

On Knowing Humanity Journal

Creating a Christian faith-based approach to anthropology, incorporating insights from theology into ethnography and analysis, and allowing religiously committed anthropologists to speak freely of the ways in which their commitments inform their theory and practice. Raising new questions and lines of research on subjects such as: the significance of humanity's unique calling in nature for personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice. Reincorporating teleology, in the sense of purpose, into scientific understanding, inviting dialogue between anthropologists and theologians of all persuasions into a deeper understanding of the human condition, and encouraging the doing of anthropological research and writing through the eyes of faith.

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Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC

Robert J. Priest¹, Abel Ngolo² and Timothy Stabell³

Against earlier predictions, witch accusations are proliferating and flourishing in many modern, urban, and Christian environments. And they are taking new forms. One dramatic change involves *who is accused*, with children now often the prime suspects when misfortunes occur. Another dramatic change relates to *who is consulted* when witch suspicions are present. Rather than non-Christian diviners or traditional healers, many now consult Christian pastors and prophets for help in identifying witches and dealing with them. Based on a survey of 713 pastoral leaders in Kinshasa from all major church traditions, and on supplemental qualitative research, this report 1) explores the profile of accused children, 2) identifies what these children are accused of, 3) identifies what sorts of evidence are used to establish the guilt of the accused child, and 4) considers the consequences to the child of being labeled a witch. Furthermore, this report explores what it is that church leaders believe, teach, and practice in relationship to child-witch allegations—considering the role of church tradition and theological education on their patterns of understanding and engagement. Specifically, we identify and examine two broad paradigms widely present in Kinshasa churches—a “witch diagnosis and deliverance paradigm” and a “child protection paradigm.” We consider some grassroots strategies of transformative engagement engaged in by *l'Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse* [EPED] leaders, and end by inviting African theological and pastoral leaders into a conversation about the impact of theological understandings, congregational discourses, spiritual disciplines, and pastoral practices on the well-being and flourishing of vulnerable children.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study⁴

1.1 Introduction

In recent decades, human rights activists and organizations have expressed alarm at how frequently children

in various regions of the world are accused of being dangerous witches and treated as such. In prior eras witch accusations customarily targeted older adults. Children sometimes appeared in these earlier accounts, but usually only as victims of witchcraft or as witnesses

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⁴ We wish to express deep appreciation to the twenty individuals who carried out this survey research: Jean Alengo, Jacques Manzita, Néhémie Mukandama, John Kabunda, Abraham Fundasili, Médard Limboto, André Nshole, Sylvie Nkolomoni, Angèle Kimfuta, Rodin Mukwama, Simsas Siwakio, George Matungulu, Beya Bantu, Marcellin Omango, Kalubi Muneme, Roger Lambi, Jean Kimbeni, Valetin Ngiamu, Faustin Tshiebue, Bienvenu Banani. Without their commitment, dedication and hard work on behalf of the street children of Kinshasa and on behalf of this research, this research would never have been completed. They are truly heroes in the fight to protect Kinshasa's children. We also wish to thank the 713 pastoral leaders who took time to answer each question of the survey. Funding for the research was received from the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and from Stop Child Witch Accusations. Dr. Robert Priest and Rev. Abel Ngolo served as the primary research directors.

testifying against older adults. Children were infrequently the ones accused.⁵

Against all expectations, modernity has not led to the demise of witch accusations and retaliatory practices, but to their resurgence and reformulation. Revised understandings of witchcraft that have recently emerged increasingly focus suspicions on children.⁶ This development has been observed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Benin, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and in immigrant communities of Europe. Kinshasa is an influential epicenter⁷ of the new paradigm.

Furthermore, in a pre-Christian past, people characteristically brought their suspicions about witchcraft to the attention of traditional healers, diviners, and shamans, and depended on them to authoritatively interpret and address misfortunes understood as caused by witches. But scholars who

study recent developments related to child witchcraft highlight rather the current trusted role of Christian pastors, prophets, apostles, intercessors, and other church leaders in authoritatively addressing witchcraft suspicions and accusations.⁸

And yet most scholars who have researched child witch accusations, at best focus only a small part of their research on the church leaders themselves. By contrast, this report, and the research on which it is based, focuses centrally on the experiences, understandings, and practices of church leaders in Kinshasa as they pertain to child-witch accusations.

1.2 Witchcraft Accusations and Tragedies in Kinshasa

Kinshasa, with a population of over eleven million⁹, is the third-largest city in Africa (after Lagos and Cairo). A significant proportion of residents experience underemployment, poverty,¹⁰ family conflicts and

⁵Only rarely have anthropologists found traditional societies that regularly accused children of causing the misfortune of others through witchcraft (for such exceptional cases, see Brain 1970, Honigsmann 1989, Santos-Granero 2002, 2004, and Yengo 2008). In discussions (May 3-26, 2017 Kinshasa) with elderly informants from different Congolese ethnic groups who were drawing on their memories of village childhoods from decades earlier, some denied that in their group (Luba, Ngombe) children were ever accused of witchcraft. Others reported, that while rare, children in their ethnic group (Bakongo, Kanioka, Kituba, Mongo, Songe, Tetela) were occasionally accused of witchcraft, usually under the logic that witchcraft had been transmitted to them from an older witch in their family. So while the idea that children could be witches is not completely unprecedented in the DRC, the current central focus in Kinshasa on children as prime suspects, is new.

⁶Adinkrah 2011; Ballet, Lallau & Dumbi 2019; Barker 2016; Barry 1998; Bartholomew 2015; Bastian 2001; Biehl 2013; Cahn 2006; Chilimampungwa and Thindwa 2012; Cimpric 2010; De Boeck 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009; De Boeck and Honwa 2005; De Boeck and Plissart 2003, 2004; D'Haeyer 2004; Foxcraft 2007; Geschiere 1980; Hanson and Ruggiero 2013; La Fontaine 2009, 2012; Madungu Tumwaka 2002; Mayneri 2017; Molina 2005; Nwadinobi 2008; Oien 2006; Onuzulike 2013; Pereira 2011; Phiri 2009; Pirot 2004; Pull 2009; Ranger 2007; Riedel 2012; Snow 2017; Stobart 2006, 2009; Tabu 2008; Tate and Stauss 2006; Tonda 2008; Van der Meer 2013; Yengo 2008. Interestingly there are parallels with witch accusations in European history. Towards the end of the European witch trials, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many European children were prosecuted as witches (Henningsen 1996; Roper 2000; Walinski-Kiehl 1996; Willumsen 2013). According to Levack (2006a, 154) "child witches figured prominently in the last great witch hunts in Sweden, Augsburg and Austria." Levack (154-155) believes the increased prosecution of children contributed to "a general doubt that those accused were guilty" and thus "played a significant role in the decline and end of witchcraft" in Europe.

⁷La Fontaine (2009, 121) reports that the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the "earliest recorded site" of the recent epidemic of child witch accusations, with diasporas from the DRC carrying child-witch beliefs, accusations, and patterns of response with them to Europe and elsewhere. De Boeck (2009, 132-133) says the "production of child witchcraft" spread from Kinshasa across "Congo and indeed Africa and beyond" on an "unprecedented scale." He identifies Congolese diasporas in Africa and Europe as transmitting the "production of child witchcraft" largely through their Pentecostal churches and networks. De Pereira (2011, 203-205) reports that Angola's explosion of child witch accusations emerged first among Bakongo immigrants from the DRC. And while Stobart (2006, 12) documents child-witch accusations in the UK among immigrants with diverse backgrounds (from Angola, Burundi, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, as well as from the Caribbean and S. Asia), the largest number (over a third) were from the DRC.

⁸Adinkrah 2011; Ballet, Lallau & Dumbi 2019; Barker 2016; Blanes 2017; Bussien et. al. 2011; Cahn 2006; Chilimampungwa and Thindwa 2012; Cimpric 2010; Cohan 2011; De Boeck 2004, 2009; Foxcraft 2009, 2014; Groce and McGeown 2013; Hanson & Ruggiero 2013; La Fontaine 2009; Mayneri 2017; Molina 2005; Nwadinobi 2008; Pearson 2009; Pereira 2011; Pull 2009; Pype 2017; Riedel 2012; Schnoebelen 2009; Snow 2017; Stobart 2009; Tate and Stauss 2006; Tonda 2008; Yengo 2008.

⁹Populations of 150 Largest Cities in the World. *World Atlas*. 17 January 2018. Retrieved 18 November 2019 [<https://www.worldatlas.com/citypops.htm>].

¹⁰Ballet, Lallau and Dumbi (2019) report on research by Tollens (2003) indicating that half of Kinshasa's population eats only one meal a day, with a quarter of the population eating less than one meal per day.

breakups, medical crises, high levels of violence, and elevated emotional distress. Government infrastructure supports (electricity, water, education, sanitation, police protection, medical care, good roads) are weak. Fertility rates are high. Parents and other caretakers often struggle to adequately fulfill parental obligations to provide their children with food and education.

It is against this backdrop that thousands of children in Kinshasa are accused of having caused, through witchcraft, the misfortunes (poverty, infertility, sickness, and death) experienced by family members. Prior research¹¹ suggests the following profile of children most likely to be accused of being malign witches.

- Children living in a home with multiple young dependents, with unemployed or underemployed caregivers, and with an absence of one or both biological parents. Especially likely to be accused were orphans living with extended relatives and children living with one parent and one stepparent in a reconstituted family.¹²
- Children with physical disabilities and other health-related attributes (epilepsy, scabies, red eyes, thinness, pot-bellied) or psychological disorders (withdrawn, depressed).
- Children with unusual behaviors (talking to self, averted gaze, nightmares, bedwetting, sleepwalking, sleep-talking) or disapproved characteristics (stubbornness, aggression, disobedience, laziness, theft).

The consequences of being labeled a witch are serious. In their own homes, accused children experience neglect and physical abuse. Often family members take them to one of the “more than 2,000 churches” in Kinshasa that practice “deliverance” for witchcraft (Tate and Stauss 2006, 3) and where the children are sometimes subjected to prolonged periods without food or water, combined with a variety of cleansing practices such as forced ingestion of purgatives, removal of body hair, or even being burned with fire. Furthermore, as feared witches, many children are driven from their homes to the street. Experts have estimated that perhaps 60% of Kinshasa’s

twenty thousand or more street children are on the street, in part, as a result of having been labeled witches.¹³ On the street, such children experience violence, poverty, and hunger as well as theft, exploitation, and physical or sexual abuse from a wide variety of actors, ranging from older street youth to police (Tate and Stauss 2006, 15-44).

1.3 First-Hand Account: “It started with the death of our sister!”

Perhaps the easiest way for readers to gain an initial sense of the dynamics of child witch accusations is to read a first-hand account. In the following narrative,¹⁴ one observes many of the most common elements in such cases: 1) people’s effort to make sense of tragedy, 2) characteristic parental and family dynamics, and 3) the central role, and varying approaches, of church leaders in addressing witchcraft concerns.

Sylvain Mbaki’s Childhood Story



Sylvain Mbaki, a bookshop manager, tells his story to Mr. André Nshole, EPED Coordinator of Project Evaluation and Follow-up.

It started with the death of our sister! We were a family of five children. My mom brought my brother and me [into the family], and my step-dad also had two children that he brought in. My father was deceased. So the death of our sister is what started it.

¹¹ See Ballet, Lallau, and Dumbi 2019, 132-133; Cimpric 2010, 16-17; Molina 2005; Pereira 2011, 188-190; Snow 2017, 5; Stobart 2006, 19-20).

¹² Ballet et al. (2019, 132) reported that in their sample of 31 accused children, 68% were in reconstituted families, and that children living with both their biological parents were less likely to be accused than those living with at least one non-biological parent. In Madungu Tumwaka’s (2002) survey of 350 children accused of being witches, 80% “were living in families where the head of household was not a biological parent” (cited in Ballet et al., 132). See also De Boeck 2009, 136).

¹³ Schnoebelin 2009, 14-15. Estimates of Kinshasa’s street children range from a low of twenty or twenty-five thousand (Pirot 2004; Ballet 2019, 126, Schnoebelin 2009, 14-15), to as high as fifty (De Boeck (2009, 130) or even a hundred thousand (Cahm 2006, 414).

¹⁴ Recorded May 12, 2017 in Kinshasa.

We had to find the cause of her death. She died December 23rd, and her body was buried on the 30th. It was the holiday season, and in our culture, we need to eat during this time. But mom and dad said, "No, we need to find the reason!" So we started attending churches where they prophesy, to seek who was the cause of our sister's death.

I was in the choir in a Protestant church. But my dad went to a church of Molimo—where people prophesy. And since people in my church don't prophesy, my dad said we were hiding our witchcraft. He wanted the whole family to follow him. My mom said I should follow my dad to avoid problems. But I refused.

The economic life at home dropped. Eating became difficult, and out of all the family members, the only person who lost weight was me. So my step-dad started to think that was suspicious. "How come only you are losing weight?" One day he asked me: "When do you sleep? Do you dream? Do you see things?" I replied: "I don't see anything. I sleep like everyone. I dream like everyone."

But he told me, "At the church where we pray the prophetess told the whole family that 'there is a child in your house that is losing weight continuously. I invite you to bring him so that I can tell you what is wrong.'" So we went on Wednesday evening. But when the Prophetess saw me, she said, "The spirit doesn't work well during the Passion—the season when Christ suffered. So I can't prophesy now. Come back after Easter."

My dad did not want to wait, so he brought me to another church on Saturday. They spread us out under the sun. There were a lot of children there, on our knees, and the "mamas" were prophesying over each one. We needed to wait for our turn. I was on my knees from 10 AM to 4 PM, under the sun. But the ceremony closed before our turn came. We went home. The next Saturday our family went very early hoping to be the first they would prophesy over. My family placed me in front because I was the suspect. But when they finally got to me, my dad had already left. So my mom explained to the prophesying mamas, "here is my child. He keeps losing weight. We want to know what is wrong with him." The prophetess said, "Take him first to the hospital. Maybe they will know what is wrong." So when we got home, my mom explained that the prophetess said I should be taken to the hospital. My dad did not agree. He said, "Sometimes witches leave their witchcraft at the door of the church, so the prophetess doesn't see it. We need to go back again. I need to be there." So a third Saturday our whole family returned, very early. The prophetess told my mom "your child has been bewitched from when he was in the womb by his father's father." My mom

screamed, "I don't believe it!" She argued, "I never met my father-in-law. He was already deceased. Maybe you mean it is my current husband's father!" But the prophetess denied that. So they argued. But my dad said, "Yes, this child is a witch." And when we went home, he told all his friends, "This child is a witch." When my friends asked if it was true, I replied: "I don't know." My dad began pressuring my mom to take me to "people of the spirits" to remove the witchcraft. But my mom did not want to. We stayed like that until the 2nd of July, the day I picked up my report card for 10th grade, a Wednesday I think. The problem exploded at home that night. My dad started blaming my mom, "Ever since it was prophesied that your child is a witch, you haven't done anything. You're always home. You leave him just as he is. Soon I will get angry, and decide on my own!"

So my dad found another church and told the whole household to attend so that our home would have deliverance. Life at home was very difficult. We were living off my mom selling fufufu. My dad's job was not working out, so it was very hard. On Wednesday, without eating, while fasting, we went to that church. We found an unfinished church with a "Father" [pastor] and some kids. When we came in, they prayed for us, they sang, they prophesied. As I told you, my dad had two children, two daughters that he had before getting married to my mom. The prophets there said, "Mom and dad, both of your daughters here have been witches for a long time. Your oldest girl here is getting married soon, in the night, in the witch's world. Soon she will be married. So we need to cut their hair." So they cut off the hair of both girls. They covered them with white sheets and started to pray and prophesy, even hitting them, saying "Why don't you want to leave witchcraft? It's blocking your dad."

But since I was the one my dad suspected, he interrupted and said, "but look at this young man here. Look at him. We were told he is a witch." They replied, "No, we viewed him in the back area, and he was a little blurry. But we did a ceremony with water, and the blur went away." That is how we cleansed ourselves. They gave us each a bucket of salt and powder mixed in water to wash. They said this took off the "blur" they saw on me.

We were there for four days. The fifth day was to be the day of deliverance, so the whole household had to be present—while fasting. Dad went early with his daughters. We got there a little late with my mom. They gave us a potion [to drink] and told us this would enable us to purge ourselves. I was suspicious and said, "How can I drink this kind of water?" So I refused. Mom also refused. The prophets said to my dad, "Don't look for solutions with your wife and her

children because they are the ones causing your trouble. See how we are trying to deliver you, but they refuse to be cleansed.” His daughters complained, “Why is mom refusing to take [the potion]? We are taking it.” “Ah,” [mom said], “You think this water will deliver us!?” The girls reported to their dad [what my mom said]. When we got home, dad was angry. There was a big fight, and dad kicked me out of our home.

I was going to travel to Kimbansek to see if I could stay with my great aunt and uncle. But a brother from my church said, “Don’t leave. We need you in our choir. Stay.” So I lived with this brother for two years, while I completed 7th grade (premiere secondaire) and 8th grade (deuxieme secondaire). I told people at my church the situation, and they supported me in prayer. They rejected the accusations against me. If it were only up to me, I would have accepted everything people told me. But when pastors told me, “They are false prophets!” this gave me the boldness to not believe everything I was told.

Mom loved me a lot. When dad kicked me out, there was no peace at home, so dad divorced her. But dad didn’t have any money, and the children started to lose weight.

Eventually, he left for the village. My mom came to visit and learned what had happened. She took us all in, including my brothers and sisters from my dad’s house, because my dad had become irresponsible. We moved to Mwana, in the south of the Congo. She put us all in school. I even went to study theology. My mom paid for it. Until January, when my mom died.

Later, I helped my father financially and took care of him in the hospital. He never asked for forgiveness, but his attitude toward me changed.

Witch suspicions and accusations in the above account, as in virtually all such Kinshasa accounts, begin with an effort to make sense of mysterious misfortunes. The Christmas day death of Sylvain Mbaki’s sister and his family’s perpetual economic misfortunes demanded an explanation, a “reason.” But while cultures vary widely in their assumptions about how to explain misfortune, historically and globally the single most common causal ontology, according to anthropologist Richard Shweder, is an “interpersonal” causal ontology—an assumption that misfortunes are caused by other malignant people acting to cause harm through mysterious power.¹⁵ In short, interpersonal causal ontologies convert the “why” question into a “who” question. Thus Sylvain’s family declared, “We need to

find the *reason*! So we started attending churches where they prophecy to seek *who* was the cause of our sister’s death.”

In the above account, we also find a reconstituted family with multiple dependents in which each child lived with one biological parent and one step-parent, with the non-biological parent being the principal accuser, the one seeking confirmation of the witchcraft charge against a step-child. Rather than asking non-Christian traditional diviners to authoritatively identify the witch, this family (as with many in Kinshasa today), sought help from Christian churches that offer ministries claiming the power to identify child-witches, and to cleanse them of witchcraft.

Finally, this account illustrates the central roles and varying approaches of churches in addressing witchcraft suspicions, all within the context of a competitive religious market. Some, such as members of Sylvain’s Protestant church, defended him against witchcraft charges, encouraged him to disbelieve the charges, and took him in when his family expelled him. Other churches and their leaders offered specialized ministries involving special understandings and powers marketed to parents who suspect their children of being witches. And yet, even these churches, as the account makes clear, do not uniformly endorse parental suspicions. Thus one prophetess advised them to take their son to the hospital for a diagnosis of his problem. But the step-father was actively shopping for a church that would endorse his suspicions, either to cleanse his step-son of witchcraft or to endorse his justification for expelling the boy from home. In such a competitive religious market, churches whose leaders claim the knowledge and power needed for identifying and dealing with witches hold a special attraction for many.

1.4 The Meaning of “Witch” (and “Witchcraft”)

While English speakers will sometimes assume that there is a single clear meaning in the term “witch” or “witchcraft,” in fact, English speakers use these terms with discordant meanings. Just as the word “football” can be confusing in some conversations because Americans associate “football” with a completely different sport than everyone else does (Americans refer to what others call “football” as “soccer”), the word “witch” can likewise confuse when conversation partners have completely different referents in mind when they use the term. It is possible for two parties to use the same word, and to assume that effective communication is happening while failing to recognize that each party assumes different meanings. Thus it is

¹⁵ Shweder (2003) provides a systematic summary of a variety of causal ontologies present in different cultures (ranging from interpersonal causal ontologies, to moral, biomedical, astrophysical, etc.) and ranking them by relative frequency.

important to specify intended meanings.

In this report, the English term “witch” (or the French “sorcier/sorcière”) is not intended to reflect the full range of contemporary American or European meanings, but instead to reflect core meanings long present in the vocabulary of Congolese languages. An American or European practitioner of the neopagan religion Wicca will call herself a “witch” or “sorcière,” and may affirm a Wiccan ethic of “Do no harm.” But such a neopagan, feminist, New Age religiosity is an entirely different sort of thing from what is being considered in this paper when children are labeled “sorcier/sorcière” or “witch.”¹⁶ Across Congolese languages, one finds the idea that there is a named category of person that is malevolent and powerful, the mysterious cause of misfortune and death in those around them. That is, the essence of the identity is the notion of an evil person who harms others. Each language examined has a term for such a malign person (a “witch”), a related term for their practice or power (“witchcraft”), and a third term, a verb, to describe their harmful act (“to bewitch”). In Lingala, for example, there is the *ndoki* (the witch), *kindoki* (witchcraft), and *koloka* (to bewitch). In Tshiluba the witch is *muloji*, witchcraft is *buloji*, and “to bewitch” is *kuloa*. For further examples from Congolese languages see footnote.¹⁷

Most contemporary Americans and Europeans have never had neighbors, relatives, or colleagues attribute their misfortune to other persons thought to have harmed them through witchcraft. Even when Americans and Europeans experience tragic mis-

fortunes and setbacks, most have never had neighbors, relatives, or colleagues suggest to them that some nearby malignant person is to blame for the misfortune, caused through witchcraft. The result is that Americans and Europeans seldom use the term “witch” with the specificity implied by words like *ndoki*, *uchawi*, or *muloji*. Indeed, they will often apply the words “witch” or “witchcraft” to phenomena that Congolese languages linguistically differentiate from these concepts.

