honest dialogue, this problem went underground and festered for a long time to come.⁵⁰

New movements of diviners and healers took up the need of addressing the problem of witchcraft. In the 1930s the *mcape* movement (in the North called *mucapi*) swept through the country. It was silently tolerated by the colonial powers and enthusiastically accepted nearly everywhere by the local population, including the Christian population. The new type of diviner, the *mucapi*, was identifying the witches in the gathered village assemblies organized by headman or chief, with the aim not of destroying or chasing the witches (as in the pre-colonial paradigm), but of cleansing and reintegrating them back into the community after they had confessed and surrendered their charms. This was a new concept in witchcraft beliefs. The witch finders and witch cleansers first invited people to bring all their charms, including protective ones, in the presence of the diviners (which many people did). Then they proceeded to find out or “sniff out” the witches in the community with the help of their mirrors or other utensils. They made them confess and forced them to drink medicines or concoctions that would prevent them from practicing witchcraft again under the threat of a sure death. After payments of compensation were made to the harmed families, and of course to the diviners (and sometimes to the chiefs and headmen), they were now supposed to become reintegrated into the

50 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, 122.

community (at least in theory — in practice this was not always working), since they had been cleansed from their evil powers.

The success of the mcape movement and of other witch cleansing movements puzzled the missionaries. The following diary entry (Kabunda Mission Diary, September 25, 1934) shows that the association of the traditional diviner with the devil was coming to a logical dilemma:

Some more Christian victims of the village cleansing carried out by the mucapi at Kalaba: they were forced to drink the 'anti-witchcraft lotion', but at least they did not buy any of the stuff for further use. At the village of Chief Kale, the witchhunters have collected an impressive quantity of horns and other magical gadgets, mainly from some old pagans and from the Chief Kale himself. We are also told that the village cleansing led also to the removal of a famous snake that had the reputation of being possessed by the Devil. According to the testimony of many serious, reliable witnesses, the way *bamucapi* proceed to 'cleanse' a village from all witchcraft can only be diabolical. All Christians are, therefore, obliged in conscience to abstain from direct participation in the proceedings. On the other hand, we can only be pleased to see full baskets of horns supposedly packed with magical bits and pieces (bones, hairs, nails, etc.) thrown away in the bush. That is a very strange sight to see *bamucapi* (witchhunters) neutralising the evil enterprises of *baloshi* (witches and witchdoctors and sorcerers) by magical means, as if the Devil were fighting against himself.

The following premises show the ambivalence with which missionaries linked the mucapi or mcape to the devil: (1) Witchcraft is evil; (2) the mucapi pretends to rescue people from witchcraft; (3) the mucapi works him/herself with the forces of the devil.⁵¹

51 For the context of Eastern Congo, Emma Wild, "'Is it Witchcraft? Is it Satan? Is it a Miracle.' Mai-Mai Soldiers and Christian Concepts of Evil in North-East Congo," *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1998): 450-467 has made a similar point about Christian discourses in the wake of the rising of the "Forces Démocratiques pour la Liberation" of Laurent Kabila against Mobutu, locally known as "Mai-Mai." Their magical powers that overcame the weapons of the army were associated with the dark forces of witchcraft or Satan, yet they brought down the evil regime of Mobutu, equally identified with darkness and the devil. This forced Christians to come up with explanations that went beyond a mere dualism of good against evil.

Converted Christians reached similar ambivalent conclusions. They easily bought into the vocabulary of the devil as an explanation for evil and for forces hostile or incompatible with the Christian faith. Yet in times of crisis, people felt obliged to go to the diviner. Coming back to the sacraments, they confessed to have been overcome by “Shetani” or that they had gone to consult the “liar.” They had often seen no other way of dealing with evil. Maybe the devil could help in important struggles against evil where God seemed powerless; maybe he knew evil better than God, and could give a hand to sort it out! Notions of good and evil had moved beyond the clear colours of black and white into ambivalent gray zones, depending on situational needs.

A few missionaries attended such cleansing ceremonies, documented what they saw and reflected about their meaning. One of them, Fr. Stürzer while in Kabunda Mission, though strongly condemning the methods of the *bamucapi* (which he considered diabolical), pointed out the failure of the Church to do something about witchcraft:

We missionaries must not have any illusion about our Christians: witchcraft has still a great, almost unshakeable hold on them. We must not be surprised that the Chiefs and all men and women of good will are giving the *bamucapi* or witchhunters such an enthusiastic welcome: they see them as well-intentioned people keen on freeing the country from the underhand hateful activities of evil-intentioned people. Our Christian teaching does *not* do anything to rid the villagers of the threat of witchcraft. The stress is on to do something to free them of witchcraft. The *bamucapi* fulfils a practical function appreciated by the people.⁵²