Congolese societies historically had a variety of named professional diviners, healers, and other magico-religious practitioners who publicly announced their identities and their professional services—with the stated goal of assisting clients. These were linguistically distinct from what we, in this report, are translating as “witch.” The Lingala *nganga* (traditional healer) is an altogether different identity from the Lingala *ndoki* (the witch). The Kisonge “witch” (*ndoshi*) is said to exercise the power of “witchcraft” (*butshi*) and acts “to bewitch” (*kulowa*) others. But the Kisonge *shalubuku* (“diviner”) is a completely different identity from the *ndoshi* (witch). The *shalubuku* (diviner) exercises the power of *lubuku* (“divination”), not the power of *butshi* (“witchcraft”), and acts “to divine” (*kubuku*) needed information, not “to bewitch” (*kulowa*) anyone. In none of the Congolese languages examined, is the normal role, power, and activity of traditional diviners and healers described using the same indigenous terms translated here as “witch,” “witchcraft,” or “to bewitch.” Rather, each Congolese language examined (see footnote) differentiated lexically the “witch” identity from the “traditional healer/shaman/diviner” identity.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a helpful comparison of terminology used in “first-world Neopaganism” with terminology common to Africa, see Hayes 1995.

¹⁷ Words for Witch, Witchcraft, and “To Bewitch.”

Language	witch	witchcraft	to bewitch
Kikongo	ndoki	kindoki	kuloka
Kanioka	muloj	buloj	kulow
Kisonge	ndoshi	butshi	kulowa
Lingala	ndoki	kindoki	koloka
Lomongo	boloki	iloka	oloka
Ngbaka	wi tunumo	tunumo	'danga
Ngombe	nwemba	demba	boako
Swahili	mulozi, mchawi	ulozi, uchawi	kuloga, kuchawi
Teke	moloo	ndoo	oloo
Tetela	doka	doka	tocha
Tshiluba	muloji	buloji	kuloa

¹⁸ Distinction between Diviners/Shamans/Healers vs Witches in Congolese Languages

Language	Diviner, Shaman, Healer, Feticheur	Witch, Sorcier/Sorcière
Kikongo (of Bas-Congo)	nganga-nkisi, umonanga-mambu, ngunza, n'sadisi	ndoki
Kanioka	nganga, nganga buk, lubuk	muloj
Kisonge	nganga, shalubuku	ndoshi
Kituba	nganga-kisi, nganga-ngombo	ndoki
Lingala	nganga-kisi, nganga	ndoki, ntshor
Lomongo	nkanga, akunda	boloki

In this report, we follow anthropological convention in attempting to retain the above distinction in our wording. We translate the identities of traditional magico-religious professionals who publically offer their special powers to assist clients as “traditional healers,” “shamans,” or “diviners.” But we reserve the English words “witch” and “witchcraft” for the identities of those thought to be the malign secret cause of misfortune in the lives of others, misfortunes ranging from poverty to bad luck, impotence, infertility, sickness, and death.

And yet it is not uncommon for English speakers to call shamans, traditional healers, and diviners “witch doctors” and to call their activities “witchcraft”—wording that anthropologists uniformly reject. That is, popular English-language usage of “witch” or “witchcraft” does not easily lend itself to precise translation of concepts from other languages. Thus when discussing the woman from Endor that King Saul consulted (I Samuel 28), English speakers will routinely refer to her as a “witch,” and French speakers will refer to her as a “sorcière.” But, to be anthropologically accurate, she is a diviner. In Kisonge terms, she is a *shalubuku* (a diviner), not a *ndoshi* (a witch). There is no biblical evidence that anyone attributed their misfortunes to this woman. Similarly, when the dictionary at the back of the TNIV Bible (published by Zondervan) defines “witchcraft” (p. 1167) as “the practice of predicting the future by interpreting omens, examining the livers of sacrificed animals, and contacting the dead—among other techniques” (1167), this is extremely confusing since all of these practices are the practices of diviners, shamans, and traditional healers, not of witches. And yet, this was how the English word “witchcraft” was defined by the American publishers of this Bible. A key point to bear in mind is that most Europeans and Americans have minimal, if any, first-hand exposure to witch-accusation discourses, and thus typically use words like “sorcier” or “witch” and “witchcraft” in imprecise and ambiguous ways that confuse and conflate two culturally distinct

sorts of identity.

Another complication is that the term “witch” in popular English usage often refers only to females. And yet the majority of indigenous words for “witch” in Congolese languages, such as *ndoki* or *mchawi*, are applied to persons of either gender. Some anthropologists have responded translationally by using the word “wizard” anytime a male is in view, and “witch” any time a female is in view. But for us to follow this pattern would misleadingly imply there are two different indigenous categories, differentiated by gender. For most Congolese languages this is not the case. It is possible for either a man or a woman to be a *ndoki*. Thus this report follows a widespread anthropological convention of using the single term “witch” for both males and females. Our references to “child-witches” relate to boys and girls.

An additional complication relates to an old anthropological distinction. Some English-speaking anthropologists, following the lead of Edward Evans-Pritchard (1937), have suggested using two words in English to differentiate two possible categories of person thought to be the evil cause of harm in the lives of others. They suggested reserving the English term “witch” for the reputedly evil person (male or female) said to harm others through inborn psychic power, and the term “sorcerer” or “sorceress” for the reputedly evil person believed to harm others through a magical manipulation of objects and words using learned magical techniques. This distinction in English is an awkward one. The English suffix “-craft,” added to “witch,” makes “witch” an odd word to reserve for the person that has no “craft,” only psychic power. And in English usage, “sorcerer,” rather than being reserved purely for the person whose core identity involves causing harm magically, has sometimes confusingly been used, even by prominent anthropologists (e.g., Levi Strauss 1963), for the professional shaman who offers his services to help heal clients.¹⁹ Other leading anthropologists have critiqued the witch vs. sorcerer

Lugbara	odjou	oleu
Ngbaka	wi de so	wi doa, wi tunumo
Ngombe	nganga	mwemba
Sakata	muu-ni-geee	ngee, ilue
Swahili	mfumu, mganga	mulozi, mchawi, muchawi
Teke	mfumu, nghaa	moloo, nga mfura
Tetela	wetshi	doka
Tshiluba	muena mbuku, muena manga	muloji
Tshokwe	mbuki, mukwatshisa, mukwayithumbo	mukwawanga

¹⁹ Because some anthropologists confusingly apply the term sorcerer to what others would simply call shamans (public magico-religious professionals that assist clients with their needs), such anthropologists will sometimes add the modifier “assault”—as in “assault sorcerer” or “assault sorcery” (Whitehead and Wright 2004; Wright 2015) to differentiate the identity of malicious persons thought to mysteriously and secretly cause harm to others.

typology as unhelpful (e.g., Turner 1964, Shweder 2003). This distinction is present within relatively few cultures and languages. Thus, this anthropological discussion occurs primarily in English-language writings, not French.²⁰ Initial anthropological hypotheses about the supposed consequences of a culture affirming one ideology of occult power vs. another, were contestable (Turner 1964). And this typology failed to exhaust the possibilities. That is, it is possible to accuse another person of causing harm 1) through inborn psychic power, 2) through learned use of magic (not involving spirits), but also 3) through forms of empowerment by sentient spirits. And indeed, under the impact of Christianity, ideologies of purely psychic human powers, or impersonal power manipulated magically, increasingly give way to, or are incorporated into, new hybridities involving ideologies of demonic power—what Onyinah (2004) aptly refers to as “witch-demonologies.” The underlying psycho-cultural pattern of witch-accusations continues, whereby misfortunes are attributed to malignant neighbors, relatives, or colleagues, but formal ideologies about the precise nature of their supposed secret powers are often ambiguous and change over time. In short, this older distinction between witches vs. sorcerers is only occasionally maintained in current anthropological writings because this distinction seldom seems relevant to observed patterns of vocabulary usage in the contemporary world. And this would seem particularly true in Kinshasa today.

In this report, while we will refer to various ideas about how witches exercise power, we will not make any specific concept of power foundational to our definition of “witch.” Rather, any time one human being, male or female, is accused of being the malignant cause of harm to another based on some sort of occult power, and then identified as *ndoki*, *ntshor*, *mchawi*, *muloji*, *oleu*, or *sorcier*, we will translate this as “witch.” And whatever actions or power they are said to exercise in accomplishing such harm, we will refer to as “witchcraft.” We will not apply these words (“witch,” “witchcraft,” “bewitch”) analytically to the normal identities and specified roles and activities of traditional healers, shamans, and diviners. Our usage is consistent with current anthropological practice, as well as with Congolese traditional linguistic distinctions.

A final complication is that under the influence of Christianity, many Congolese Christians today insist that these traditional Congolese linguistic distinctions

mislead. Traditional diviners and healers only pretend to help others, while in fact working to cause harm. They are thus, the argument sometimes goes, actually witches (Wallo Mutsenga 2013). Later in this article, we will consider ways in which Christianity has been used to reconfigure older understandings of witchcraft. But even under such revised usage, the core charge when labeling someone a witch is that they cause harm to others.

When someone is accused of being one of these “witch” identities (*ndoki*, *ndoshi*, *oleu*, *ngee*, *ntshor*, *mwemba*, *muloki*, *muloj*, *buloz*, *murogi*, *akut*, *maye*, *umthakathi*, *mchawi*, *mfiti*), the core offense of which they are accused is that they have caused, through evil occult power, someone else’s misfortune, poverty, infertility, sickness, or death. An orphan accused of having caused his parents’ death, to be clear, is accused of being a murderer. Thus, the central accusation whenever a witch label is applied to some person is that this person is the cause of misfortune, morbidity, or mortality in the lives of others. They are understood as destroyers of life and human flourishing. Such labels are consequential. Those labeled in this way are feared and often hated.

1.5 The Critical Role of Pastors and Churches

As Kinshasa residents struggle to make sense of the vicissitudes they experience, it is frequently to the teaching and preaching of church leaders that they turn. And Kinshasa pastors often encourage their listeners to interpret their misfortunes as caused by neighbors or family members that are secretly witches. Not infrequently church leaders remind their listeners that even the children living in their own homes might be witches that are to blame for family tragedies.²¹

Furthermore, other than schools, churches in Kinshasa probably work with more children than any other social institution. Not only are many children regularly brought to church with their families, but families also bring their children to church “intercessors,” “prophets,” and pastors for spiritual counsel and prayer, especially when suspicions of witchcraft are involved. In the past, people approached traditional diviners and healers (with identities listed in footnote 15 above) for help in identifying whether someone was a witch, and for help in counteracting witchcraft. Today many people prefer to approach church leaders for this same help. And many church

²⁰ The French word *sorcier*, despite its apparent similarity to the English word *sorcerer*, does not correspond to the narrower meaning of “sorcerer” used by English-speaking anthropologists.

²¹ Evidence for this comes from our survey results to be explored later in this paper, but also in pastoral writings on the subject. For samples of the writings of local Kinshasa pastors that do this, see Wallo Mutsenga 2013; Kigalu Mangala 2008, 2013; or Kalonji Mbuyi 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014.

leaders do claim the ability to know who is a witch and how to fix the problem. Indeed, churches today, for good or ill, arguably more than any other social institution, play a central role in influencing people's understandings and ideas about child-witches, and their responses to children perceived to be witches.²²

Child Witch Deliverance



May 2017, Kinshasa. Photo by EPED.

While many scholars and human rights activists have stressed the negative effects of church involvement with witch accusations and treatment, others have suggested that churches are uniquely positioned to make a difference for good, when actively and rightly engaged on behalf of child protection and care.²³ The following first-hand account²⁴ by a Kinshasa pastor, Josué Mabélé, illustrates such an alternative pastoral role:

Pastor Josué Mabélé's Story



Pastor Josué Mabélé tells his account to Mr. Jean Alengo Jean of EPED

Christophe and Christian were cousins, 15 and 12 years old, whose families sent them to Kinshasa to further their education.²⁵ Their host father was the biological father of Christophe and the uncle of Christian. Initially, he was pleased to receive them, and for a while, all went well. But this man's current wife was step-mother to these boys. The couple could not have kids, but the wife came into the marriage with a daughter from a prior relationship. Shortly after the boys came to live with them, the father began to experience economic hardships.

The stepmother then accused the boys of causing their problems through witchcraft.²⁶ The two boys denied they were witches, but the mother influenced her husband (to suspect them of witchcraft). They mistreated them, deprived them of food, and moved their mattresses and clothes outside the house, forcing them to leave. The boys took refuge in an empty unfinished house.

One of my church members found out about their situation and took in the boys. He fed and cared for them. But then he approached me, explained the

²² Ballet, Lallau and Dumbi 2019; Cimpric 2010; De Boeck 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009; De Boeck and Honwa 2005; De Boeck and Plissart 2003, 2004; La Fontaine 2009; Molina 2005; Pereira 2011; Riedel 2012; Snow 2017; Stobart 2006, 2009; Tate and Stauss 2006; Tonda 2008. According to at least some observers, the child-witch phenomenon is more prevalent in majority Christian communities than in Muslim ones. See Cimpric 2010, 15. Dr. Samuel Kunhiyop, the Nigerian leader of one of Africa's largest evangelical denomination's (ECWA), suggested (personal conversation, March 5, 2016, Nairobi) that in Nigeria those attending Christian churches are more likely to be accused of witchcraft by fellow-Christians than those attending a Muslim mosque are to be accused by fellow Muslims. If true, this is a pattern that needs to be better understood. More research comparing Christian and Muslim populations might be helpful to our understandings of relevant dynamics.

²³ See, for example, Aguilar Molina 2005; Pearson 2009; Pull 2009.

²⁴ Recorded May 6, 2017 in Kinshasa.

²⁵ From Mbandaka (in the province of Équateur) to live in Kinshasa (Mombebe Square in Limete).

²⁶ She had earlier accused Christophe's older brother of witchcraft, leading to his ejection from the home, and had reportedly heard rumors that Christian had been accused of witchcraft by others. So here she accused both together.

situation, and clarified that he was not able to afford to care adequately for them. He asked if I would take them into my home and care for them. I agreed and welcomed them into my home.

When we first took them into our home, they were very skinny. Their health was bad. People were saying, "See, witches usually have poor health." But when we took them in, and brought them into our church, and cared for them, they started to change right away. Before long, they were in good health and were developing normally.

Our goal was to reinsert them in their families. By the grace of God and his blessing, both boys have been reinserted in their families with peace restored and where they are comfortable. We keep in touch with them. Christophe is back with his biological father, and Christian is with his biological mother. They are attending school. Both are very smart kids, "A" students, valedictorians. As we speak, Christophe is taking his SAT, and his younger brother is in 8th grade. They are doing well.

Pastors exercise significant cognitive and moral authority in Kinshasa. And, as we shall see, how they exercise such authority in the context of child witch suspicions has significant potential either for good or ill.

1.6 The Vision and Mission of EPED: The Organization Carrying Out This Research

This research was carried out by the staff of EPED, *l'Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse*, under the supervision of Révérend Abel Ngolo (Secrétaire général-représentant légal of EPED) in partnership with Robert J. Priest and Timothy Stabell, and with financial support from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School's "Henry Center" and from "Stop Child Witch Accusations." EPED is a national non-governmental and non-profit organization based in Kinshasa, whose mission is to contribute to the protection, welfare, and safety of children with a view to preventing all forms of ill-treatment and abuse within families and in society at large. Its vision is for a Congolese society in which every child is loved, healthy, educated, safe, and free to realize all the potentialities that God has given them.

But while this vision and mission are largely shared by other sister organizations that focus on child welfare in Kinshasa (such as REEJER and CATSR),²⁷ EPED is an explicitly faith-based organization that works closely

with a network of pastors. Its staff is composed of pastors, as well as of nurses, social workers, and educators. And it retains a central focus on the role of pastors and churches in problems related to child-witch accusations, but also on pastors and churches as key to the promotion of healthy understandings and practices related to children, both in families and the church. That is, it aspires to bring change by impacting churches and church leaders.

EPED Worker Assisting Child



14-year-old Exaucée²⁸, after eviction from her home as a witch, receives help from Mrs. Liliane Suaku, EPED social worker, with the goal of family reintegration.

In the following first-hand account,²⁹ a pastor whose prior ministry was focused centrally on eliciting child-witch confessions describes how EPED influenced him, leading to a fundamental shift in his approach to children accused of being witches. That is, this extended case illustrates some of the church dynamics in Kinshasa that human rights activists have rightfully been alarmed over. But where secular human rights organizations have had limited success in persuading pastors to change their views, this account illustrates how the faith-based model of engagement carried out by EPED can bring deep transformations within the thinking and practice of Christian pastoral leaders.

²⁷ Réseau des Educateurs et Jeunes de la Rue (REEJER) and Comité d'Appui au Travail Social de Rue (CATSR).

²⁸ This name is a pseudonym.

²⁹ Recorded May 11, 2017 in Kinshasa.

Pastor Jean's Story



Pastor Jean³⁰ tells his story
to Pastor Faustin Tshiebue,
Deputy Executive Director of EPED

My name is Pastor Jean. Since 2001, I have pastored a church in the municipality of Njili. But, before I tell you about my ministry—the ministry that EPED helped me understand was wrong—I will share my birth story since it influenced me.

My dad was married to my aunt, with whom he had a son. When my aunt was in the hospital, her sister (who was my mother) came from the village to help out. She was twelve years old. My dad got her pregnant. This created conflicts in the family and they tried to abort the baby. But it did not work out. Three months after I was born, they sent my mom back to her village. I learned I was illegitimate when I was six years old. I suffered under the weight of it, never knowing a mother's love. I was blamed for everything negative that happened. For example, I was blamed as a thief every time something would disappear in the house. They would buy clothes for my siblings, but not for me. So I became a professional thief. There were no secret hiding places from me. I knew about all the hiding places they used. It got to where I started stealing shoes in the neighborhood and selling them in the market. When the neighbors complained, my dad humiliated me by making me kneel in front of everyone, and my brothers nicknamed me "Jaskram." My dad took a knife, put it in the fire, and sliced my back. I cried and screamed. They took me to the hospital. There was a scandal, to the point where they arrested my dad and took him to court, asking me if they should incarcerate him. I said, "No, just let him go."

I have a scar right here, from the knuckles he hit me with when I was eight. The scar is still here. I have another scar here, from his whip. They were unbelievably insane whippings. Later I rebelled, and said to my dad, "Am I the one who slept with my mom, that I should deserve such suffering?" Today, I

am bearing your burden. I have scars all over me, on my legs, my head—you burnt my back, look at all these scars. I prefer today to live outside this house rather than living within the family. I left my parents' house when I was 14.

Much later, when I became a pastor, this childhood still had an impact on me. Even when I would receive children, I did not love them. Since I was working in the prefecture of Njili, many children were brought to me. I would look in their eyes, and if their eyes were light brown, I would say they were witches. When I saw kids with ringworm and scabs on their heads, I considered them witches. If a child had a strong smell, the same conclusion. If a child during prayer time was making gestures with their hands, that was another sign they were a witch. They would move their fingers as if on a phone call to another world. "Cabalistic pandemonium," I would tell the person assisting me, "you see, he's giving a call, he's a witch."

All of these things made me one of the most famous pastors. People started to consider my church as the church to discover child witches. They would bring children in large numbers, and I would pray for them until they were delivered. That became my small market, helping the parents of the children. Parents were bringing me money because every deliverance requires a special offering. Every work generates abundance. I had a job and it required remuneration. Pay was needed for the work to go forward. [This was also] getting me into an acceptable social standing, financially speaking. What hurt me the most was seeing how many kids were left out in the street, because some would not confess.

But others were confessing—since I forced them to. Sometimes I would press on their eyes to force them to admit. Sometimes I would have them drink vegetable oil. I would have them fast [up to] seven days. If you don't admit before that time ends, I would force you to tell me, "what was 'your ride' [to the other world]?" And the child would say, "I fly with this stick." Others would bring me their fufu spoon... I would burn these tools in daylight. It was making me famous. Others would tell me, "See this cut [on my body]. It's like my pocket. When I go out at night, I fill it with meat." I would tell their mother, "See, I just uncovered him." Others I would put through the process of deliverance, and after the third day, I would make them drink vegetable oil. Of course, if you fast and then drink vegetable oil, you will throw up. When they threw up, I would say, "See, he just threw up what we were looking for."

Sometimes I locked children in the church. I would tie them, and even chain them, to a pole.

³⁰ This name is a pseudonym.

Others I would tie their feet so they would not leave. I wouldn't let them sleep at night, because if they can't sleep, then they can't go to work [in the witch world]. I told myself they were living every day to go to work around midnight to come back at 4 AM, so if I didn't let them sleep, they would be absent at work, until they were fired. That's the way it was. We had high benches without back support. If we were praying, I would have them sit on the bench. If they dozed off, they would fall. I would put them back on the bench, which was quite high. I put them on the bench so they wouldn't sleep. I wouldn't let them doze off. If they dozed off, that meant they had left. So if I kept them awake for 2 or 3 days, these absences would cause them to be fired and lose their [witch] jobs. That's the way I was doing it. It was a form of torture—physical and moral torture.