After the mcape, other witchcraft eradicating movements swept through the country, on both wide and small scales. Some indigenous churches took up the quest of cleansing witches to reintegrate them back into the community after confession. In the 1950s up to the beginning of the 1960s, people brought heaps of charms to Alice Lenshina in the Lumpa Church in both Protestant and Catholic territories, be

⁵² Kabunda Mission Diary, October 14, 1934.

it on their own accord or through group pressure.⁵³ They confessed, were baptized and reintegrated into the community. Seeing the enormous success of Lenshina, some priests tried out similar initiatives, inviting people to bring their charms and be prayed over. Very few people came, if any. The Catholic Church by now had firmly established itself in the realm outside the local discourses on witchcraft, spirits and other spiritual forces that intruded into people's lives. This image could not be changed by means of one or two isolated initiatives, nor would it proceed without the help of charismatic and gifted persons who could connect to people on a deep symbolic and spiritual level.

Church workers were well aware that charms also remained important for Christians, who continued to use them for securing love and good luck, good businesses, protection or just for hunting. Nevertheless, there had developed in the Church a bias to look at those accused of witchcraft as sheer victims of wrong accusations. Witch finders, according to the church discourses, would conveniently seek out the rich and successful and share the spoils. They would also mix into the equation some of the elderly and poor, or the beggars who were becoming a nuisance to their own families, to give further credibility to their divination practices. The Church looked at the accused as totally innocent of all witchcraft, sometimes overlooking that some of the accused were power-hungry, aggressive, and surrounding themselves with an aura that inspired fear. Declaring them as innocent came across as condoning their behavior. Some of the accused people were leaders in the church councils, and the priests seemed to be protecting them.

Nevertheless, the mcape movements showed that concepts of witchcraft were changing and were even adapting to a Christian framework and to judicial conditions that had outlawed the killing of witches. Pre-colonial Zambian approaches to witchcraft had left little chance for the witch to be "converted" to a life where witchcraft is abandoned. If the inherited soul of a person was itself rotten, then there was little chance for redemption for a real witch. Such ideas were chang-

53 See Gordon's recent studies (2013, 2011) concerning the internal narratives of Lenshina's followers, and Binsbergen, *Religious Change in Zambia*; Hinfelaar, *Bemba Speaking Women of Zambia*; and Jean-Loup Calmettes, "The Lumpa Sect, Rural Reconstruction, and Conflict," Archives of the Missionaries of Africa. (Lusaka: FENZA 1982).

ing. The mcape movements illustrated to people that witches could be redeemed; through cleansing rituals, their evil forces could be removed from their bodies. Such popular movements were adaptations of beliefs to new colonial situations and to new spiritual understandings. Priests and church leaders have seen in the triumph of the mcape movements a relapse of Christians into paganism. In hindsight, one can also describe their triumph as a sign that Christian concepts of redemption had partly re-molded Zambian concepts of the human person. Concepts of witchcraft were not static.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE DEVIL IN THE MODERN PARADIGM

Starting from the 1950s, the devil disappears from the mission diaries. Missionaries saw less and less of the devil in the spiritual forces that affected people and more of a world of superstitious beliefs that needed to be eradicated — not through engagement with such forces but through the provision of modern education and healthcare. While in earlier paradigms the devil had been omnipresent in non-Christian cultures, he now nearly disappeared. Many thought that African epistemologies would slowly disappear with the arrival of the Western world in Africa (modern education, healthcare, scientific outlook, systems of law and institutions of the nation state), with the consequence that the ng'anga or mucapi would also lose the very ground he/she stood on. Many pastors feared to step on this ground and toss around with its forces; they feared that such an engagement would validate the very worldview that one was fighting. Also, many local Zambian Catholic priests and pastoral workers were afraid to step on this terrain, which was governed by its own sets of ritual authorities from which the Church had for a long time already excluded itself.

In many pre-Christian African cultures, God was approached either directly or through intermediaries. John Mbiti described in his reconstructions of African religions how people lived in an awareness of God's presence, though God was not approached lightly outside of calamitous situations. Intermediate spirits (of nature and of the dead/ the ancestors) interfered into the details of daily life.⁵⁴ The

54 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.,

modern “enlightened” outlook on the world and on human life made God more remote to people’s spiritual problems. Sickness and disease in this outlook are biological in nature, not spiritual; a sick person is referred to hospitals and clinics, not to priests. Frightening dreams and inner voices became a matter to be investigated in the realm of psychology, not spirituality. Moral decay in society became analyzed in reference to economic poverty and social change, not their spiritual causes and consequences. The rain that traditional religion had connected directly to God as his entry-point into human history was no longer a concern for communitarian prayers but for radio announcements by the meteorologists. Issues of human fertility also were transferred from the spiritual world into the competence of the modern medical establishment. The answers that the Church was giving to people’s spiritual problems often became secular answers. People suffering attacks from witchcraft or demons needed counselling, not prayers. Church membership continued to grow, but for spiritual problems, people went to diverse prophets and the ever-growing armies of traditional healers with different sets of healing paradigms, outside the Catholic gates.