If a child did not admit [to being a witch], I would tell the parents to kick him out because he would be a danger to his family. "He will set you back." Even in the church, I was kicking them out. If you refuse to open your heart to me, I would kick you out of the church. If you refused deliverance, I would kick you out. Through these practices, a lot of children were kicked out. They were many. Others were beaten. I would beat them. Nobody had mercy on me [when I was a child]. I was born and grew up suffering. So that's why I beat them uncontrollably.

Something even worse happened when I married my wife. Six months after we were married, her seven-year-old son came to live with us. One day I told my wife, "this child is working with darkness." She started crying. We had a fight. Since [the problem] was in my own house, it was something I couldn't address, so I took him to another pastor. That pastor told me, "this child is a high-level Ndika witch at a point of no return. He will never leave his witchcraft." These high levels, Ndika or Koba, were categories that I told parents to separate from. Because they could kill you, destroy your jobs, destroy your family, disintegrate the household. It's better to get rid of them. Leave them in the street because it's better to get rid of a rotten tomato than to have more rotten tomatoes because of [contamination from] the first one. That was my principle.

When that pastor informed me of the level of witchcraft of my adoptive son, which he wouldn't agree to let go of, I told my adoptive son, "you have two choices, abandon witchcraft, or else!" I started torturing the child. I tortured him, tortured him, and kicked him out. I said, "Let him return to the family of my wife's parents where he came from." When he returned, since that label was accompanying him, my family-in-law concluded that if the pastor who is considered the "doctor of deliverance" of child

witches got rid of his child, that child must be of a very high level of witchcraft. "So how can we, that are not doctors, take care of him, and deliver him." They also kicked him out. He started to live at Saint Therese, collecting charcoal. He would pick it up and sell it. And my wife would be weeping at night thinking about her child being left out like that—until she went herself to bring her child back. But this co-living did not work out. This time, he ran away. When he ran away, he ended up in an orphanage in Bamdale County. From Bamdale, they would come to me to reason with me: "You are a pastor, you are a man of God . . ." My heart was softened, but I still couldn't accept the idea of living with a child witch.

But glory to God, one day, I met Pastor Faustin. We started hanging out, and one day, he gave me a set of questions that hit me like a hammer because it regarded child witches. When he told me to answer in a written way, I answered. But I did not answer sincerely because it was something like piercing me with a spear. When I answered, I gave it back to them and thought, "Get out of my face with those things." But then Pastor Faustin invited me, "We have a conference of EPED concerning child witches that would interest you." He and his wife did this in a way that insisted I come. I went unwillingly. When I went, I heard the teachings and training. I was so moved that I cried. I cried very much, and said, "My God!"

When I went back home, I apologized to my wife. We had to find that child that became a child of the streets. We looked for him and brought him home. I asked my wife for forgiveness. Today my wife and I are living in a good way. We are living in peace with our child. I am supporting him. I do not think evil about him anymore. I do not have nightmares about him anymore. This is due to the influence of EPED and their teachings on me. I let go of the practices I was doing in the church. I praise God that today I am free.

My sharing openly with you is like paying back a debt of the wrongs I did. May God bless EPED by giving them means, financial means, because this is not easy work. Those children are complicated. To take a child off the street, to put him back into a family setting, to have him back in church, to put him back into a social setting requires a lot of means and effort. EPED has helped many children.

It helped my own family. My family is living in peace because of EPED. EPED has been a huge blessing. I am being honest. Knowing that God forgave me since it was out of ignorance that I was doing these things, I feel free before God. I have gotten to the place where I love kids. I am a protector of kids. Today if you want to hurt a child, I defend the child, even if the child is being labeled a child-witch. I am not pleased by it anymore, because it was

something I did from anger, because of the way I was born. Today, if God blesses me, I want to be among the host families receiving abandoned and rejected kids. I want to support them and share their suffering and the suffering of their parents.

The above account illustrates both challenges that EPED is confronting and some of the hoped-for outcomes of its work. Thus, EPED was well-positioned and motivated to partner on this research, hoping to benefit from the research findings as it goes through its own internal review and planning process.

1.7 Aims and Goals of This Study

This research examines the ways in which Kinshasa pastors are engaging the child witch phenomenon. It is expected that research results will be of interest to scholars (such as anthropologists, world Christianity scholars, or theologians) and to a wide variety of more applied stakeholders (human rights activists, church leaders, NGOs) interested in the welfare of these children. And because African church leaders play trusted roles in helping others understand and engage witch allegations, we hope above all that this research provides a helpful foundation for engaging the community of African theological and pastoral leaders in a conversation about the impact of theological understandings, congregational discourses, spiritual disciplines, and pastoral practices on the well-being and flourishing of vulnerable children.

This research surveys pastors of Kinshasa on the subject of child witches, and addresses the following questions: What have pastors directly observed concerning child witch allegations? How many accused children have they had contact with, and of what age and gender? What is the profile of those most frequently identified as witches? How does this compare with witch accusations directed at adults? What harms are child witches accused of causing? What were the factors seen as evidence of guilt? What specific practices are carried out with such children in the context of church deliverance ministries? To what extent do church discourses (prayers and sermons) reference (and reinforce) the dangerous reality of child witches, and in what ways? What do pastors believe and teach about the alleged power and guilt of child witches said to have harmed others through witchcraft? To what extent do pastors benefit through a ministry of deliverance for child witches? To what extent do

pastors and churches protect children from witch accusations? Are they aware of the Congolese law making it a crime to accuse a child of being a witch? With what implications? To what extent, and in what ways, do churches work to help children become reintegrated into the families that rejected them as witches? To what extent do churches provide medical care, educational support, or foster homes for such children? How do theological education and denominational or theological tradition impact the beliefs and practices of pastors and their churches as they relate to child witches?

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Prior research on child-witchcraft has been largely qualitative rather than quantitative. Such qualitative research has contributed to an understanding of beliefs, practices, experiences, and social processes related to child-witch accusations. But it is essential that quantitative research builds on the foundation of this prior qualitative research if we are more fully to explore the prevalence and distribution of the specific patterns identified in this prior research and to consider possible implications of the correlations observed.

Based on a review of prior publications, an initial questionnaire was designed by Robert Priest and field-tested in Kinshasa with 52 pastors in August of 2014 at a conference co-sponsored by EPED and Stop Child Witch Accusations. The results were carefully analyzed, and the leadership team of *Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse (EPED)*, themselves social workers and pastors with years of first-hand experience working to care for Kinshasa's street children and under the leadership of Pastor Abel Ngolo, worked for several days together with Robert Priest and Timothy Stabell in revising the wording of survey questions and response options, and adding additional questions to the survey. The final 82-item survey addressed the research questions already described above under "Aims and Goals of the Study."

2.2 Research Population

Our target population was the pastoral leaders of the many thousands of congregations in Kinshasa.³¹ This was intended to include anyone on the congregational staff with pastoral/ministerial roles, whether or not they

³¹ While Revival church leaders informed Katrien Pype (2012, 36) of a 2005 census that identified 12,000 revival churches in Kinshasa, she was unable to actually "lay hands" on the census results. A more modest number is provided by Matangila (2006, 78), who counted over 3,000 revival churches in Kinshasa (cited in Pype 2012, 36). In any case, when adding in Catholic, Protestant, and African Independent churches, there are many thousands of congregations in Kinshasa.

were fully ordained. Thus, many with the title or role of evangelist, prophet, or assistant pastor were included in our intended population, whether or not they were ordained. The survey was intended, however, to exclude staff with non-ministerial roles (such as secretaries), and to exclude categories of lay leaders (such as “intercessors”) that in Kinshasa typically serve in non-remunerated roles.

These pastoral leaders operate mostly within four major and distinct church traditions.

2.2.1 Roman Catholicism has a long history in the DRC and operates 143 parishes in Kinshasa. While in its earlier history the Catholic Church in Kinshasa was not known for directly addressing witchcraft beliefs and realities, this has changed in recent decades. Under the impact of 1) the Catholic Charismatic renewal movement, 2) the adoption of new leader and non-leader roles influenced by those of the Revival Churches (such as the role of evangelist, intercessor, or even prophet), and 3) a focus on family ministries, local parishes of the Catholic Church in Kinshasa have come to be known for ministries that sometimes include a focus on the “deliverance” of so-called child witches.

2.2.2 Protestant missions and denominations also have a long history in Kinshasa, with 62 of these mission-initiated denominations legally incorporated under the umbrella of the Church of Christ in Congo—in French, *Église du Christ au Congo* (ECC). In earlier years, these churches, perhaps under the influence of foreign missionaries, often took the position that witch suspicions or accusations were without merit. They were not known to have any regular practices related to engaging witchcraft suspicions or accusations. However, in recent decades these Protestant churches have been deeply influenced by the success of Revival Churches. That is, they have increasingly endorsed an understanding of the Holy Spirit as gifting church leaders with unusual powers and understandings. Many of these churches now also have the new recognized roles of prophets and intercessors—roles they learned from the Revival Churches. And it is now not uncommon for these churches to be involved in ministries focused on the deliverance of children alleged to be witches.

2.2.3 African Independent Churches began to emerge in the DRC, beginning in the 1920s with Kimbanguism—formally “the Church of Christ on Earth by the prophet Simon Kimbangu.” As a Baptist, Simon Kimbangu reportedly performed miracles and claimed for himself special powers and knowledge from God. The older mission church establishment rejected him and called for his arrest, thus triggering the birth of a new breakaway movement—a movement grounded in a mix of Christianity and African traditional religion.

Kimbanguism is strongest in Bas-Kongo, but also has a significant presence in Kinshasa. Other African Independent Churches follow the leadership and divine instructions of Prophet Kimpa Vita or Prophet Ne Muanda Semi. These churches have regular practices involving the identification and deliverance of child witches, practices partly based on older African traditions.

2.2.4 The Revival Churches (*Églises de Réveil*) emerged in the 1970s largely out of the Protestant Churches, but also from Catholicism. Influences included the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, the Assemblies of God (itself a Protestant [ECC] church), and other Protestant ministries focused on the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Unlike Protestant churches with denominational structures and identities, these churches are usually either independent congregations or small clusters of congregations associated with a single prominent leader. Some of the largest congregations in Kinshasa are from this tradition. Rather than stress Bible knowledge and formal theological education as the foundation of pastoral authority, these churches placed a high value on gifts of the Holy Spirit. They pioneered new ministry roles (intercessor, prophet, evangelist, apostle) each of which was believed to depend on the exercise of special spiritual power and knowledge. These churches focused their preaching on deliverance from sickness, poverty, and other misfortunes understood as related to demonic realities and to witchcraft. They pioneered approaches to the deliverance of child witches that sometimes subjected children to fasting, the ingestion of noxious substances, shaving of the head (under the idea that hair serves as an antenna of communication), burning, and so on.

While the Protestant Churches initially repudiated the Revival Churches, the unusual and highly visible success of Revival Churches has resulted in greater respect and influence, with Revival Church leaders increasingly likely to study in Protestant theological schools, and with Protestant Churches themselves increasingly adopting beliefs and practices of the Revival Churches. And, of course, a majority of Revival Church leaders have come out of Protestant backgrounds. Thus, the early marked divide between the Protestant and Revival Churches has significantly lessened.

2.3 Sampling and Data Collection

Our target population was pastoral leaders. But these pastors came from scores of denominations, small networks of churches, and independent congregations. Because we lacked any adequate sampling frame from which to draw a random sample, we

employed a combination of purposive and stratified sampling.

Since population estimates were available for each of Kinshasa's 24 municipalities, this allowed us to carry out stratified sampling. A target of 1,000 respondents was set, and a demographically-weighted number of desired respondents from each municipality was determined. Under the supervision of Reverend Abel Ngolo, trained social workers and pastors were assigned different municipalities to carry out research, and given the target number of desired responses for each municipality. Researchers visited local churches street by street and invited pastors to fill out the survey. Follow up phone calls and visits were carried out to encourage survey completion and to collect the completed surveys. Pastors were contacted by phone, at church gatherings, and by personal visits to the church, and were asked to fill out the survey. Follow-up phone calls and visits were conducted to encourage survey completion and collection. Data collection was pursued over six months in 2015.

The following table provides the demographically-weighted target for each municipality, the number of surveys collected in each municipality, and what percentage the completed surveys were of the planned total.

Table 2.3 Surveys Stratified by Municipality

Municipality	Demographically Weighted Target	Actual Completed Surveys	Percent of Initial Target Reached
Bandalungwa	37	18	49%
Barumbu	24	15	63%
Bumbu	42	44	105%
Gombe	10	2	20%
Kalamu	57	33	58%
Kasa-Vubu	31	23	74%
Kimbanseke	128	6	5%
Kinshasa	27	10	37%
Kintambo	18	14	78%
Kisenso	44	27	61%
Lemba	52	49	94%
Limete	47	26	55%
Lingwala	18	18	100%
Makala	45	49	109%
Maluku	18	1	6%
Masina	62	25	40%
Matete	35	25	71%
Mont Ngafula	18	22	122%
N'Djili	62	24	39%
N'Sele	12	172	1433%
Ngaba	25	27	108%

Ngaliema	106	13	12%
Ngiri-Ngiri	33	27	82%
Selembao	49	43	88%
TOTAL	1,000	713	71%

Overall, after several months of data collection, we achieved a sample size that was 71% of the original goal of 1,000. For 19 of the 24 municipalities, we achieved between 37% and 122% of the intended target number. We significantly oversampled in N'Sele and under-sampled in Kimbanseke³² and Maluku (a distant rural municipality), but otherwise have sampled at reasonable rates for the other municipalities, given the research challenges faced.

Below we will discuss some of the unusual research challenges that made it difficult to get a fully satisfactory stratified sample. Two factors can be mentioned here. Different municipalities historically have had differing levels of police intervention related to church practices involving children alleged to be witches. And this seems to have impacted the comparative level of suspicion or openness encountered by researchers in each municipality. N'Sele, for example, is rather distant from the places where police interventions have been strong. And the known and respected local medical and educational ministries of EPED in N'Sele helped establish trust. This doubtless contributed to the unusually high numbers of respondents in N'Sele. Second, since each municipality had its own researcher or research team that varied in their relational ties and knowledge of their assigned municipality, and perhaps in their skills, training, and motivation, it should not surprise that research teams varied in the extent to which they achieved targeted goals.

In terms of church traditions, we had no precise numbers on how many Catholic, Protestant, African Independent, or Revival Church pastors exist in Kinshasa, although all four are present in high numbers. That is, we had no way to estimate the actual population of pastoral leaders in each community in order to establish weighted targets, as we did with municipalities. Thus, we simply worked hard to survey significant numbers of pastoral leaders in each of the four main traditions.

However, field researchers reported major differences between the willingness of pastoral leaders from the different traditions to respond to the survey.³³ Revival church pastors, coming largely from independent churches and from traditions that value

³² Kimbanseke, the Kinshasa municipality with the largest population, a municipality filled with churches, is our most serious case of undersampling. In this instance, during the months of data collection, reports from Kimbanseke's lead researcher had all been positive, suggesting that a significant number of surveys were being collected. But when final surveys were due, this researcher failed to appear. Inquiries revealed this researcher had left the region over a "family emergency." All subsequent contact efforts failed, and by this time it was too late to start over.

³³ Unfortunately, records on how many were approached, and either declined or accepted, were not kept.

publicity and confident openness to outsiders responded at high rates. According to one of EPED's lead researchers, "99% of the time" when he approached a Revival pastor, the pastor would agree to fill out the survey. He estimated that 70% of the time Protestant pastors agreed to fill out the survey. But he then described sequentially approaching 30 Kimbanguist churches and being denied at each, before finally getting a single Kimbanguist pastoral respondent. That is, the African Independent Churches were reportedly more suspicious and reserved, operating almost like secret societies, and markedly different from the Revival Churches in their openness. Our sample of pastoral leaders from these churches is relatively small (N=62).

Finally, the method of directly approaching pastoral leaders at local churches, which worked well for Revival and Protestant pastors, did not work well with Catholic pastoral leaders. Local research assistants found it difficult to get past parish gate-keepers and actually gain an audience with the highest (ordained clergy) local church leaders. And, when they did get access to such leaders, these leaders often indicated they would need to check with superiors before they could fill out the survey. Thus, each completed survey by formal clergy often required multiple trips to gain initial access, as well as multiple follow-up efforts to collect the completed survey. By contrast, Catholic parishes often had family-oriented ministries and Charismatic Renewal ministries influenced, in part, by Revival Church patterns. And these ministries often had non-ordained pastoral leaders with titles not commonly associated with Catholicism—such as the title of Prophet. It appears that these leaders were easier for local researchers to gain access to for purposes of the survey. Thus, our sample of Catholic congregational leaders was relatively small (N=52), with only 25% of surveys completed by formally ordained Priests, and the remainder completed by non-ordained pastoral leaders.

A couple of observations need to be made about our data for these four traditions. First, both because this was not a random sample and because of differing response rates, our data cannot be used to estimate the relative populations of pastoral leaders that exist in each tradition. Second, our data is clearly strongest for Protestant and Revival Churches, both because of the larger sample size for each, and because they responded at relatively high rates. But the results for Roman Catholic and African Independent Church leaders are nonetheless of interest, and so we include them in our analysis while cautioning readers to recognize the limits of the data with respect to these two categories.

2.4 Data Entry and Analysis

The data from completed surveys were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. Results were discussed at length with EPED staff, to enhance understandings of the likely meaning of responses.

2.5 Research Challenges

In addition to research challenges and limitations that have already been mentioned, the survey took many pastors a long time to fill out, and this may have contributed to the failure of some to complete the survey, especially those with less education. Despite assurances of anonymity, and explanations of the purpose of the research, some pastors declined to participate out of fear that the survey was intended to collect information on behalf of the government to allow the government to police churches. To be clear, our survey was asking about behavior (accusing children of being witches) that violates Congolese law. It is thus possible that pastors with the most to lose, that is those most active in child witch accusations might have declined to complete and submit the survey at higher rates than others. And the fact that this article's lead author (Robert Priest) did not speak French meant that every step of the process required extensive processes of conversation and translation—with a great deal of attention to the meaning of words. Rev. Ngolo and Dr. Stabell, by contrast, were fluent in French and through their own experience and research deeply knowledgeable about Congolese contextual realities related to our topic.

2.6 Supplemental Qualitative Research

Finally, as we commenced analysis, it became increasingly clear that supplemental qualitative research was needed to better understand the meaning of some of our quantitative survey results. Prior qualitative research by other scholars did not provide answers to some of our questions. Thus Robert Priest spent May of 2017 in Kinshasa and partnered with EPED pastoral staff in carrying out three additional qualitative research steps intended to enhance understandings of local meanings.

a) Our team interviewed several individuals that had been accused of being child-witches, and several others who had played pastoral roles in addressing child-witch accusations, about the nature of their experiences. These were recorded, with permission to use their stories, and with several of these accounts transcribed and translated into English³⁴—including the above accounts by Sylvain Mbaki, Pastor Jean, and Pastor

³⁴ By assistants fluent in English, French, and Lingala.

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Josué Mabélé. In this report, we use the actual names of adult interviewees, with their permission, with the single exception of Pastor Jean, whose name is a pseudonym. Robert Priest discussed the content of each case with EPED staff.

b) EPED staff photographed some of their own research activities, including interviews conducted, and were granted permission to attend and photograph local church events involving deliverance of children thought to be witches. Photographs in this report have been selected and/or edited to conceal actual identities, with the exception of photographs of EPED leaders and pastors that explicitly agreed for their pictures to be included.

c) Third, EPED staff visited a variety of Christian bookshops and solicited input from others in finding manuscripts (published and unpublished) written by Kinshasa pastors on the topic of witchcraft. Several were identified as particularly influential,³⁵ meriting careful content analysis, such as a pamphlet by Revival Church Pastor Malochie Wallo Mutsenga—pastor of one of the largest and most visible megachurches in Kinshasa. These were translated, in whole or in part, into English to facilitate analysis.³⁶ Robert Priest and EPED staff discussed these writings together, and their meaning and significance.

d) Fourth, EPED staff visited Bible societies and Christian bookshops and purchased Bible translations in 15 Congolese languages spoken by Kinshasa residents. Arrangements were made for one or two older fluent speakers of each language (between the ages of fifty and eighty), speakers who had grown up in villages where this language was the mother tongue, to spend three or four hours one-on-one with Robert Priest and a professional interpreter. We focused on the vocabulary of witchcraft, divination, fetishism, and traditional healing. We explored the extent to which different identities were understood as gender-specific or not. We probed early memories of witch accusation episodes. We inquired how often, if ever, children were accused of witchcraft back in the rural or village settings they grew up in decades earlier. Finally, we examined Bible translations into each language, exploring whether and how indigenous words and concepts about witchcraft were featured in the translated Bibles in a variety of specific texts.

Chapter 3: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

3.1 Profile of Pastors Surveyed and of Their Churches

3.1.1 Pastors' Sex, Age, Marital Status, and Number of Children

A majority of respondents were male (83%). Just over two-thirds were married (68%), with male respondents more likely to be married (72%) than female respondents (47%). Age was highly correlated with marriage, with only 39% of those under 35 years old married, compared to a 91% marriage rate for those over 45. If we exclude Catholic respondents, the marriage rate for those over 45 rises to 95%. Of respondents that were married, half reported having four or more children (for a mean of 4.4). The following table summarizes demographic information on age, sex, marital status, and number of children for respondents.

Table 3.1.1 Respondents by Age, Sex, Marital Status, and Number of Children

		Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24	87	12.2%
	25-34	192	26.9%
	35-44	200	28.1%
	45-54	151	21.2%
	55-64	68	9.5%
	65+	15	2.1%
Sex	Male	590	82.7%
	Female	123	17.3%
Marital Status	Married	484	67.9%
	Single	209	29.3%
	Other	20	2.8%
Number of Children	None	138	19.4%
	1-2	192	26.9%
	3-5	218	30.6%
	6 +	165	23.1%

3.1.2 Ethnicity of Respondents

There are more than two hundred ethnolinguistic groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But in Kinshasa, most churches worship in French and Lingala. The primary exception seems to be the African Independent Churches that are often smaller, family-based, and ethnically homogeneous. These represent the primary settings in Kinshasa where one finds worship services in a variety of specific Congolese languages.

While most residents of Kinshasa carry out their

³⁵ Balibuno Zahinda Byamungu 2013; Kalonji Mbuyi 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014; Kigalu Mangala 2008, 2013; Wallo Mutsenga 2013.

³⁶ Each manuscript was scanned, converted to text (using Adobe Acrobat Pro), translated into English (using Systran -- a computer translation program), and with the translation double-checked and modified by assistants fluent in English and French. They were subsequently entered into the qualitative data analysis program NVivo for further analysis of themes and patterns.

affairs using a combination of French and Lingala, Kinshasa residents nonetheless often identify with a specific tribal or ethnic heritage and retain close links to family and relatives back in their communities of origin as well as in Kinshasa. They exemplify varying levels of linguistic fluency in the relevant ancestral language and in knowledge of the witchcraft vocabulary and associated meanings and practices of their ancestral communities. The following table lists the most common tribal or ethnic identities claimed by survey respondents.

Table 3.1.2 Ethnicity/Tribe

	Frequency	Percent
Bangala	12	1.7%
Kele	7	1.0%
Kongo	105	14.7%
Luba	98	13.7%
Mbala	30	4.2%
Mbundia	25	3.6%
Mongo	19	2.7%
Ngombe	11	1.5%
Nyanga	17	2.4%
Pende	11	1.5%
Sakata	24	3.4%
Sengele	9	1.3%
Songe	15	2.1%
Suku	13	1.8%
Teke	16	2.2%
Tetela	18	2.5%
Yaka	25	3.5%
Yansi	33	4.6%
Yombe	23	3.2%
Other	123	17.3%
Undeclared	78	10.9%

3.1.3 Education of Respondents

A majority of respondents (89%) reported having completed secondary school (grades 7-12), with 62% reporting completion of a subsequent post-secondary degree. However, many reported education that was not formally theological. Nearly a third (29%) reported that they had not taken any formal theological studies, with a third (33%) having completed a four-year bachelor's degree in theology or above. The following provides the results.

Table 3.1.3 Education of Respondents

Highest Level Completed	Frequency	Percent
Primary (Grades 1-6)	14	2.0%
Technical School	62	8.7%
Secondary School (7-12)	196	27.5%
Post-Secondary Level 1 (3 yrs)— <i>Niveau Graduat</i>	307	43.1%
Post-Secondary Level 2 (2 yrs) <i>Niveau License</i>	129	18.1%
Doctoral Studies or Doctoral Degree	5	0.7%
Nature of Pastoral Training	Frequency	Percent
Only Informal Training While in Ministry	208	29.2%
Bible Institute (2-3 years)	236	33.1%
Theological Institute (4 years with a diploma)	33	4.6%

Bachelors in Theology	148	20.8%
<i>Licence en théologie</i>	80	11.2%
<i>Troisième cycle en théologie</i>	8	1.1%

Protestant respondents were higher overall on the educational level completed. But the most dramatic difference between traditions was not so much educational level, as the nature of formal pastoral training. Over 42% of Revival respondents indicated that they received their pastoral training only informally in the context of ministry, compared to only 15% reporting this for Protestant respondents, and 8% for Catholic ones. Protestant pastors were more likely to have completed formal theological programs beyond the Bible Institute level (58%) than were Revival church pastors (19%).

3.1.4 Church Tradition of Respondents

The following provides the breakdown of respondents in terms of church tradition, with the largest denominations or church associations listed under each, where relevant.

Table 3.1.4 Respondents by Church Tradition (and Denomination)

Protestant	233
Communauté Baptiste	58
Communauté des Assemblée de Dieu	40
Communauté Évangélique au Congo	12
Communauté Presbytérienne	10
Communauté des Eglises des Frères Mennonites au Congo	4
Armée du Salut	4
Communauté Méthodiste	3
Revival	352
Assemblée Chrétienne de Kinshasa	9
Centre Évangélique Gagner d'Ames pour Christ	7
Nzambe Malamu	6
Cité Bethel	5
ERC	5
Pain de Vie	3
Roman Catholic	52
African Independent	62
Église de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par son Envoyé Spécial Simon Kimbangu	8
Église du Saint Esprit au Congo	4
Église Neo-Apostolique	4
BIMA	3
Église Prophétique	3
Mpeve ya Longo	3
Other/Not Sure	14

While formal church identity was the principal way by which we identify the church tradition of respondents, in recognition of other influences that tend to cross-cut older church divides, we also asked respondents: "Does your church tend towards Pentecostal doctrine?" Three-quarters of respondents replied yes (74%), ranging from a high of 88% for Revival church respondents to 73% of African Independent respondents, to 62% of Protestant

respondents, and 38% of Roman Catholic respondents.

3.1.5 Size of Congregation Being Served

Over a third of respondents (36%) served in congregations with less than a hundred in weekly attendance. Another 39% served a congregation with more than 100 and less than 250 in weekly attendance, with a final 20% serving a congregation of more than 250 in weekly attendance.

Table 3.1.5 Size of Congregations Being Served

Average Sunday Attendance	Frequency	Percent
<100	256	35.9%
102 - 250	276	38.7%
251 - 500	102	14.3%
501 - 1000	43	6.0%
1001+	36	5.0%

Not surprisingly, given the Catholic parish structure limiting the number of Catholic congregations, Catholic respondents were more likely to serve in congregations with higher average levels of weekly attendance. Protestant respondents were less likely to serve in congregations of less than 100 (28%) than were Revival church (41%) or African Independent Church respondents (43%). Otherwise, the size distributions were not notably different for the three non-Catholic traditions.

3.1.6 Ministry Titles of Respondents

Churches in Kinshasa have a wide variety of named roles and titles. Some of these roles (such as “intercessor”) are considered lay and non-remunerated positions. Such positions are held by individuals that are not considered pastoral staff. Our intended focus was on those considered to serve in pastoral roles. This nonetheless covered a wide range including, on one end of the continuum, evangelists, prophets, and non-ordained pastors, and on the other end, ordained pastors, including Doctors or Teachers of the Church, Apostles, Bishops, and Arch-Bishops.

While Catholic Churches historically had a range of religious leader titles reflecting status hierarchies (Priest, Monsignor, Bishop, Archbishop, Pope), the Protestant Churches that came to the DRC initially had a single religious category of Pastor. The leaders of Protestant denominations or church associations often had secular titles such as Moderator, General Secretary, or President. The African Independent Churches adopted elevated titles such as Prophet for their most esteemed leaders. And the Revival Churches stressed a variety of leader titles, such as Prophet, Pastor, Evangelist, Apostle, and Doctors or Teachers of the Church.

In recent years one can observe a great deal of borrowing between traditions. Thus, other churches borrow from Catholicism. For example, the leader of

the ECC Protestant Church association currently is addressed by the title Monsignor, a practice that in an earlier era would have been anathematized in Protestant circles. Similarly, some Revival Church pastors wear clerical gowns and pectoral crosses similar to those used in Catholic Churches and occasionally employ titles such as Bishop or Archbishop. On the other hand, the success of Revival Churches has meant that other churches increasingly adopt their practices (related to such things as fasting, intercession, prayer, prophecy, music and other worship practices) and their church roles and titles (Prophet, Evangelist, Apostle) at local congregational levels. At local ministry levels, even the Catholic Church now has “Prophets.” The following shows the leader titles that respondents reported using in their ministry.

Table 3.1.6 Ministry Titles of Respondents

Ministry Titles	Frequency	Percent
Evangelist	136	19.1%
Prophet	178	25.0%
Pastor (Non-ordained)	174	24.4%
Reverend (Ordained)	185	25.9%
Apostle	24	3.4%
Bishop or Archbishop	16	2.2%
TOTAL	713	100%

Fifty percent of respondents self-identified as Pastor or Reverend, 19% as Evangelist, 3.4% as Apostle, and a full 25% as Prophet. In most churches, Prophets and Evangelists are subordinate roles within a local church and under the direction of a senior pastor. Evangelists do outreach preaching in local markets, on buses, and organize evangelistic campaigns or one-on-one evangelism. Prophets give prophetic words to those who come to them and pray for them. Evangelists and prophets who demonstrate fruit in ministry may eventually move into more senior pastor roles in their church. Apostles also often serve under the sponsorship of some senior pastor that sends them out to plant a church elsewhere. That is, the Apostle title usually has the sense of being a missionary church planter, “in the tradition of the Apostle Paul.”

Not surprisingly, our survey data shows that Prophets on average are younger (60% are less than 35 years old), less likely to be married (51%), more likely to be female (35.4%), and with less formal education as compared with the other major categories. Evangelists are closest to Prophets on each of these, with ordained Pastors/Reverends having highest education, being older (70% are over 45 years old), less likely to be female (7%), and, for non-Catholics, more likely to be married (93%).

3.2 Profile of Accused Children, According to Pastors

3.2.1 Why ask pastors?

Because we could envision no easy way to systematically survey accused children or their parents and caretakers, we instead surveyed pastors about their experiences with and their knowledge of such children. When people suspect a child of having harmed someone through witchcraft, it is natural that they would share their suspicions with religious professionals whom they trust. To confirm that pastors are approached on these matters, we asked pastors how often they've had others tell them about such suspicions. The following provides the results.

Table 3.2.1a: How many people have told you they suspected a child of having harmed someone through witchcraft?

<i>Number Reporting Child-Witch Suspicion to Pastor</i>	Frequency	Percent
None	173	24.3%
1 or 2	177	24.8%
3 - 5	126	17.7%
6 - 10	101	14.2%
11 - 20	48	6.7%
21+	88	12.3%

Over three-quarters of respondents (76%) report that one or more people had explicitly shared such a suspicion with them, with 12% reporting that more than twenty people have shared such suspicions with them. Some pastors clarified afterward that the question was potentially ambiguous since people often indirectly signal their suspicions rather than explicitly state them, as the question implies.³⁷

The denominational tradition of pastors affected the frequency with which people shared child-witch suspicions with them, where Catholic, Revival, and Africa Independent respondents report receiving

somewhat higher levels of verbalized child-witch suspicions than Protestant respondents.³⁸ Differences between Catholic, Revival, and AIC respondents were not statistically significant.

Since there is clearly a difference between receiving a report about a suspected child, and actually having first-hand relationships with suspected children, we also asked, "How many children do you personally know that have been accused of having harmed others through witchcraft?" Again, some pastors later suggested the question was ambiguous. One might have had first-hand contact with accused children, but might nonetheless not report "personally knowing" the alleged witch-child. And indeed, evidence from other question responses, suggests this may have been the case. In any case, the following provides the results.

Table 3.2.1b: How many children do you personally know who have been accused of having harmed others through witchcraft?

<i>Number of Accused Children You Personally Know</i>	Frequency	Percent
None	228	32.0%
1 or 2	194	27.2%
3 - 5	111	15.6%
6 - 10	66	9.3%
11 - 20	41	5.8%
21+	73	10.2%

Two-thirds of pastors (68%) reported a first-hand personal relationship with one or more such children, and with 10% reporting that they personally know more than 20 such children.³⁹ While there was great variability within each denominational tradition, denominational tradition nonetheless had a significant but small effect on knowing accused children.⁴⁰ With both of the above questions, one finds evidence that most pastors have significant first-hand exposure to the child-witch phenomenon, and thus that surveying

³⁷ In societies around the world, people often signal their initial suspicions in indirect ways. And in a context where Congolese law makes it a crime to accuse a child of witchcraft, the tendency to signify through indirect allusion might be even higher. In short, question wording doubtless could have been better.

³⁸ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions differed significantly on the extent to which people reported child-witch suspicions to pastors [$F(3, 699) = 8.70, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Protestant respondents differed from Catholic respondents at $p < .01$, from Revival respondents at $p < .001$, and from Africa Independent respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .036$]. But even controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, using the general linear model in SPSS, church tradition still had a significant though small effect on how frequently pastors received allegations of child-witchcraft [$F = 7.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .032$].

³⁹ A parallel question about accused adults "personally known" to respondents elicited very similar rates.

⁴⁰ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions differed significantly on the extent to which pastors reported personally knowing accused child-witches [$F(3, 699) = 6.65, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Protestant respondents differed from Revival respondents at $p < .01$, and from Africa Independent respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .028$]. But even controlling for sex, age, church size, and educational level completed, church tradition still had a significant though small effect on how frequently pastors received allegations of child-witchcraft [$F = 5.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .025$].

pastors about their knowledge of the phenomenon makes good sense.

3.2.2 The Accused by Sex and Age

The literature on child-witch accusations sometimes suggests that boys are accused far more often than girls.⁴¹ But others have questioned this.⁴² Cimpric (2010, 17) reports that “no accurate statistical analysis has been carried out to confirm the [supposed] tendency to accuse boys more than girls.”

Since pastors are often on the front line of those asked to address child-witch suspicions, we wanted to know, in the experience of these pastors, whether there was a tendency for either boys or girls to be accused more frequently. The following provides the results.

Table 3.2.2a: Among the boys and girls that you personally know who have been accused of being witches, who have been accused most often?

<i>Accused Most Often?</i>	Frequency	Percent
The Boys More Often Than the Girls	208	29.2%
Boys and Girls Equally as Often	327	45.9%
The Girls More Often Than the Boys	178	25.0%

Nearly half of respondents reported boys and girls being accused at comparable rates, with the other half split nearly evenly between those who think boys are accused more often and those who think girls are. The frequency of child-witch accusations does not differ significantly by gender. By contrast, a parallel question asking whether adult men or women are accused more often, had twice as many respondents answering “women” (38.6%) as answered “men” (18.7%), but with many nonetheless claiming equal frequency for both (42.7%).

Girl Accused of Witchcraft



Young girl, said to be a witch, waits her turn for deliverance.

Boy Accused of Witchcraft



Boy undergoes deliverance by a prophet. May 2017. Photographs by EPED Staff

Prior research suggests that children of all ages get accused, but there is disagreement on which ages are accused most frequently. Yengo (2008) suggests four-to-seven-year-olds are accused most frequently, while D’Haeyer (2004), Schnoebelin (2009, 30) and Stobart (2006, 10) identify eight-to-fourteen-year-olds as most frequently accused. In our survey, then, we asked pastors to consider child-witch accusations cases they personally know of, and to indicate the age of the youngest accused child, as well as to indicate the average age of the accused.

Table 3.2.2b: In the child-witch accusation cases you know of, when considering the age of those accused, what was . . .

	Frequency	Percent
The Youngest Age Accused?		
≤ 4	127	19.8%
5 - 8	202	31.6%
9 - 12	182	28.4%
13 - 17	129	20.2%
The Average Age Accused?		
Between 1 & 8	257	36.0%
Between 9 & 17	456	64.0%

One-fifth of respondents reported knowledge of accused children four-years-old or younger. Half reported knowing accused children less than nine. Slightly over a third estimate the average age of the accused as less than nine, while nearly two-thirds place the average above that. Our results are compatible with the peak ages others have identified as 8 to 14.

⁴¹ D’Haeyer 2004; Mayneri 2017; See also *The Impact of accusations of Witchcraft against Children in Angola. An Analysis From The Human Rights Perspective*. UNICEF, p. 21.

⁴² De Boeck 2000; Cahn 2005; Schnoebelin 2009, 30; Ballet, Lallau and Dumbi 2019, 8.

3.2.3 What the Children Are Accused of When Labeled a Witch

Witch suspicions emerge against the backdrop of misfortunes. And families in Kinshasa encounter a wide variety of misfortunes. Even those with educational credentials, gifting, and social connections sometimes find themselves with perpetual unemployment. Travel hopes are thwarted. Married couples face unwanted fertility problems. Illnesses hinder employment and require medical expenditures that further drain scarce financial resources. And family members die.

With misfortunes on all sides, people come to feel “blocked” and suspect the secret presence in their family of a malign “witch.” And when a child is accused of being this witch, the central charge against them is that they have caused their family’s misfortunes through some malignant and mysterious power.

While families often bring their children with their suspicions to Kinshasa pastors, “it is important to note,” according to the anthropologist Filip de Boeck (2009, 131), “that church leaders themselves are most often not the source of witchcraft allegations against children, [but] merely confirm (and thereby legitimize) accusations and suspicions which already exist within the child’s family environment.”⁴³ By turning “already existing allegations into an official diagnosis,” according to de Boeck, such pastors are able to then offer an “alternative solution to the problem.” The point to bear in mind at this stage of the analysis is that the specific harms which family members attribute to child-witches do not differ appreciably from the misfortunes that pastors also attribute to witches, as evidenced by the writings of Kinshasa pastors on the subject.⁴⁴ For example, the Reverend Apostle Wallo Mutsenga Malachie (pastor of one of Kinshasa’s largest mega-churches), who reports delivering scores of witches—both children and adults, wrote a brochure (2013) on witchcraft for use in his church’s “School of Deliverance.” He writes that witches have great power, as evidenced in their ability to transform themselves into “a mosquito, rat, cockroach, or lion.” Their principal goal is to bring misfortune on people, families, relationships, and projects. Witches, he tells his readers, divide families, cause the unemployment of family members, “block” family members from

“finding openings that would enable them to flourish,” cause family poverty, cause divorces, cause infertility, cause multiple family illnesses contributing to poverty and misery, bring death to family members, and cause family members “to remain single”—unable to find a spouse.

In the following table, respondents report on the frequency with which various sorts of harm are attributed to the children said to be witches.

Table 3.2.3: “In child accusation cases you know, which of the following were children accused of having caused through witchcraft?”

<i>Harm Allegedly Caused Through Witchcraft</i>	Frequency	Percent
Financial Difficulties	530	74.3%
Sickness	520	72.9%
Death	517	72.5%
Consistent Bad Luck	478	67.0%
Sterility/Infertility	454	63.7%
Impotence	262	36.7%

Nearly three-quarters of respondents report knowing child accusation cases where the child allegedly caused financial difficulties, with a similar number allegedly causing sickness, and a similar number, death. Over two-thirds report knowing cases where the charge was for causing “consistent bad luck,” with nearly two-thirds reporting the charge of having caused sterility/infertility, and over a third the charge of having caused impotence.

The above items correlate highly with each other, forming a cluster, such that the presence of any one item is likely to be accompanied by other items in the cluster. In other words, respondents who mentioned one of these items were likely to mention others in this list as well. Statistically, they may be added together as a composite measure, a scale, of “Afflictions Allegedly Caused Through Witchcraft.”⁴⁵

Denominational tradition had a medium impact on reported allegations that children cause these afflictions through witchcraft, with Catholic pastors, Revival pastors, and AIC pastors reporting higher levels of such allegations than Protestant pastors, but with Catholic, Revival, and AIC pastors not differing statistically from each other.⁴⁶

⁴³ By contrast, Hanson (2013, 8) reported that “research carried out in 2010 [in the Niger Delta] shows that in 31 percent of cases the child was accused of witchcraft by a pastor in the first place.” The possible role of pastors in fostering witch accusations, or even initiating them, merits further study.

⁴⁴ Balibuno Zahinda Byamungu 2013; Kalonji Mbuyi 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014; Kigalu Mangala 2008, 2013; Wallo Mutsenga 2013.

⁴⁵ As a scale these have a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .861.

⁴⁶ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions had a significant effect on the extent to which these misfortunes are attributed to child-witches [$F(3, 699) = 13.39, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Protestant respondents differed from Revival respondents at $p < .001$, and from Catholic and Africa Independent respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was *Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell*, Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches

3.2.4 Factors Understood as Evidence of the Identity of a Child-Witch

While mysterious misfortunes lead people to infer the presence of a witch at work, the actual identity of the witch is inferred on other grounds. Since witches are thought to operate in a night world, dreams provide one sort of evidence.⁴⁷ If someone dreams that another family member is attacking them, according to Revival church Pastor Jules Kigalu Mangala (2008, 89), this signals that the person dreamed about is a witch. Alternatively, a child's reported dreams can provide evidence that they are a witch. According to pastor Wallo Mutsenga, many witches do not even know they are witches—but their dreams provide evidence they are unconscious witches. Dreams that indicate one is a witch include dreams of flying, of being naked, of doing something wrong, of visiting a wonderful and unknown world, of being older than one truly is, of cultivating fields, of giving birth, of nursing, of bathing and caring for young children, and of eating meat (Wallo Mutsenga 2013). In Dr. Opoku Onyinah's extensive research on witchcraft among Christians in Ghana, he reports that those claiming to be victims of witchcraft frequently appeal to what their own dreams "revealed," and that even those "confessing" to witchcraft, often confess simply based on "the assumption that they probably committed the alleged crime in their dreams" (2012, 53).