While the devil disappeared from Catholic theology, he did not disappear from people’s minds but continued to develop into a powerful category of thought. Apocalyptic descriptions of the devil or of biblical beasts with many heads and horns in a cosmic battle threatening the annihilation of a chosen community have appealed to Christians in stressful situations, who went on to apply them to the political realities that they experienced. Jehovah Witnesses waited for the Biblical Armageddon, the global fight of God against wickedness and evil to restore heaven on earth for the selected just ones. Such images gave them strength in their resistance, active or passive, against the colonial regime and the authority of chiefs and village structures. Lumpa adherents, the followers of Alice Lenshina whom they believed had risen from the dead to bring a message from heaven, applied apocalyptic images to the hostilities they encountered in their environment. Such images inspired them to enter the final destructive war against their enemies (1964). The Mutima Church of Emilio Mulolani (founded in the 1950s) regarded sin as

1969), 29-91; Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, [1975] 1991), 45-81.



the blood of Satan; such images helped members to defy social and gender roles. Seventh Day Adventists applied the beasts of the books of Daniel and Revelation directly to the Catholic Church. Catholic responses have remained on a defensive side. Priests and catechists explained them away as historically referring to a remote Roman or other empire, or by ignoring the debate altogether as irrational or fundamentalist. Catholic responses to evil did not meet the symbolic layer on which people engaged with it, and they sidelined or downplayed Biblical images of the devil (beast, dragon, serpent, battles, Anti-Christ etc.) that were important in the theology of other Christian denominations or sects.

CONCLUSION

Christian missionaries (and long before them Muslim traders) brought the concept of the devil to Zambia, but they did not invent notions of evil. People were well acquainted with ideas of utter evil — the concept of the witch is one of them. The images of the devil that the missionaries spread needed to come alive through associations with people's own experiences and frameworks. If they did not, the devil remained an abstract spirit — hardly relevant for daily life. Where they met, however, demons became meaningful for people in ways that went beyond the catechism lessons taught by the missionaries. African Christians applied the concept of the devil to different situations than did the missionaries. They recognized his presence in witchcraft and the witches, while missionaries saw him in the opposite camp, in the witch finders, diviners and healers, as well as in cultural practices that were not easily reconciled with the demands of the Gospel. Later, when the official Catholic Church became rather silent about the devil in its pronouncements, he remained a persuasive category of thought in local discourses and theologies that people applied to various political constellations.

Many missionaries, though themselves believing in the existence of the devil and of demons, placed African spiritual beliefs much more often into the world of false superstitions. Local African church leaders, catechists and teachers, in contrast, who gave up or reinterpreted their beliefs in traditional spirits within a Christian framework, did not just substitute old African beliefs with modern *secular* notions of causalities, but continued to look for *spiritual* interpretations of their local events.

Notions of the devil and of demons were very persuasive in times when Christians found themselves under fierce opposition, struggles and personal attacks. Local leaders and catechists in Zambia were on the battle line in their home villages; the notion of devils could become more persuasive for them than for the missionaries themselves.

When missionaries stopped to believe in the existence of the devil, or when the devil was seen as an abstract theological concept, missionary endeavours lacked the direct engagement with many spiritual perils that afflicted people. Missionaries, upon their arrival in Zambia, shared the view that Africans lived in fear of witchcraft and spirits. With some exceptions, their response was largely indirect; they saw the solution to the problem not in individual battles with concrete spiritual powers, but in modern education and people's inclusion into the sacramental life of the Church. Local diviners and healers, in contrast, were directly involved in people's concrete spiritual battles with witchcraft or spirits. The official Church had only a partial presence in the discernment processes that guided people, including the Christians, through these battles; often the Church was in fact totally excluded, or had excluded itself. Notions about spiritual evil were shaped in these concrete interactions outside the gate of the Church.

While missionaries and local church leaders regarded many African spirits as demons or placed them into the sphere of superstitions, African Christians likewise often held situational and pragmatic opinions about the spirit world. The landscape of spiritual notions remained complex. The Church's framework is accepted when people expect help within a Christian narrative. These same people, when visiting a traditional healer, may appreciate an analysis of the spirit world in very different terms and frameworks. Hence the urgency of the task to make Christian and traditional frames of reference meet.

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