In Kinshasa, a wide variety of behaviors are thought of as likely indicators of witchcraft. For example, as taught by Revival megachurch pastor Wallo Mutsenga (2013), indicators of witchcraft include weight loss, bedwetting, and "odd hand, eye, mouth, or tongue gestures." Involvement in the night world of witchcraft is evident in deep unmoving sleep, talking in one's sleep, waking up tired, sore, and lethargic with apathy over the affairs of waking life. Forgetfulness, depression, and bad hygiene provide further evidence of having a primary focus on the night world of witchcraft. As Wallo Mutsenga notes, "witches are often ugly," with "elements that make them disgusting (scabies, slobber, filth.)" Under a logic of exchange,

witches are understood to achieve great power in the night world by sacrificing this-worldly health and power. Thus someone with a handicap, a disability, anemia, an illness, or even mental defect may be understood as having actively chosen these outcomes as part of a conditional exchange to acquire great witch power. Witches are often sick with odd and complicated illnesses. As children, they develop slowly. As adults, they age quickly (Mutsenga 2013). Revival Pastor Jean Marie Kalonji Mbuyi (2003, 51ff) identifies similar sorts of evidence for witchcraft and adds that child-witches like dirt and resist baths because of a desire to retain their distinctive smell. He says that if a child (or adult) falls asleep during prayer or sermon, this provides evidence they are a witch. Pastor Jules Kigalu Mangala (2008, 89-93) repeats the same symptoms of unconscious witchcraft that Wallo Mutsenga does, but also provides lengthier discussions of how sexual and procreative disorders can be evidence that an adult is an unconscious witch.⁴⁸

Since family members, such as parents, are normally thought to have the best interests of their children in mind, when a family member nonetheless identifies their child as a witch, this is sometimes felt to carry unusual weight. Traditionally, diviners were felt to have the supernatural power to sense who was a witch. Thus their word was trusted. Today, many Christian pastoral leaders are likewise felt to have supernatural insight on the identity of witches. So when a family member, a diviner, or a pastor, signals that they believe a child is a witch, this itself counts as plausible evidence that they are.

Finally, an actual confession of witchcraft is felt to hold special evidentiary weight. And when a confessing child then identifies someone else as also a witch, this identification likewise holds evidentiary weight. In the following table, respondents report on their own experience of the prevalence of appeals to each sort of evidence.

medium [$\eta^2 = .055$]. Even controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant and moderate effect on how frequently afflictions were attributed to child-witches [$F = 11.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .049$].

⁴⁷ Pastor Kalonji Mbuyi (2003, 51) reports that "the dreams that God gives us about our children sometimes can be a language of revelation" letting us know our child is a witch. A dream of losing a child while on a journey, he says, should be interpreted as signaling that one has lost this child to witchcraft.

⁴⁸ He explains that disorders of everyday life are by-products of witch activities in the night world: "A sexual organ that is used in the world of darkness will lose its vigor, quality, taste, and even depth of action." Sexual impotence, frigidity, sterility, sexual diversion tendencies (masturbation, homosexuality, pedophilia, incest), disgust of marriage, prolonged singleness, sexual incontinence or lack of self-control in the sexual domain, gynecological illnesses of all sorts (STDs, resistances, blockage, cysts, fibromyalgia, perturbation within menstrual cycles, premature stoppage of periods, prostate problems), urinary incontinence, disgust of natural sexual intercourse, etc. all provide evidence of unconscious witchcraft due to sexual involvements in the night world of witchcraft (121-122).

Table 3.2.4: In the child accusation cases that you know of, which of the following factors influenced people to conclude that the child was truly a witch?

<i>Factors Influencing People to Conclude a Child is a Witch</i>	Frequency	Percent
A Child's Physical Defect, Illness, or Handicap	195	27.3%
The Child Wet Its Bed	252	35.3%
Suspicious Behavior of the Child	392	55.0%
Another Person Who Confessed to Witchcraft Identified the Child as a Witch	393	55.1%
A Parent or Family Member Identified the Child as a Witch	417	58.5%
Another Child Identified Him or Her as a Witch	323	45.3%
A Non-Christian Diviner Identified the Child as a Witch	375	52.6%
A Pastor, Prophet, or Intercessor Identified the Child as a Witch	489	68.6%
A Dream	446	62.6%
The Child Confessed to Being a Witch	516	72.4%

Slightly over a quarter of respondents (27%) report a child's defect, illness, or handicap as having been appealed to as evidence that they were a witch. More than a third (35%) report bedwetting used as evidence, with over half (55%) identifying unspecified "suspicious behavior" as evidence. When a child is accused of witchcraft by a "confessed witch" (55%), or by a parent or family member (58%), or by a non-Christian diviner (53%), these were considered evidence of guilt in cases observed by over half of respondents. Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) reported that the testimony of a pastor, prophet, or intercessor was treated as evidence. Nearly two thirds (63%) report an evidentiary appeal to dream content. And the most common evidence appealed to, as seen in the 72% of pastors reporting this, is the confession of children themselves.

The above items correlate highly with each other, forming a cluster, such that the presence of any single item is likely to be accompanied by other items in the cluster. That is, respondents who mentioned any one of these items were very likely to mention others as well. Statistically, they may be added together as a composite measure, an "Evidences a Child is a Witch Scale."⁴⁹ There were no significant differences between pastors of different denominational traditions in the extent to which these items were considered evidence that a child

is a witch. However, respondents who reported high levels of "Afflictions Allegedly Caused Through Child-Witchcraft," also reported high levels of appeal to "Evidences a Child is a Witch." The correlation between the two is moderately strong.⁵⁰

3.2.5 Consequences for the Accused Child

When children are accused of having caused the affliction and death of others, it makes sense that such a charge would have social consequences to the child. Those who've studied the phenomenon note that accused children are feared and avoided, mistreated in their own homes, beaten, driven from their homes, and sometimes killed.⁵¹ Many are also taken to pastors both to confirm the suspicions and to seek deliverance. The following table shows the frequency with which pastors observed various outcomes for the child.

Table 3.2.5a: In the child-accusation cases that you know of, what were the consequences for the accused child?

<i>Consequences for the Accused Child [50-54]</i>	Frequency	Percent
People Avoided Contact with the Child	600	84.2%
The Child was Driven from Home &/or Neighborhood	414	58.1%
The Child was Physically Harmed	436	61.2%
The Child was Killed	93	13.0%
The Child was Brought to a Church for Deliverance	544	76.3%

Over half (58%) know of cases where accused children were driven from their home or community, with a slightly higher number (61%) reporting physical harm being done to them, and 84% report that people avoided contact with the child. For vulnerable children, such as orphans, social avoidance can be hugely consequential. Thirteen percent of pastors report personally knowing of an accused child being killed. Three-quarters (76%) know cases of children being brought to a church for deliverance.

3.3 Pastoral and Church Responses to Child-Witch Accusations

In Kinshasa, as we've seen, when families suspect a child of witchcraft, it is often to church leaders that they turn. And church leaders respond in a variety of ways. One possible outcome of a child being brought to a

⁴⁹ As a scale these have a Cronbach's Reliability Alpha of .791.

⁵⁰ $r = .459, p < .001$.

⁵¹ Bussien et. al. 2011, 9; Cimpric 2010, 40ff; De Boeck, 2009, 131; Molina 2005, pp. 20ff.

church under suspicion of witchcraft is that church leaders endorse the accusation, and endeavor to resolve the problem through some form of deliverance practice.

The anthropologist Filip De Boeck (2009, 131-132) indicates that often church leaders simultaneously confirm the witch diagnosis and offer a solution to the problem, removing accused children from “the (sometimes extreme) physical and psychological violence they undergo in their own family” to a church-based “therapeutic ‘healing’ space.” Here children undergo a period of time where they are secluded/quarantined (often with other accused children), and subjected to purgatives (laxatives and emetics), to fasting, and to regular interrogations encouraging them to confess. “In collaboration with the leaders of the church, the children slowly construct a narrative about how they became witches,” eventually leading to a public confession and deliverance, with the “hope of facilitating the reintegration of the cleansed witch-child within its family.” De Boeck reports, however, that family members are often unwilling to readmit a child understood to have been a witch back into their family. All too frequently, he contends, such “young children are forced to take to the street in the end.”

Based on prior literature, and on advice from EPED staff, we inquired about several church-based child-witch deliverance practices sometimes reported.³² We asked, “In the cases you personally know of where a pastor, prophet, or intercessor was involved in the deliverance of children accused of being witches, which of the following did they do as part of the deliverance?”

Table 3.3a Traditional Deliverance Practices

<i>Done to Child as Part of Deliverance</i>	Frequency	Percent
Require the Child to Fast	327	45.9%
Prod the Child to Confess	240	33.7%
Make the Child Drink a Special Potion	208	29.2%
Induce the Child to Vomit	194	27.2%
Shave the Child's Head	197	27.6%

³² Aguilar Molina (2005, 30ff) for example, reports anal flushing, purging through the ingestion of oils and other substances, cuttings with razor blades, the administration of dangerous substances to the eyes, denial of food and water, and genitals being caressed.

³³ We also asked about whether the child was “sexually molested” in deliverance. Forty-three respondents affirmed this being present in cases they personally know of (6%). But in retrospect, we realize that this question was poorly worded, framed in terms that might have been denied by those most likely to be involved in any deliverance practices involving sexual contact. And statistically this item did not strengthen the list as a scale. So we did not include it in our scale.

³⁴ Giving a Cronbach's Alpha of .784.

³⁵ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions had a small but significant effect on the presence of these deliverance practices [$F(3, 699) = 6.04, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Protestant respondents differed from Revival respondents and from Catholic respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .025$]. Even controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant but small effect on these deliverance practices [$F = 3.60, p < .05, \eta^2 = .016$].

Pass the Child through Fire	110	15.4%
Cause the Child to Bleed	77	10.8%

A little less than half of the respondents (46%) report that deliverances of child-witches which they personally know of required the child to fast. A third (34%) report that the child was prodded to confess. Between a quarter and a third of respondents reported that the child was required to drink a potion (29%), was induced to vomit (27%), or had their head shaved (28%). And lower numbers reported that the child was required to pass through fire (15%) or was bled (11%).³³ Each of the above practices has precursors in traditional Congolese cultures. While some of these have no parallels with anything in Scripture, at least two of these do. But while fasting does occur as a biblical practice, in Scripture fasting seems to be practiced by the person who is praying, not the person who is being prayed over, and certainly does not involve a mandate for coerced fasting of individuals being delivered from witchcraft. Similarly, confession is a common practice both in the Bible and in Congolese cultures, although the effort to elicit a confession from people accused of witchcraft only explicitly occurs in traditional Congolese cultures, not in Scripture. The above practices, then, form a cluster of traditional deliverance practices that co-vary together. In other words, respondents who mentioned any one of these items were very likely to mention others as well. Thus these can be combined as a “Traditional Deliverance Practices Scale.”³⁴

Taken as a whole, denominational tradition has a small, but significant association with “Traditional Deliverance Practices,” with both Catholic and Revival respondents scoring higher on this scale than Protestants.³⁵ While AIC respondents scored as high as Revival respondents on these practices, because of their smaller sample size this difference from Protestant respondents did not register as statistically significant.

It is worth pointing out that while most pastors reported first-hand knowledge of deliverances of

children for witchcraft, not a single one of the practices listed above was identified by more than half of the respondents as present in the cases they were familiar with. A partial explanation, based on De Boeck's description, might be that the above practices generally happen in relatively private settings managed by a small sub-set of church leaders, practices no longer present in what are sometimes concluding public church-wide confession and deliverance events. The final confession and deliverance are likely to be most compelling to an audience when confessions seem voluntary and spontaneous, rather than when confessions are clearly responsive to coercive practices of elicitation. Thus church leaders whose only exposure to deliverance is in a final front-stage performance might be less aware of these back-stage practices than leaders more centrally involved throughout. That is, many such leaders may simply not be aware of the preparatory practices that in fact precede the public confessions they observe. But it is also possible that these practices are not present, or only minimally present, in many deliverances. Aguilar Molina (2005, 30) acknowledged that some pastors report "using only prayer as a means of deliverance," a possibility we failed to explore in our survey. Some Congolese pastors on deliverance explicitly critique traditional deliverance practices such as those above as culturally derived and nonbiblical, and seemingly advocate primarily prayer and "laying on of hands." For example, one of the most influential local authors in Kinshasa on the topic of witchcraft deliverance is the Revival Church pastor, Jean Marie Kalonji Mbuyi, himself a leading advocate of deliverance for witches, but who nonetheless explicitly critiques as illegitimate what he reports are common deliverance practices in Kinshasa.

Prayer for Alleged Witch



May 2017, EPED Photo

Specifically he repudiates any practice involving purging, burning, cutting of hair, drinking or washing with special water, drinking oil, rubbing with oil, hitting the witch with an iron rod, making the witch stare at the sun from sunrise to sunset, and putting hot pepper in the witches eyes or ears (Kalonji Mbuyi 2003, 101; 2010, 47). Unfortunately, he does not provide descriptive detail on how he himself conducts deliverance sessions. Future research should focus on providing a more careful descriptive analysis of prayer patterns in churches that renounce traditional cultural practices.

In our survey, we asked respondents to characterize the frequency within their own churches with which various patterns related to alleged child witches are present. When we examined the results statistically using factor analysis, we discovered two clusters of attributes for which each item in the respective cluster was closely correlated with each of the other items in that cluster, and which thus can be said to form a scale. The first cluster features items that we label here as involving a "Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm."

Table 3.3b Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm

<i>In My Church:</i>	Frequency	Percent
Deliverance of Child-Witches is Practiced	Never	145 20.3%
	Sometimes	299 41.9%
	Often	182 25.5%
	Always	87 12.2%
Sermons Teach that Child-Witches Harm Others by their Supernatural Powers.	Never	212 29.7%
	Sometimes	312 43.8%
	Often	134 18.8%
	Always	55 7.7%
Certain Church Leaders are Believed to have the ability to Identify Who is or is Not a Witch	Never	164 23.0%
	Sometimes	332 46.6%
	Often	143 20.1%
	Always	74 10.4%
Church Members Confess to Being Witches	Never	260 36.5%
	Sometimes	366 51.3%
	Often	79 11.1%
	Always	8 1.1%
Children Confess to Being Witches	Never	161 22.6%
	Sometimes	429 60.2%
	Often	108 15.1%
	Always	15 2.1%

Eighty percent of respondents report that deliverance of child-witches is practiced in their church, but with varying levels of frequency. Over two-thirds of respondents (70%) report that sermons in their church teach that misfortunes are caused by the supernatural power of child-witches, again with varying frequencies. Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) report that church leaders in their church are assumed to have the power to know who is or is not a witch, again with variability. Nearly two-thirds (64%) report that church members in their church sometimes confess to being witches, with more than three-quarters (77%) reporting

that children in their church confess to being witches, though again with varying levels of frequency. Statistically, the above items form part of a larger package. The “deliverance of child witches” is justified by sermons that explicitly defend the idea that misfortunes are sometimes caused by the evil power of child witches, and underpinned by the belief that some church leaders truly have the ability and authority to identify such child witches. And the normative requirement of confession is frequently part of the ritual process within deliverance ceremonies. Statistically, they form a scale,⁵⁶ for a “Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm.”

Denominational tradition had a small but significant impact on the extent to which respondents’ churches exemplified the attributes of the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm. Specifically, AIC churches scored higher on this paradigm than any of the other church traditions at a significant level.⁵⁷ But the other three traditions did not differ from each other at a significant level. Whether a church “tended toward Pentecostal doctrine” also had a small but significant positive effect on support for the child deliverance paradigm.⁵⁸

To be clear, as the above table shows, on each item listed, there is great variability among churches. Some churches “never” practice deliverance of child-witches, and others do so frequently. But this variability exists within each denominational tradition far more than between denominational traditions. In each denominational tradition, and on each side of the pentecostal vs. non-pentecostal divide,⁵⁹ there are many churches that “never” practice such deliverance and others that “often” or “always” do so. But if one looks

at the average responses of each denominational tradition, and at the average responses for churches inclined towards Pentecostal doctrine vs. those that are not, the averages tend to differ only weakly, or not at all. We will have more to say about this in our concluding remarks.

Pastoral training was also associated with the extent to which a church scored high on the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm. Specifically, churches whose pastors had a formal theological four-year diploma or above were less likely to affirm the child deliverance paradigm than churches where pastors were simply trained informally in congregational settings, or trained in a two or three year Bible institute.⁶⁰

The cluster of practices in the “Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm” assumes that the child is truly a powerful witch contaminated by a great moral evil that must be combatted and removed. But there is a second cluster of practices predicated on the contrasting perception that the accused is a weak and vulnerable child in need of protection and assistance. These questions are closely correlated with each other statistically, representing a “Child Protection Paradigm.”

⁵⁶ The “Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm,” as measured by these questions, forms a scale with a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .718. And when the questions are combined as a scale any given church can be scored from 0 (when “never” is answered for all five questions), to 15 (when “always” is the consistent answer).

⁵⁷ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational tradition had a small but significant effect on the “Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm” [F(3, 699) = 4.45, $p < .01$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that AIC respondents differed from Protestant respondents at $p < .01$, and from Catholic and Revival respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .019$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant but small effect on patterns related to the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm [F = 6.13, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .026$].

⁵⁸ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that Pentecostal doctrine had a significant effect on the child deliverance paradigm [F(1, 711) = 13.47, $p < .001$]. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .022$]. After controlling for sex, age, denominational tradition, and church size, Pentecostal doctrine was still positively associated with the embrace of the child deliverance paradigm [F = 11.67, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .017$].

⁵⁹ “Recall that within each tradition, there are pastors that respond affirmatively to the question “Does your church tend towards Pentecostal doctrine?” and others that did not—see 3.1.4).

⁶⁰ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that pastoral education had a significant small effect on churches’ embrace of the child deliverance paradigm [F(2, 710) = 7.660, $p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that churches whose pastors had a four year theological diploma or above, differed from churches whose pastors were training only in ministry at $p < .01$ and from pastors with only a 2 or 3 year Bible institute education at $p < .01$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .021$]. After controlling for sex, age, denominational tradition, and church size, using the general linear model in SPSS, pastoral training was still positively associated with the embrace of the child protection paradigm [F = 3.70, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .011$].

Table 3.3c Child Protection Paradigm

<i>In My Church, Accused Children Are . . .</i>		Frequency	Percent
Defended from Witch Accusations	Never	200	28.1%
	Sometimes	270	37.9%
	Often	152	21.3%
	Always	91	12.8%
Provided with Medical Assistance	Never	189	26.5%
	Sometimes	392	55.0%
	Often	77	10.8%
	Always	55	7.7%
Provided with Educational Assistance	Never	209	29.3%
	Sometimes	331	46.4%
	Often	102	14.3%
	Always	71	10.0%
Provided with Counseling	Never	178	25.0%
	Sometimes	353	49.5%
	Often	106	14.9%
	Always	76	10.7%
Provided with Personalized Pastoral Care for the Wholistic Development of Children	Never	206	28.9%
	Sometimes	279	39.1%
	Often	131	18.4%
	Always	97	13.6%
Placed in Foster Families	Never	288	40.4%
	Sometimes	324	45.4%
	Often	57	8.0%
	Always	44	6.2%

Seventy-two percent of respondents indicate that children accused of witchcraft in their church are, at least sometimes, defended against the accusation, although at variable rates. For example, only 13% report that such child-witch accusations are always contested. And 28% report that child-witch accusations in their church are never contested. Similarly, a high number report, at least sometimes, providing accused children with medical assistance (73%), educational assistance (71%), counseling (75%), “personalized pastoral care for the holistic development of children” (71%), and placement in foster families (60%). On each item, there is significant variability in frequency from “never” to “always.” But the above items form a cluster statistically correlating with each other to a high degree,

and thus forming a scale.⁶¹ That is, churches that provide one of these forms of assistance is highly likely to provide others of these forms of assistance.

The survey also asked about the extent to which respondents’ churches facilitate family reinsertions of accused children, with only 17% never doing so up to 25% “always” doing so. Eighty-three percent report that their churches practice family reinsertion at least sometimes. But factor analysis did not identify this question as part of the Child Protection Scale. In all likelihood, this is because, as De Boeck observes, even churches emphasizing the “Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm” conceptualize their goal as resulting in family reinsertion. So, in principle, all approaches aspire to family reinsertion. But statistically, the practice of family reinsertion is correlated positively at a moderate level with the Child Protection Paradigm⁶² and is not correlated either positively or negatively with the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm.⁶³ That is, churches scoring high on the child protection scale are more likely to practice family reinsertion than churches that score low on this scale. And churches that score high on the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Scale do not practice family reinsertion at either a higher or lower level than churches that score low on this scale.

Sixty-four percent of all respondents reported that their church had “a specific program on positive parenting.” Those churches scoring high on the Child Protection Paradigm were significantly more likely to report having such a program on positive parenting.⁶⁴ Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that their church had “a child-protection policy.” Again churches scoring high on the child protection paradigm were significantly more likely to have such a formal child protection policy.⁶⁵

Denominational tradition had a medium and significant impact on the extent to which respondents’ churches exemplified the attributes of the Child

⁶¹ The “Child Protection Paradigm,” as measured by these questions, forms a scale with a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .794. When the questions are combined as a scale any given church can be scored from 0 (when “never” is answered for all six questions), to 18 (when “always” is the consistent answer).

⁶² $r = .319, p < .01$.

⁶³ $r = -.044, p = .236$.

⁶⁴ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that the Child Protection Paradigm was associated with having a program in positive parenting [$F(1,711) = 35.54, p < .001$]. The effect size was medium [$\eta^2 = .048$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, church size, and denominational tradition, the Child Protection Paradigm still had a significant and medium-small effect on having a program in positive parenting [$F = 31.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .043$].

⁶⁵ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that the Child Protection Paradigm was associated with having a child protection policy [$F(1,711) = 59.58, p < .001$]. The effect size was medium [$\eta^2 = .077$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, church size, and denominational tradition, the Child Protection Paradigm still had a significant and medium effect on having a child protection policy [$F = 41.65, p < .001, \eta^2 = .057$].

Protection Paradigm. Specifically, Catholic churches scored higher on this paradigm than the other three traditions, at a significant level. And Protestant churches also scored higher than Africa Independent churches.⁶⁶ However, Revival Churches did not differ at a significant level from either Protestant or AIC churches.⁶⁷ As above, individual churches within each denominational tradition had far greater variability than did denominational traditions as a whole in comparison with each other. Within each denomination, a sizeable number of churches scored high on this scale, and a sizeable number scored low.

The pastoral training of respondents was significantly but weakly associated with the extent to which their church scored high on the Child Protection Paradigm. Specifically, churches whose pastors had a formal theological four-year diploma or above were more likely to affirm the Child Protection Paradigm than pastors simply trained in ministry, or trained in a two or three year Bible Institutes.⁶⁸

Finally, while the above cluster of traits within each scale is tightly correlated with each other, the Witch Diagnosis and Deliverance Paradigm and the Child Protection Paradigm are not empirically correlated, either positively or negatively. That is, how a church scores on one scale is not predictive of how they will score on the other. A church can score high on both scales, low on both scales, or high on one and low on the other.⁶⁹ Apparently, many people are responsive both to the view that some children are vulnerable, weak, and subject to being falsely accused, as well as to the possibility that other children represent dangerous and powerful evil. Or perhaps within some churches one finds a significant group of church members responding one way, and another significant group responding the other.

3.4 Pastoral Remuneration and Child-Witch Deliverance Ministries

Researchers on child witchcraft commonly report that pastors ask families either for money or for other material goods (such as for sheets of aluminum roofing for the church), in exchange for child witch deliverance. And our own interviews often confirmed the pattern, as when Pastor Jean above, commented: “Parents were bringing me money because every deliverance requires a special offering. Every work generates abundance. I had a job and it required remuneration. A payment was needed for the work to go forward. This was also getting me into an acceptable social standing, financially speaking.” Aguilar Molina (2005, 28ff) reports on his systematic examination of the issue, providing extensive case examples, and argues that deliverance is “a profit-making frenzy organized in response to parents’ concerns.” He reports, “We have not come across a single church in which exorcisms and/or healing for witchcraft is free.” Thus we inquired whether the families of children suspected of witchcraft are asked to make a donation/payment to the church or pastor for the deliverance. The following table includes only the 568 respondents who report that their own church practices deliverance of child witches.

Table 3.4 Material Contribution

<i>Families of suspected children are asked to contribute</i>		Frequency	Percent
Material	Never	244	43.0%
Goods to the	Sometimes	218	38.4%
Church or	Often	69	12.1%
Pastor	Always	37	6.5%
		229	40.3%
Money to the	Never	201	35.4%
Church or	Sometimes	88	15.5%
Pastor	Often	50	8.8%
	Always		

Sixty-five percent of respondents in churches practicing child witch deliverance report that either

⁶⁶ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions differed significantly on attributes of the Child Protection Paradigm [$F(3, 699) = 16.43, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Catholic churches differed from churches in the other three traditions at $p < .001$, and that Protestant churches differed from AIC ones at $p < .05$. The effect size was medium [$\eta^2 = .066$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant and medium effect on patterns related to the Child Protection Paradigm [$F = 14.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .060$].

⁶⁷ Revival churches fell in between Protestant and AIC churches, but were not sufficiently different statistically from either one for the difference to be statistically significant.

⁶⁸ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that pastoral education had a small but significant effect on child protection paradigm [$F(2, 710) = 6.266, p < .01$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that churches whose pastors had a four year theological diploma or above, differed from churches whose pastors were training only in ministry at $p < .01$ and from pastors with only a 2 or 3 year Bible institute education at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .017$]. After controlling for sex, age, denominational tradition, and church size, pastoral training was still positively associated with the embrace of the child protection paradigm [$F = 5.26, p < .01, \eta^2 = .015$].

⁶⁹ The relation between the two scales is $r = -.025, p = .511$.

money or other material goods, or both, are asked of the family at least sometimes in order for the church to carry out a deliverance. Given Molina's assertion that 100% of the time such payment is expected, the fact that 35% deny that such contributions are ever requested poses its own issues. Molina reports that sometimes church leaders denied that requests for material support were occurring, but that the children's parents always reported that this had occurred. Perhaps some survey respondents who deny that such payment is requested are simply not as close to deliverance practices and thus are simply unaware that such requests are occurring. Or perhaps some are inclined to deny a potentially discrediting motivation for carrying out such practices. But if we accept the answers given, then perhaps deliverances in a minority of churches occur without any explicit request for material support. More research on this is needed.

The above two questions measure the extent to which material compensation is expected, and statistically, the two questions can be added together to form a single measure, a scale⁷⁰ of "expected material compensation." There were no statistically significant differences between denominational traditions on this variable.

However, the "expected material compensation scale" was rather strongly associated with the "traditional deliverance practices scale."⁷¹ That is, ministries focused on deliverance using fasting, purgatives, shaving, and other traditional practices were apparently also more likely to be demanding compensation.

3.5 What Respondents and Church Members Believe About Witchcraft

To what extent do pastors and church members believe that some people truly cause the misfortunes of other people by means of preternatural witchcraft power? This is not an easy question to research. The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010, 178) surveyed Christians in 16 African countries and asked, "Do you believe in witchcraft?" Results varied by country, with an average of 42% of Christians in each country answering "yes," and 63% of Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo answering "yes." But the question is ambiguous. For Christians the biblical phrase "believe in" often has the overtones of "trusting in," rather than the overtones of "affirming a belief that something is true." And as Adam Ashforth (2005) points out in his own work, many people who have profound anxieties about being the object of a witchcraft attack nonetheless

think that if they refuse to "believe in" witchcraft, this refusal itself will ensure their safety. Evidence of weaknesses with the wording of Pew's question can be seen when a different question is asked. Dr. Opoku Onyinah (2012, 174), in a survey of 1200 Ghanaian Christians, asked: "Is witchcraft real?" With this as the question, 92% of respondents said yes—a much higher number than the 51% of Ghanaian Christians who told Pew that they "believe in witchcraft." But while Onyinah's question wording, in certain respects, is an improvement over Pew's, ambiguities remain. Neither question specifies precisely what is meant by witchcraft. Consider the ambiguities of asking "Is Hinduism real?" Is one asking whether respondents agree with cognitive assumptions associated with Hinduism, such as the supposed reality of reincarnation? Or is one merely asking whether Hinduism has a consequential social and cultural existence? Similarly, "Is witchcraft real?" can be understood either as a question about whether misfortunes may legitimately be attributed to third parties acting through evil occult means, or as a question about whether, in the modern world, there is a continuing pervasive and consequential social and cultural presence of beliefs and practices associated with witchcraft.

Our survey asked respondents about their agreement with the assertion: "Certain people are truly capable of killing other people in a supernatural manner through witchcraft." The wording of this question thus intentionally stipulated the specific understanding of witchcraft belief we were asking about. And, rather than frame the matter as a simple yes or no question, as was done in Pew and Onyinah's research, we provided response options allowing for various degrees of confidence or uncertainty.

Table 3.5a Belief in Witches' Power

Certain people are truly capable of killing other people in a supernatural manner through witchcraft.	Frequency	Percent
Definitely Not	28	3.9%
Probably Not	40	5.6%
I Do Not Know	128	18.0%
Probably Yes	263	36.9%
Definitely Yes	254	35.6%

Framed in this way, 73% of respondents express some level of agreement with the assertion, although with only slightly over a third (36%) expressing complete confidence in the assertion. Nearly 10% express some level of disagreement, and 18% claim not

⁷⁰ With a Cronbach's Reliability Alpha of .850. With "never" counted as "0," and "always" as "3," the scale measures churches from a minimum of "0" to a maximum of "6."

⁷¹ $r = .460, p < .001$.

to know. But even those inclined to doubt the assertion are mostly tentative in their doubts, with less than 4% expressing confident denial of the witchcraft logic of power and evil.

Denominational tradition had a medium-small but significant effect on the extent to which pastors believed in the harm-causing efficacy of witch power. Specifically, Revival pastors scored higher on this belief than pastors in the other three church traditions.⁷² Catholic, Protestant, and AIC pastors did not differ significantly from each other.

Pastoral training had a small but significant effect on the extent to which pastors affirmed belief in the efficacy of witchcraft. Specifically, respondents whose only pastoral training was received in ministry were more likely to affirm this than those with advanced formal theological education.⁷³

A possible behavioral indicator of the belief in witch-causing harm is the presence of people praying that God would protect them from witchcraft. Rather than ask respondents whether they themselves prayed for such protection,⁷⁴ we asked whether members of their church did so.

Table 3.5b Prayer for God's Protection from Witchcraft

		Frequency	Percent
People in My Church	Never	145	20.3%
Pray that God will	Sometimes	299	41.9%
Protect them from	Often	182	25.5%
Witchcraft	Always	87	12.2%

Eighty percent of respondents report that such prayers occur in their church, with varying levels of frequency. Denominational tradition had a medium-small and significant effect on the extent to which church members pray for God's protection from witchcraft. Specifically, Revival churches scored higher on this than Protestant and Catholic churches.⁷⁵ Revival and AIC churches did not differ significantly. Nor did Catholic and Protestant. On both measures above, Revival churches show elevated levels of belief and concern about the presence and power of witches to cause harm. Churches tending toward Pentecostal doctrine are also slightly but significantly more likely to pray for God's protection from witches.⁷⁶

3.6 Beliefs About the Guilt of Alleged Child-Witches

Finally, we wished to know the extent to which pastors are inclined to believe that the children alleged to have harmed others through witchcraft are truly guilty as charged. Thus we asked, "When you think of

⁷² Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational tradition had a significant effect on belief in witches' power [F(3, 699) = 13.03, $p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Revival pastors differed from Protestant pastors at $p < .001$, from Catholic pastors at $p < .01$, and from AIC pastors at $p < .05$. The effect size was medium [$\eta^2 = .053$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant effect on patterns related to the pastoral belief in witches' power to harm [F = 11.19, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .047$].

⁷³ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that pastoral training significantly impacted belief in witches' power to harm [F(2, 710) = 12.41, $p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that those whose only training was in the church ministry context were more likely than those with Bible Institute training or with more advanced formal theological education to affirm confidence in such power, each at $p < .001$. Effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .034$]. After controlling for sex, age, denominational tradition, and church size, pastoral education still had a significant effect on pastoral belief in witches' power to harm [F = 4.321, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .012$].

⁷⁴ In retrospect it would have been good to include this question also. To illustrate, on March 7 of 2013, I (Robert Priest) surveyed a small group of 23 African theologians, graduate students of theology, and denominational leaders gathered in Nairobi from across the African continent (and from the USA), and asked "How often do you pray for God to protect you from witches?" Only 13% percent answered "never," with 26.4% answering "often." The remainder indicated that they do pray for such protection, but not often.

⁷⁵ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational traditions significantly impacted prayer for protection from witches [F(3, 699) = 9.67, $p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that Revival churches differed from Protestant churches at $p < .001$, and from Catholic churches at $p < .05$. The effect size was medium-small [$\eta^2 = .040$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant effect on the amount of prayer for God's protection from witches [F = 9.20, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .039$].

⁷⁶ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that Pentecostal doctrine significantly impacted prayer for protection from witches [F(1, 711) = 9.67, $p < .001$]. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .028$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, Pentecostal theology still had a significant effect on the amount of prayer for God's protection from witches [F = 14.45, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .020$].

children that you personally know who have been accused of harming others through witchcraft, which of the following best represents your point of view?”

Table 3.6 Guilt of Children Alleged to Have Harmed Others Through Witchcraft

	Frequency	Percent
I think <i>none</i> of the accused children were guilty.	97	13.6%
I think <i>only some</i> of the accused children were guilty.	357	50.1%
I think <i>most</i> of the accused children were guilty.	227	31.8%
I think <i>all</i> of the accused children were guilty.	32	4.5%

More than six out of every seven pastors believe that at least some of the accused children are truly guilty of having harmed others through witchcraft—although there are significant differences in their propensity to treat any given child alleged to be a witch as truly guilty. Only 4.5% believe all accused children are guilty, but with another 32% believing most accused children are guilty, and another 50% that at least some are guilty. By contrast, only 13.6% believe that all accused children are innocent of the charge that they harmed others through witchcraft.

Theological education had a small but significant effect on pastors’ inclination to believe in the guilt of accused children. Specifically, pastors with formal advanced theological education were less likely to endorse accusations than were pastors whose only training was informal in the context of church ministry.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that pastoral training had a significant effect on tendency to believe child witch allegations [$F(2, 710) = 5.29, p < .01$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that those with more advanced formal theological education differed from those whose only training was in congregational ministry settings at $p < .01$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .015$]. Those with 2-3 years of Bible Institute training did not differ statistically from the other two groups. After controlling for sex, age, denominational tradition, and church size, pastoral training still had a significant small effect on belief in the guilt of alleged child witches [$F = 4.09, p < .05, \eta^2 = .012$].

⁷⁸ See article 41 of the DRC Constitution (2005).

⁷⁹ This ranges from 87% of Protestant pastors, to 81% of Catholic, 76% of Revival, and only 58% of AIC.

⁸⁰ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that denominational tradition had a significant impact on awareness of this law [$F(3, 699) = 7.442, p < .001$]. A post hoc Tukey test showed that AIC respondents differed from Protestant ones at $p < .001$, and from Revival and Catholic respondents at $p < .05$. Protestant respondents also differed from Revival respondents at $p < .05$. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .031$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, church tradition still had a significant effect on awareness of the law [$F = 5.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .020$].

⁸¹ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates this [$F(1, 712) = 10.19, p < .01$]. The effect size was small [$\eta^2 = .014$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, and church size, awareness of the law still had a significant association with likelihood of believing accusations [$F = 9.28, p < .01, \eta^2 = .013$].

⁸² Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that knowledge of this law forbidding child-witch accusations had a significant and medium impact on churches’ own act of forbidding child-witch accusations [$F(1, 711) = 60.99, p < .001$]. The effect size was medium [$\eta^2 = .079$]. After controlling for sex, age, educational level completed, church size, and denominational tradition, knowledge of the law still had a significant and medium effect on church prohibitions of child-witch accusations [$F = 57.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .077$].

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo⁷⁸ prohibits as “punishable by law” any accusation that a child is guilty of witchcraft. And 78.4% of our respondents indicated that they were aware that DRC law “forbids anyone to accuse children of witchcraft.”⁷⁹ The dilemma, of course, is that people who truly do believe that children sometimes cause misfortune in the lives of others by means of witchcraft, confront a law that forbids them to assert what they believe to be true.

Denominational tradition had a small but significant effect on whether or not pastors were aware of this law, with AIC respondents less likely to be aware of this law than others, and with Protestant respondents also more likely to be aware of the law than Revival respondents.⁸⁰ Other differences between denominational traditions were not significant.

Awareness of the law had a significant but small negative association with the belief that children are truly guilty.⁸¹ That is, those who were aware of the law were less inclined to believe (or to report believing) that suspected children were guilty.

Since the Congolese government forbids people from accusing children of witchcraft, we naturally asked if it was forbidden in respondents’ churches “to accuse children of witchcraft.” Eighteen percent answered that it was always forbidden in their church, 24% that it was “never” forbidden, and equal numbers (in each case 29%) reporting it was “sometimes” or “often” forbidden. Awareness of the above law had a significant and medium association with churches’ own likelihood of “forbidding” such child-witch accusations.⁸² The presence and awareness of this law, publicized and

appealed to by the pastoral educators of EPED, appears to contribute to pastoral willingness to prohibit such accusations in their own churches.

Finally, the confidence with which respondents affirmed or questioned whether some people truly have the power to kill others through witchcraft was positively but weakly correlated with their tendency to suspect accused children of being guilty.⁸³ The weakness of the relationship between the two is counterintuitive. In part, this reflects the fact that nearly all respondents are at least somewhat open to the possibility that witch power exists. And yet, pastors vary significantly in their tendencies either to endorse or reject the child-witch accusations they encounter. The weakness of the relationship between the two variables is a puzzle. Pastor's level of confidence or doubt with reference to witch power does not appear to be the principal variable explaining pastors' quite divergent tendencies either to endorse or reject child-witch accusations. We will return to this theme below.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Christian Pastors as Central Actors in the Drama of Child-Witchcraft

In an earlier era, anthropologists and comparative religionists assumed that belief in witchcraft would decline under the impact of modernity, urbanization, and Christianity.⁸⁴ Influenced perhaps by this assumption, anthropologists largely stopped researching African witchcraft after the 1960s (Cimpric 2010, 9). But more recently, beginning in the 1990s and into the present, both anthropologists⁸⁵ and African theologians⁸⁶ have come to recognize that reformulated beliefs about witchcraft are proliferating and flourishing under the influence of modernity, capitalism, urbanization, and Christianity. The topic is again receiving prioritized scholarly attention. And central to the new and emerging cultural patterns is the

identification of children as the locus of witch agency and harm.

Scholars who've studied the phenomenon of child-witch accusations uniformly point to the role of Christian churches in the new patterns.⁸⁷ And while those who write on the topic often identify pastoral leaders of "Pentecostal churches," or "Revival Churches," or "African Independent Churches" as the central actors in the drama of child-witchcraft, our own research results in Kinshasa indicate that the relevant patterns currently exist in each church tradition. Indeed, there are greater differences between pastors and churches within each tradition than there are differences between the averages of each church tradition. On the questions we explore, all of the significant differences that do exist between denominational traditions and between those who do or do not identify as "pentecostal" are small to medium, not large.

But within each denominational tradition, one finds significant variability. In each church tradition, one finds pastors and churches that endorse virtually every child-witch accusation they encounter, and others that refuse to endorse any child-witch accusations. In some churches sermons, prayers, deliverance practices, and confessions pedagogically transmit the view that misfortunes are to be understood as caused by child-witches. In other churches, each of these is absent or at least contested. In some churches, there are ministries that prioritize practical care and protection for the accused, including defense against the very accusation itself, and in others there are ministries that portray the accused child as incredibly powerful and evil, requiring strong and even harsh interventions.

Given these divergences, it would be natural to assume that pastors simply differ in whether or not they believe in the possibility of some people having a preternatural ability to harm other people through witchcraft, and that this is what determines their tendencies either to reject or endorse child-witch accusations. But field experience, as well as the

⁸³ $r = .139, p < .001$.

⁸⁴ For example, Geoffrey Parrinder predicted in 1958 (202-203) that "enlightened religion, education, medicine and better social and racial conditions will help to dispel witchcraft beliefs."

⁸⁵ See, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 1999; Ashforth 2005; De Boeck 2013; De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Geschiere 1997, 2013; Meyer 1992, 1999; La Fontaine 2009.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Onyinah 2004, 2012; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015; Kunhiyop 2002; Onongha 2017.

⁸⁷ Adinkrah 2011; Ballet, Lallau & Dumbi 2019; Barker 2016; Bastian 2001; Cahn 2006; Chilimampungwa and Thindwa 2012; Cimpric 2010; De Boeck 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009; De Boeck and Honwa 2005; De Boeck and Plissart 2003, 2004; D'Haeyer 2004; Foxcraft 2007; Hanson and Ruggiero 2013; La Fontaine 2009, 2012; Molina 2005; Nwadinobi 2008; Onuzulike 2013; Pereira 2011; Phiri 2009; Pirot 2004; Pull 2009; Riedel 2012; Snow 2017; Stobart 2006; Tabu 2008; Tate and Stauss 2006; Tonda 2008; Van der Meer 2013; Yengo 2008.

quantitative survey data already mentioned above, suggest this is incorrect. Consider the following two episodes.

At a 2015 workshop hosted by EPED, a Congolese theologian for three days told story after story deconstructing child-witch accusations to the great entertainment and appreciation of all. But finally, he was asked to confirm that he did recognize that witchcraft is real and that some people really are witches who harm others through their powers. He responded that while humans can use natural powers to harm others, he did not believe any human being had the supernatural ability to harm another through witchcraft. The outcry was immediate, with one pastor publicly saying, "I am so sorry you said this. We have been loving everything you have taught us for three days. It has been so helpful. But now we have to question everything you have told us."⁸⁸ Privately that evening, in my (Robert Priest) presence, another church leader advised this theologian that in future he should recognize that he will lose credibility if he publicly affirms such a view.

Again in May of 2017, I (Robert Priest) spent a month with EPED pastors, listening to story after story of pastors recounting how they had defended children against witch accusations. But when some EPED leaders perceived that I thought this meant that they completely disbelieved in the reality and power of actual witches to cause harm through their supernatural powers, they treated me to a late-night banquet where they recounted personal experiences intended to convince me of the reality of witchcraft, including stories of Americans who learned to their detriment that witchcraft was real. Notably, these stories featured only adults as witches.

As our survey confirms, very few Kinshasa pastors are inclined to categorically deny the very possibility of witch causality. To do so before a Congolese audience would be to lose credibility. It would signal unbelief in the supernatural realities widely understood to be taught in Scripture. It would imply capitulation to white secularist unbelief.

Although we have no comparative data allowing us to statistically compare witch beliefs of Kinshasa residents in general with those of pastors examined in this report, it seems likely that there is marked convergence in belief. That is, it is likely that pastors are affirming, as De Boeck argued, ideas about witches that are widely shared by parents and others. But unlike the average Kinshasa resident, pastors are thought of as cognitive authorities on the realm of the supernatural. And those pastors who do claim such authority in a religious market have a competitive advantage in certain

respects over those who ignore or deny what is commonly believed. In such an open religious market, churches and pastors of all traditions entrepreneurially adapt ideas and practices from those in other traditions who seem most successful in appealing to a broad audience and to its taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus the patterns examined in this paper have a strong, though not uniform, presence in each church tradition.

4.2 Grassroots Strategies of Transformative Engagement

How then do pastors, most of whom do believe in the possibility that some humans truly are witches causing great harm to others, nonetheless mobilize a movement to protect children from child-witch accusations and their consequences? While this research failed to focus data collection on this question to the extent it should have, a number of patterns were observed that are suggestive.

First, EPED staff reframe each claim that a child is a witch, as an allegation to be questioned, not a pronouncement to be endorsed. While others routinely refer to accused children as "witches," in the EPED workshop Robert Priest and Timothy Stabell attended leaders consistently referred rather to "children that are said to be witches." This seemingly minor linguistic shift from "child-witches" to "children that are said to be witches," laid a critical foundation for considering the many possible reasons why such claims might justifiably be questioned. When Pastor Kokasi, who attended several EPED workshops, was asked how the training changed his approach, he explained that today when parents bring their children to him and "confirm that their child is truly a witch," I no longer immediately "agree with their accusations," or "jump to a conclusion" that the child really is a witch.

Second, EPED staff encourage pastors to focus on family dynamics, especially in relation to whoever is most centrally behind the accusations. Pastors learn that a high proportion of accused children are accused by someone other than a biological parent and that when step-parents or more distant relatives are the prime accusers, there are often good reasons to distrust the accusers. EPED pastors tell story after story of the rather straightforward human dynamics discovered to lie behind allegations. Pastor Kokasi, for example, tells about a child whose mother accused him of witchcraft. Because of his EPED training, Pastor Kokasi probed further into the family dynamics and discovered that the accuser was a step-mother wishing to get rid of a child not her own. He concluded that her motives raised questions about the credibility of her accusation.

⁸⁸ This is an approximation of what was said, based on memory, and is not verbatim.

The following provides a summary of case notes on a case being followed up by EPED staff during my (Robert Priest's) Kinshasa visit in May of 2017. It illustrates this strategy of engagement and also hints at others.

Berthe's Story



Pastor Faustin Tshiebue, of EPED, pays 17-year-old Berthe⁸⁰ a visit (May 2017).

Berthe was born to an unwed mother who subsequently married. Facing financial troubles, they moved in with her maternal aunt. Her aunt saw that Berthe wet her bed, would talk in her sleep, and had poor health, and suspected Berthe was a witch that had caused her parents' financial difficulties. She took Berthe first to a prophetess, and later to an intercessor from her church, who each endorsed the charge of witchcraft. Berthe denied the allegation but was subjected to insults, threats, torture, and food deprivation (forced fasting as part of deliverance). Her aunt, not satisfied with the results, kicked Berthe out of her home. A pastor's wife learned of her situation and arranged for an EPED pastor to begin a discussion with Berthe and her mother, and with her accusers—that is, her uncle and aunt. The pastor was able to uncover and communicate the information that Berthe's stepfather had lost his job, not due to witchcraft, but because of "his poor attitude in service and his disobedience to his supervisor's instructions." The pastor stressed the value and importance of this child in the eyes of God. He explained the "law concerning child protection" and warned of possible consequences over the eviction of a child. As a result of the pastor's persuasion "there was reconciliation and a good atmosphere regained surrounding the child and all members of the family." Berthe's mother received limited financial support from EPED enabling her to start a microbusiness to provide for her daughter.

Berthe is back in school, her health restored. EPED continues to follow up with periodic visits, offering mentoring sessions with the word of God. "To this day a positive atmosphere continues to prosper within the family, and the child is doing great."

A third emphasis, as seen in the above account, is that EPED pastors continually name the harms that result from identifying children as witches, the "insults, threats, torture, food deprivation" and eviction to the streets. They work to transform the narrative of evil from a narrative that attributes great evil to accused children and point instead to the great evil perpetrated against children by their accusers. In that context, they actively appeal to (and even threaten with) the Congolese law on child protection, a law that names child-witch accusations a prosecutable crime.

A fourth aspect of EPED workshops and mentoring is the effort to critique and neutralize the logic of suspicion that deliverance ministries propagate and build their ministries on. That is, as was seen above, deliverance pastors list and identify all sorts of seemingly puzzling phenomena that are in fact common in every human community (talking in one's sleep, dreaming of flying), or phenomena that are common among those who have suffered traumas (nightmares, depression), and they coach people to believe that each of these is a symptom indicating that someone is a witch. Speakers at EPED workshops, by contrast, tell story after story pointing to alternative understandings of the very phenomena supposedly indicating a witch identity. Two of the most common dreams all over the world are dreams of flying or of being naked. But in most cultures, no one draws the conclusion that the dreamer must be a witch. Speakers remind listeners of the traumas children have experienced (such as the death of parents). They explain and elucidate the symptoms of PTSD. The very symptoms deliverance ministers list as evidence the child is the cause of great evil, they redefine as evidence the child has suffered great evil. And the stories EPED spokespersons repeatedly tell feature positive outcomes when children are embraced, cared for, fed, medically treated, counseled, educated, mentored. This is illustrated in the conclusion of EPED's report on Berthe: "To this day a positive atmosphere continues to prosper within the family, and the child is doing great!"

A fifth dimension of EPED interventions is the recognition that accusations often emerge from homes suffering economic hardship. Thus, they emphasize the importance of a holistic engagement with all dimensions of individual and family well-being, ranging from educational to medical to dietary. This is

⁸⁰ This name is a pseudonym.

illustrated in the above case where EPED arranged finances to help Berthe's mother begin a small micro-enterprise.

Stressing the identity of the accused *as children* is also central to EPED's strategic response. Children are, of course, not the only ones accused of witchcraft.⁹⁰ But the negative social consequences to children of such accusations are obvious, and it is doubtless easier to make a plausible and compelling appeal to the innocence and victimhood of children, than to the elderly. As alluded to in the above case notes, EPED pastors often exposit the many biblical passages showing God's love for orphans and other children, and the biblical commands for us to love and protect such children. Workshops focus on what it means practically to love children, to listen to them, to talk to them, to treat them with gentle and firm care. This focus on children represents a strategic emphasis, which potentially could be leveraged into a wider concern for other accused vulnerable parties.⁹¹

Child Reintegrated into her Family



Naomi⁹², reintegrated into her family, plays with her little sister at EPED staff visit.

EPED leaders recount stories of how pastors or parents went through a paradigm shift, a repentance even for the way they have treated children. Parents whose kids are already on the street are encouraged to repent and go find their children, bring them home, be

reconciled to them, and develop healthy ways of relating to them as children.

EPED leaders coach pastors to avoid any actions that could be interpreted as endorsing the witch accusation. One pastor reported that someone brought him a child and asked him to pray for the child. Although he had no particular reason to believe the child was a witch, he laid hands on the child and prayed. Later he was surprised to learn the relatives were telling others he had agreed the child was a witch, citing his authority on behalf of their accusations. Pastors, EPED leaders warn, must take care not to be co-opted. One EPED leader illustrated his own response to a request for prayer. A woman brought him her stepson, asking for prayer. Noticing the child's obvious health problems, and perceiving her unspoken assumption that the child was a witch, the pastor told her, before I pray I want you to take the child to a nearby clinic for medical diagnosis. He gave her money and asked that she bring him the receipt and medical report. When she returned with prescriptions, he again sent her with money to fill the prescriptions and to return with receipts. Again, he deferred prayer, telling her to go home and care for her son following the medical prescriptions. She was to return in two weeks to begin counseling and prayer. After two weeks, she returned with her son's condition greatly improved, open for him to interview them each separately, to give advice on practical family matters, and to pray in a context where it was clear the prayer was not endorsing witch suspicions. Some pastors quite decisively confront anyone seen as propagating witch suspicions. The pastor in the above case also reported on an incident when a distant aunt visited his home, with his family of many children. She began to make indirect allusions to sensing the presence of a child witch. He immediately proceeded forcefully to shout at her, "Out, out, out of my home. No one who spreads such suspicions is welcome here!"

Finally, EPED workshops are led by pastors, and sometimes by theologians—who draw from the perceived authority of Scripture and theology—to engage the issues. In the workshop we attended, Dr. Opoku Onyinah, a prominent Pentecostal theologian

⁹⁰ While our survey focused primarily on child-witch allegations, we did ask pastors how frequently they had received allegations that an adult was a witch, as well as how frequently they had received allegations that a child was a witch. The numbers were quite similar, but with slightly more adults accused than children. Unfortunately, we do not have data on the consequences to Kinshasa adults of such accusations, to match our extensive data on child-witch accusations.

⁹¹ According to Levack (2006a, 154) "child witches figured prominently in the last great witch hunts in Sweden, Augsburg and Austria." Levack (154-155) believes the increased prosecution of children contributed to "a general doubt that those accused were guilty" and thus "played a significant role in the decline and end of witchcraft" in Europe. In short, by focusing on child-witch accusations, EPED may be contributing to a strategic step in moving church and society away from witch accusations altogether.

⁹² This name is a pseudonym.

and church leader, provided biblical and theological expositions critiquing all sorts of popular practices related to child-witch accusations, and drew from his extensive formal research and pastoral experience in relation to child witchcraft. He successfully talked through anthropological realities, psychological dynamics, and biblical teaching all in the context of recounting his many experiences with handling cases of children—each of whom he told us had been wrongly accused of witchcraft. He successfully critiqued the problems with popular child-deliverance ministries, defended the sorts of approach advocated by EPED, and appealed to his own spiritual authority as the leader of the largest Pentecostal church fellowship in Ghana in pronouncing such children innocent.

Most pastors influenced by EPED and by this approach to resisting child-witch accusations did not change fundamentally in whether or not they thought witches with harm-inducing witch powers might conceivably exist.⁹³ Rather they changed in their predilections as to whether actual specific witch allegations should be trusted. The shift is illustrated by the words of one African seminarian⁹⁴ who said, *“When I first heard my professor question whether those accused of witchcraft were truly guilty, I thought, “If 100 people are accused, maybe one of them is innocent!” But after attending pastoral workshops on the topic, and doing my own research where I met and worked closely with many individuals who’ve been accused, and hearing their stories, I now think, “If 100 people are accused, maybe one of them is guilty!”* I suggest that this exemplifies the shift for many Kinshasa pastors, a shift with real consequences for how any actual allegation of witchcraft is engaged. Instead of a presumption of guilt, many such pastors presume the accusation is likely false. Instead of imagining evil as most likely residing centrally in the accused child, they now imagine evil as frequently residing in the false and motivated accusations of accusers, and in their actions harming the child. Pastors are opened to the idea that Satan does his work through false accusations, which is why Scripture names him the great accuser.⁹⁵ When we accept false child-witch accusations against orphans, we are inclined

to treat orphans as dangerous and evil. Thus we are motivated to do the work Satan desires, rather than what God calls us to, to love and protect orphans.⁹⁶

In America’s own most famous witch hunt at Salem, people began with an inclination to endorse every accusation. And so eighteen alleged witches were publicly hung, one was pressed to death, and hundreds more were jailed (the youngest jailed alleged witch was four years old). Witch accusations spiraled out of control. Motivations of accusers increasingly seemed suspect. The supposed evidences of guilt (e.g. “spectral evidence”) increasingly seemed problematic. Even confessions seemed less than trustworthy. At Salem, the accused who refused to confess were killed. Those who confessed escaped the death penalty. This is not a process likely to produce highly credible confessions. The result of all this was that New England went through a rapid and profound change in its perception of witch accusations. The shift was not that people become naturalists or atheists.⁹⁷ Most citizens probably would not have denied the very possibility of witch powers. But, like the pastor above, who began by presuming the validity of virtually all witch-allegations, and who ended up doubting virtually all witch-accusations, this shift resulted in deep resistance ever again to wrongly contribute to the harm caused by endorsing false witch-accusations. And, in New England, the witch hunts ended. I suggest that a small, but increasing, number of Kinshasa pastors are making a similar and consequential shift. Similar networks of pastors in other cities of the DRC and in other countries are going through similar shifts.

4.3 Christianity and Its Relationship to Witch Accusations

While it is likely that Kinshasa pastors share many of the same ideas about witches as others in their community, they nonetheless serve as influential authorities and thought leaders who affirm, reformulate, and propagate the mix of ideas about witchcraft that is present in Kinshasa. While in the past, diviners, shamans, and traditional healers were the

⁹³ As noted above, a very small number of pastors took this position.

⁹⁴ This young man was a Sukuma from Tanzania, where he primarily had in mind old women as accused witches in his comments to me (Robert Priest). But I suggest this illustrates the shift many pastors have gone through in Kinshasa also.

⁹⁵ For a biblical and theological treatment of this theme by a theologian, see Girard (2001).

⁹⁶ See, for example, Psalm 82:3, James 1:27.

⁹⁷ Doubtless, for some, it did have this effect. In the long run, especially given the centrality of the Christian church (and of theologians such as Cotton Mather) to this Salem episode, this event doubtless had a profound negative impact on the credibility of Christianity for many, influencing a rejection of Christian faith.

religious professionals that people trusted to understand, explain, and address witchcraft realities, today in Kinshasa Christian pastors are the authorities people frequently rely on for help. And while earlier mission churches seldom addressed the topic of witchcraft, a majority of today's churches—through public prayers and songs, through rituals of confession and deliverance, through pastoral sermons, and through the circulation of pamphlets and books written by pastors—actively propagate and instruct in a whole set of complex ideas related to witchcraft. Through such church pedagogy, people are taught that the various misfortunes they encounter in life are likely due to the witch agency of children and others. People learn that witches might not even know they are witches, but that the content of their dreams (dreams of flying, of being naked, of bathing children, of eating meat) demonstrates their identity as witches. They learn complex and multifarious ideas about how to recognize that someone is truly the witch who has caused the misfortune and tragedy that they experience. They learn that some Christian leaders truly understand such realities, and should be trusted to guide a process of child-witch deliverance.

In short, while most pastors' understandings of witchcraft in all likelihood do not differ fundamentally from the understandings of Kinshasa's population as a whole, pastors nonetheless play central authority roles in justifying, reformulating, and socially transmitting the complex of ideas related to child witchcraft. Today, when Kinshasa residents learn the ideas about witchcraft which they come to affirm and take for granted, it is often in church that they do so, in the very liturgy of the church, by the very authority of pastoral spokespersons. Such ideas come to seem, for many, a part of Christian orthodoxy. And, when scholars who've researched child witchcraft emphasize the role of churches and church networks (along with the influence of Nigerian, Ghanaian, and Congolese Christian movies and TV shows⁹⁸) in spreading the new ideologies and ritual practices related to child-witch accusations, they are probably correct. That is, church networks

appear to be central to the spread of child-witch ideologies and deliverance practices.

Indeed, if we rely on the extensive scholarly literature on child-witch accusations to infer its contours, this phenomenon is apparently not present in African Muslim communities in any way comparable to its presence in African Christian communities. To state this bluntly: It is in Christian churches, not Muslim mosques, where allegations of child-witchcraft proliferate and flourish. The anthropologist Aleksandra Cimpric (2010, 15) puzzles over this apparent fact. She mentions the possible relevance of doctrinal differences and argues that Islam and Christianity provided differing levels of opportunity and support for the improvisational translation and communication of their religious message, which she suggests may partially explain differences of outcome. While the untranslated Koran remained only in Arabic, Christians translated the Bible into each language and encouraged its meaning to be improvisationally explicated using indigenous languages and concepts. This created more scope for new hybridities, a topic to which we return below.

In any case, as our research confirms, African churches have been central both in propagating child-witch ideologies, and in working to resist child-witch ideologies, accusations, and deliverance practices. And, African church leaders and theologians, like the Boston ministers in America's own most famous witch hunt (in Salem),⁹⁹ might well be the only actors in many African communities with sufficient cognitive authority to make a decisive difference. This report is written with such influential church leaders and theologians in view.

Indeed this Kinshasa research was inspired, conceived, and planned in the context of a larger scholarly conversation by an international community of church leaders and theological educators. In March of 2013, and again in March of 2016, theologians, church historians, missiologists, and church leaders gathered in Nairobi from across Africa and the wider world, to engage a pastoral and theological conversation about witch accusations and the church.¹⁰⁰ Between the

⁹⁸ For Nollywood films on child-witches see Onuzulike 2014; Ugochukwu 2017; for Ghanaian films Meyer 2015; and for Kinshasa films Pye 2012. A grassroots illustration of the possible influence of these movies was reported to Robert Priest by Rev. Dr. Steve Rasmussen, a Pentecostal missionary among the Sukuma of Tanzania, where elderly widows were frequently identified as witches and sometimes killed. Steve told a Sukuma Pentecostal pastor that in Kinshasa people often accused children of being witches. The pastor declared, "That is terrible! Children can't be witches!" Ten years later, that very pastor mentioned an 8-year-old neighbor child and told Steve Rasmussen, "That child killed his mother." "But you told me children could not be witches," Steve objected. "Yes, but he confessed," was the reply. Rasmussen pinpointed the local influence of Nollywood movies and TV shows with their depictions of child witches, deliverance rituals, and confessions as likely influences on the emerging trend.

⁹⁹ If, for example, Increase Mather and other Boston ministers had responded decisively at a much earlier stage with their later theologically informed critique of spectral evidence, they could have stopped the atrocities instantly. They were arguably the only social actors in that setting with sufficient cognitive authority to have decisively made such a difference.

¹⁰⁰ With funding secured by Robert Priest and Dr. Tite Tienou from the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understandings of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

consultations, a number of the key participants (Dr. Andy Anguandia-Alo, Dr. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Dr. Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, Dr. Opoku Onyinah, Dr. Robert Priest, Dr. Steve Rasmussen, Dr. Timothy Stabell) regularly contributed blog postings on this topic at the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding—with less frequent postings by others.¹⁰¹ And at each colloquium, among the speakers and workshop leaders, were denominational leaders of churches representing a combined sixteen million members spread across several African countries.

Church Leaders from across Africa Gathered to Discuss Witch Accusations and the Church



Participants at the March 6-9, 2013 Nairobi Colloquium on “Witchcraft Accusations and the Church”

From the first conference, it was clear that there was great interest in the topic. It also increasingly became clear that the conversation needed to focus, in part, on the vulnerable populations most targeted in witch accusations and violence (elderly widows, orphans, etc.), and that the role of churches in this whole phenomenon needed to be substantively considered. And while most conference participants had extensive personal experience with our topic, it became increasingly clear that high-quality research on the varying ways in which churches were understanding and engaging the issues, and with what varying outcomes, was needed as a basis for our shared conversation to move forward. Some of the most interesting conversations at the second conference focused on grass-roots initiatives with local pastors, such as when Dr. Steve Rasmussen’s and several Tanzanian Pentecostal Bishops and professors described how their pastoral network went through a paradigm shift in

how to engage allegations that old women were killing people through witchcraft.¹⁰² This larger conversation provided a backdrop for the desire to prioritize this Kinshasa research, research focused on a context where churches were variably engaged, and where it was possible to retain a central focus on a specific vulnerable population increasingly being targeted in witch accusations—children.

In September of 2017, several of the key participants in the above conferences (Steve Rasmussen, Abel Ngolo, Samuel Kunhiyop, Robert Priest, and Caroline Gent of The Bethany Children’s Trust) were invited to speak at a workshop sponsored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on “Witchcraft and Human Rights” that was held in Geneva. Roughly ninety scholars, activists, and human rights leaders were present. We heard stories of women burned alive as witches in New Guinea and North India, of orphan children abandoned to the streets of Kinshasa, of elderly men murdered as witches in Malindi (on the coast of Kenya), of elderly widows lynched with machetes in Tanzania, and of thousands of vulnerable women who have sought refuge from lynching in the witch camps of Northern Ghana.

Speakers at Workshop Sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



In Geneva outside the UN Palais Wilson: Robert Priest (far left), Abel Ngolo (far right), and Caroline Gent (center right).

Many of the speakers expressed a concern that witch ideologies, beliefs, and accusatory practices were all too

¹⁰¹ <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/section/witch-accusations/>. To view or download all postings in a single document, see https://www.academia.edu/40619650/Blog_Conversation_About_Witchcraft_Accusations_and_the_Church.

¹⁰² Including Raphael Okeyo, Benester Misana, and Nestory Lunyilija.

often propagated through Christian religious institutions and networks. That is, speakers not only reminded us that Christianity had played a historical role in helping legitimate the ideas that led to the European witch hunts, but argued that Christian communities today sometimes continue to accredit ideas that contribute to the sometimes aggressive actions directed at those alleged to be witches. However, a number of human rights activists also expressed a recognition that their own secular humanism significantly hindered them from having a credible voice with many local communities. And indeed, there was a recognition that a number of Christian faith-based initiatives, led by confessing Christians, were having a significant positive impact for good. Thus, a distinctive feature of this UN conference was the invited presence of church leaders, theologians, missionaries, and missiologists as full conversation partners—including several from our own working group.

4.3 *Where do we go from here?*

Contestable ideologies about witchcraft have permeated the discourses, liturgy, and practices of many churches with profound consequences for human lives. And when grassroots networks of pastors strive to wisely engage the issues, we should applaud. But the seriousness of the issues, and the difficulties they pose for Christians, and the implications of our engagements for the credibility and witness of Christian churches across time and space, would suggest the importance of an Africa-wide and even global Christian conversation among church historians, biblical scholars, theologians, missiologists, and anthropologists over the issues and their implications. The very topic of witchcraft naturally lends itself to such an interdisciplinary dialogue. This in-depth research on child-witchcraft in Kinshasa provides a significant starting point for further discussion and engagement of the issues. And since the on-line journal "On Knowing Humanity" exists to foster integrative dialogue between theology and anthropology, and has agreed to publish this report, as well as to publish a variety of responses by knowledgeable Christian scholars from diverse disciplines and regions of the world, this is a potentially ground-breaking publication event where a variety of contributors are invited to help us all gain clarity on the issues involved.

The following are a few selective observations for contributors to consider as we brainstorm how to move the conversation forward in a constructive way.

New Hybridities. First, we should acknowledge that Christian discourses and practices inevitably involve admixtures or hybridities of meanings, categories, assumptions, actions, and intentions indebted to some

combination of Scripture and culture. This happens in every cultural setting in relation to all sorts of difficult matters ranging from sexual ethics to witchcraft. Within the rubric of orthodox Christian faith, hybrid formulations can involve either a healthy and proper contextualization of the Christian faith or alternatively a flawed and harmful syncretism. Exploring and assessing this requires 1) careful attention to the actual discourses and practices of a given Christian community and of its spokespersons, 2) careful attention to traditional discourses and practices of the prior or wider culture, 3) careful attention to what Scripture itself does or does not support, and 4) a careful effort to assess contemporary teachings and practices in the light of the first three. Considering all of this requires understandings of anthropology, of culture, of the history of the gospel/culture encounter, of the contemporary cultures of specific Christian communities, and of Scripture. The following is intended to illustrate first, what is meant by a hybrid concept, and second to point to broader themes and processes to be grappled with.

The Mystical Seed of Witchcraft. According to leading deliverance ministers in Kinshasa, a witch is a person contaminated with a "mystical witchcraft seed" that empowers them towards harm, evil, and destruction. This witchcraft seed can be transmitted into someone by means of contact with a gift of food, drinks, clothes, or toys. Alternatively it may be transmitted in a dream, through sex, or acquired from one's mother while still in the womb. The presence of this seed gives Satan total authority and control. This seed is not itself a spirit, but allows Satan to influence the witch's behavior (manifesting itself in hatred, arrogance, "exaggerated nudity," or "lack of self-control shown by untamed words, open brutality, epidemic reactions"). Through this seed Satan is also able to influence the witch's dreams, which then feature "life in places lived long ago," "abominations and aberrations," and "troubled, tormented, disruptive" dreams." Such persons become "fundamentally bad." "Like a bomb," those with the witchcraft seed are a source of "massive destruction." Witchcraft is the means by which Satan accomplishes his goal as articulated in John 10:10—"to steal, to kill, and to destroy." Witches serve their master, Satan. When the seed is fully activated, a witch moves from unconscious sorcery to conscious sorcery. The first transmission of this evil seed unleashing "all the power of destruction of the tripartite human being, i.e. body, soul and spirit" occurred in the Garden of Eden, with the eating of the forbidden fruit. Examples in Scripture of those with this mystical seed include Nabal (I Samuel 25) and Judas. Deliverance must be

oriented towards the removal of this seed.¹⁰³

There are some clear parallels here to pre-Christian ideas of a witchcraft “substance” that a diviner would sometimes remove from an alleged witch. Through the recurrent biblical metaphor of “seed” that is linked to evil, to sin, and to Satan (as in the Genesis 3:15 reference to the “seed” of the Serpent), the “substance” idea is transformed into a “seed” that remains impersonal, but is now Satanically empowered.

The Meaning of Suffering. In every society, people have struggled to make sense of misfortunes and suffering which they experience. But how they explain such afflictions varies from one culture to another. In some cultures, people explain suffering by recourse to what anthropologist Richard Shweder (2003) calls moral causal ontologies. In such cultures, when a man has painful and mysterious physical afflictions, the repeated death of children, the loss of wealth and fortune, as with Job in the Bible, cultural counselors will interpret the afflictions as a sort of karma for the sufferer’s own sin. Everyone gets what they deserve, perhaps because of sins in a prior life. But in other cultures people never explain misfortune in this way. In some cultures people explain misfortune by reference to auspicious vs. inauspicious times and seasons, what Shweder calls an astrophysical causal ontology. But Shweder points out that the most common causal ontology, although not present in every society, is an interpersonal causal ontology which attributes suffering and misfortune to other human beings thought to have caused harm through evil occult power. The precise cultural theory for how the power operates varies from one culture to another. But what such cultures share is the explanation that another malevolent human being is to blame. In such cultures, every misfortune and death triggers a quest to identify some third human party to hold responsible. The “why” question is transformed into a “who” question, as in Sylvain Mbaki’s family quest for “who” killed his deceased sister. And as we saw earlier, many Kinshasa pastors teach people to attribute the misfortunes in their lives to witches, including child-witches. According to Shweder, such an interpersonal causal ontology is extremely wide-spread. The Bible, of course, is also filled with narratives of suffering, infertility, and death—and addresses the meaning of suffering and affliction in a variety of ways. A more careful comparison of the most widespread ideas in Kinshasa for how to make sense of misfortune with the full spectrum of biblical teaching on the subject, is needed. Sometimes Scripture does attribute afflictions to demonic or Satanic agency, which introduces our next theme.

Satan, Demons, and Witches: Consider the matter

of how to understand the Christian Satan in relationship to the witch idea. While the concept of a high God was common in many African societies prior to the presence of Christianity, the concept of a Satan figure, of a powerful and evil supernatural being as the discursive focus of evil, as the opponent of God and the good, the leader of a host of demonic beings similarly inclined, was absent. Ancestral spirits and nature spirits were often understood to exist, but were not understood as ultimate opponents of God or the good. In African traditional moral discourses, the discursive focus of evil was centered rather on the image of the human witch—the incarnation of anti-social impulses—who was thought to be envious, malicious, resentful, cannibalistic, harmful and hateful, without normal moral scruples. The witch’s power was understood as personal and psychic or magical, but was not normally thought of as power derived from sentient nonhuman spirits. That is, witch power was power that belonging to the person of the witch, not to a spirit. But, as argued by Onyinah (2004, 2012), the advent of Christianity fostered new hybrid formulations. Since both Satan and the traditional image of the witch were central images of evil, the similarities naturally resulted in conflation of the two. Since indigenous languages lacked words that closely fit the idea of Satan, it was often words associated with witches that were used for Satan. For example, while the Adiokrou of Côte d’Ivoire traditionally had no concept of a supernatural Satan, or even of evil supernatural beings implacably opposed to God and the good, they did have a concept of a witch (*agnu*), whose witchcraft power (*agn*) was directed in anti-social and harmful attacks on others. In traditional understandings, this *agn* was a psychic power that belonged to the *agnu* (the witch) and had nothing to do with sentient non-human spirits. But under the influence of Christianity, the psychic meaning of the traditional word for witchcraft, *agn*, was transformed into the notion of a sentient, evil non-human being, and became the very word Christians and others used to refer to “the devil” (Hill 2007). This did not mean that the Adiokrou abandoned the idea of human witches, only that they transformed the logic for how the human witch (*agnu*) acquired and utilized power. People still accused other people of being *agnu* (a witch), of having caused their misfortunes, but now the harm was understood simultaneously as a harm produced by a person and by a sentient supernatural devil. When the Bible was later translated into Adiokrou, *agn* became the word used for “the devil” (Hill 2007). Similarly, the anthropologist Birgit Meyer, in her book *Translating the Devil* (1999a), documents how early missionaries to the Ewe of Ghana translated Satan as *Abonsam*, an

¹⁰³ Wallo Mutsenga 2013; Kigalu Mangala 2008, 87, 123, 205, 77, 84-85, 145; Kalonji 2003, 26-27.

Akan term which she says was originally understood by the Ewe as a synonym for “witch.” Every Ewe and Adiokrou Christian reference to Satan, and indeed every biblical reference to Satan in their translated Bibles, thus becomes simultaneously a reference to, and ratification of, the witch idea. But whether or not words meaning “witch” were used to translate the idea of Satan,¹⁰⁴ the associations between the two were easily and frequently made. The very description of Satan as one who came to “steal, kill, and destroy” named Satan as doing precisely what witches were traditionally understood to do. Associating the two was quite natural. And increasingly older ideas of witches that operated with their own psychic power transitioned to newer ideas linking them to demonic power—a power to be combatted by deliverance. Onyinah (2004, 2012, 2001) argues that these new hybrid understandings emerged among Ghanaian Christians partly indebted to ancient African understandings, partly indebted to the Scriptures as translated and communicated by missionaries, and partly inspired by the “spiritual warfare” writings of westerners (he mentions Derek Prince, Charles Kraft and Peter Wagner). This new “witch-demonology” cited passages in the gospels where Jesus cast demons out of people that were afflicted, as justification for utilizing deliverance methods on people understood to be witches. That is, they applied deliverance to people understood as the cause of other people’s afflictions. This, despite the fact that none of the Gospel accounts even hints at the idea that those being delivered were suspected of having harmed others through witchcraft. Rather the Gospels associate demonized (“demon-possessed”) people with those whom Jesus healed of various diseases, and thus identifies them as fellow sufferers rather than as somehow responsible for the suffering of others. Onyinah provides an excellent initial discussion of such dynamics and processes, illustrating the sorts of analysis and assessments that are needed.

*Is the witch idea universal?*² Anthropologists report that people in a high proportion of traditional societies did explain misfortune by reference to the notion that certain antisocial persons harmed others through some form of evil occult power. The precise logic of how the power was explained was culturally variable (psychic, magical), and indeed was frequently modified under the influence of Christianity towards a more demon-based logic of power. In any case, the interpersonal causal ontology logic was quite widespread. But it was not universal.¹⁰⁵ Robert Priest, the child of missionaries to

the Bolivian Siriono, agrees with earlier anthropologists that while the Siriono believed in spirit realities (and told stories of fearsome encounters with nature spirits), they never attributed their own misfortunes to the mystical evil powers of another person. There were no witches even in the imagination of this society. This historical absence of the witch idea was not unusual for hunter-gatherer societies, or for some East Asian societies.

How exactly were the cultures different between those with the witch idea, and those without it? First, cultures with the witch idea exemplified an interpersonal causal ontology. People regularly explained infertility, sickness, poverty, and the death of loved ones by pointing to other human beings as to blame. Second, their languages had lexically specified terms for evil persons with occult powers thought to cause the misfortunes of others, words like *ndoki*, *nchawi*, *mulozi*, *doka*, *maye*, *oleu*, *akut*, *muoi*, *omorogi*, *murogi*, *mithakathi*, *boloki*, *fwiti*, *mfiti*, and *suba*. Third, in such cultures each misfortune or sequence of misfortunes triggered efforts to identify the supposed witch—often with a highly elaborated set of ideas about the signs that indicate one is a witch—such as red eyes, whiskers on an old woman, white hair on an old man, etc. Magico-religious professionals (shamans, diviners, prophets, pastors) publicly offered consultative services to identify and deal with the person thought to have caused the problem. In situations with high levels of misfortune, witch hunts may be conducted to ferret out witches. Fourth, it is frequently the case in such cultures that witch accusations are directed at powerless, vulnerable people—at widows, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, orphan children, and strangers. A by-product of this is that discourses about these categories of people in these cultures will often feature negative stereotypes and will encourage antipathy and fear of those who objectively are weak and vulnerable, rather than encouraging empathetic love and concern for them. Fifth, since cultures the world over believe serial murderers should be punished, when deaths are attributed to murders through witchcraft, there is typically a strong culturally shared impulse to get rid of the accused person either by violent eviction or lynching. When witch panics and witch hunts begin, this can sometimes result in the lynching of large numbers, as apparently occurred in June and July of 2001 around the Lugbara community of Aru (in the DRC), where several hundred people were reportedly killed

¹⁰⁴ A more common Bible translation strategy was simply to use a transliteration of the name “Satan,” rather than trying to find an equivalent term in the local language.

¹⁰⁵ George Peter Murdock (1980, 22-26) lists a number of traditional societies where anthropologists report that the witch/sorcerer explanation of illness was historically absent: Atayal, Aweikoma, Bororo, Bushmen, Japanese, Manchu, Samoyed, and Siriono.

(unpublished research by Dr. Andy Anguandia-Alo).¹⁰⁶ Sixth, there is strong evidence in such societies that people not only feel deep insecurity, but that they respond to this insecurity by methods thought to protect from the witch attacks of neighbors, relatives, or colleagues. Such methods may include use of protective charms and amulets, or of prayers to God for protection. All six of these patterns characterize a high proportion of traditional societies around the world, including Europe between 1450 and 1750 when forty-five thousand Europeans were executed as witches (Levack 2006, 1-29).

But in other societies, such as with the Siriono or Koreans, all six traits are missing. How has Christian contextualization worked in such societies? To what extent does one find in these societies discourses and practices similar to those in Kinshasa churches? Such societies, especially where Christianity has become strong make interesting test cases to consider in terms of the idea of the witch. After all, doesn't the Bible itself teach the idea of the witch—the idea that some people, through evil occult power, are secretly the cause of other people's misfortunes?

This is a larger topic than can be fully addressed here. But we wish to illustrate the possibility that Christians have fundamentally misread their Bibles, and thus that a larger conversation is needed that involves the biblical text, later translations, anthropological categories, and theological reflections.

Consider then, what is perhaps the central biblical text, one that most Kinshasa pastors can quote, translated into most Congolese languages¹⁰⁷ roughly as, "you shall not allow a witch that is a woman"¹⁰⁸ to live (Exodus 22:18)." When many African Christians read their Bibles, whether in local languages or in English or French, it will appear that the Bible itself straightforwardly affirms the common cultural belief that the real reason for people's misfortune is neighbors, relatives, or colleagues who are secret witches inflicting harm on others through evil occult power, and that the prescribed solution in Exodus, when faced with misfortune, was to seek to identify the individuals who are secretly causing misfortune to

others and remove them. In cultures that already have witch ontologies, this translation will be seen as a Christian endorsement of prior cultural assumptions and dispositions. And since the powers of witches operate invisibly, then there is a need for special routes to knowledge, if one is to identify such witches. To be clear, few contemporary pastors are utilizing this passage to call for the death of supposed witches. But many Christians do understand it as providing the underlying logic of why such people are evil (they cause harm and death), and the underlying logic for why they must be identified and dealt with.

It is interesting to consider the Bible which Korean Christians read, one in which Exodus 22:18 translates the Hebrew *kashaph* as *moodang*, a female shaman. The Korean Bible, identifies this person, not as witch, but as having an identity similar to that of African diviners and traditional healers. That is, a *moodang* has a public identity, and seeks clients whom they can provide services to. Koreans do not attribute misfortunes to the *moodang*. When Koreans read their Bibles, they will understand this passage as similar to many other Old Testament passages (Lev 19:31; 20:6; Deut 18:10-12; Isa 8:19-20; Jer 27:9) that condemn a wide variety of magico-religious professionals, ranging from diviners to mediums. And since these sorts of magico-religious professionals recruit clients during life crises and interpret the ultimate meaning of their life situation, what their future holds, while also prescribing magico-religious solutions to their problems, such public professionals are religiously competitive with the meanings, spokespersons, solutions, and allegiances or relationships that God was said to approve. Thus, the people of God should not become the trusting clients of magico-religious practitioners not endorsed by God, fostering ideologies and solutions not endorsed by God, and the nation of Israel should not permit such persons to advertise, recruit, and carry out their meaning-propagating activities within its borders.

Korean Christians read a fundamentally different Bible, in this respect, than do Congolese Christians. There are no witches in the Korean Bible. And the witch idea is not salient to how mainstream Korean

¹⁰⁶ See also: Adrian Bloomfield. 2001. "Massacre in the Jungle by Witch-Hunters," News.telegraph, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/democraticrepublicofcongo/1335661/Massacre-by-the-jungle-witchhunters.html>. [Viewed October 30, 2019]

¹⁰⁷ This includes, for example, Bibles in Kanioka, Kikongo, Kisonge, Kituba, Lingala, Lomongo, Ngbaka, Swahili, Tetela. For Congolese Bibles consulted, only the Tshiluba Bible avoided the Tshiluba term for witch (*muloji*), and used a title for an identity (*muena majimbu*) that is publicly claimed and performed before others, that offers to help clients counteract witchcraft.

¹⁰⁸ While this is not our focus here, it is worth pointing out the odd (and problematic) message conveyed when African witch categories (such as *mchawi*, *muchawi*, *ndoki*, *mfiti*, *omorogi*, *nurogi*, *nuoi*, *fwiti*) are understood locally to be either male or female—with male and female secret killers equally bad—and yet where the translated biblical texts, in an effort to be faithful to the original Hebrew grammar, implies that God only wishes the female versions of secret killers to be punished.

Christians understand the supernatural world.

For Christians who accept the authority of Scripture, the question remains, what exactly is the correct interpretation of this passage? How should this passage be translated? Into what local linguistic categories? Should local terms for evil secret killers be used? Or should translators use local terms for magico-religious professionals offering their services to contact the dead, forecast people's futures, provide healing through special supernatural powers, etc.? The answer to this question is not easy. The critical Hebrew word *kashaph* appears only a few times in the Old Testament, usually without enough context to guess its meaning. But a number of converging lines of evidence are suggestive. Etymologically it may have come from a word meaning "to mutter" (Bretherton 2005, 147). One clue to the Hebrew meaning of *kashaph* is present in the way the third-century BC Septuagint translated it into Greek using the term *pharmakous*, a word from which we get our term "pharmaceutical" and which appears to have been associated with incantations, herbs, potions, and medicines (ibid). In short, the *pharmakous* translation likely implied some sort of magico-religious practitioner offering their services for pay, and actively recruiting others to become clients, rather than the ascribed category of "secret killer." Of course when the later Latin Vulgate translated Exodus 22:18 as *maleficos*, implying malicious harm, this more closely approximated meanings parallel to many Congolese translations, but not to the Korean one.

A second line of evidence relates to the idea that when a list of categories are presented together as a cluster, they are often of a similar sort. Thus when one notices that the Hebrew word *kashaph* appears in lists (such as Exodus 7:11, Deut 18:10, Daniel 2:2) with other identities that are better understood, and where all the other identities relate to publicly claimed categories of people offering their services to clients, it makes sense that *kashaph* would be a similar sort of category. And indeed there are only two Old Testament passages where *kashaph* is used with enough context to infer its meaning, a meaning similar to African categories for people who offer their services to clients (*nganga*, *nganga-kisi*, *mfumu*, *shalubuku*) rather than to the ascribed category of witch (*ndoki*, *mchawi*, *muloji*, *mliti*, *mthakathi*). In Exodus 7:11, after Moses performs wonders, Pharaoh calls for his guild of *kashaph*, to see if they can perform similar wonders. And in Daniel 2:2 King Nebachadnezzar calls for his guild of *kashaph* to interpret a dream. In short, in the only two instances in Scripture where we actually see the word used descriptively of an ethnographic event, *kashaph* is applied to magico-religious professionals employed by a king to do precisely the sorts of things that diviners, shamans, and wonder workers do for clients. These are not framed as secretly evil destroyers

of human lives and human flourishing.

In a 2002 interview, Eugene Nida, the "world's most influential Bible Translator," complained in a *Christianity Today* interview that many Bible translators fixate on, and worship, words, but fail to understand that "words only have meanings in terms of the culture of which they are a part" (Nida and Neff 2002, 46). This suggests a final line of evidence involving the larger culture of which *kashaph* is a part. As suggested earlier, anthropology demonstrates that six cultural attributes cluster together with the cultural construct of the witch. One of those has to do with the presence of a linguistic category for witch. But since it is unclear whether or not *kashaph* fits the witch category, it makes sense to look at the other five aspects that normally accompany the lexical presence of a witch concept, to see whether it fits.

First, such a concept will derive its cultural meaning from a broader underlying causal ontology that is interpersonal. In short, cultural discourses about infertility, poverty, suffering, sickness, and death will continually attribute misfortunes to the occult evil agency of malevolent neighbors, relatives, or colleagues. But while such attributions are pervasive in cultures with witch constructs, and while the Bible itself is filled with narratives about infertility, poverty, suffering, sickness, and death, there is not one single example anywhere in Scripture where anybody's misfortune is ever attributed to the evil occult agency of another human person. The book of Job, for example, is one long narrative about precisely the misfortunes that in other cultures would be explainable only in terms of evil third-party witches. But the counselors of Job's culture explained misfortunes by appealing to a radically different causal ontology—a moral causal ontology. Never once do they even hint at the idea that some neighbor, relative, or colleague of Job might be causing his misfortune through witchcraft.

Second, in such cultures whenever misfortune strikes, major efforts are exerted to identify the evil witch causing the problem, with special techniques and powers and with magico-religious professionals deployed to hunt and identify those thought to have caused the misfortune of others. Again there is no evidence for any of this from Hebrew narrative.

Third, such cultures often attribute negative characteristics to orphans, widows, the poor, disabled, elderly, and strangers—who are frequently accused of being witches—and encourage a lack of empathy for them. But these are precisely the categories that the Old Testament Jews were called to love and care for, not to fear. Indeed, the Exodus 22:18 passage is immediately followed by instructions to protect and care for strangers, widows, and orphans.

Fourth, such cultures will sometimes experience witchcraft panics and witch hunts designed to ferret out

and kill the many people presumably to blame for causing the misfortune and death of others through their anti-social hostile occult aggressions. Again, such a pattern is lacking for OT Jewish culture.

Fifth, in such cultures people seek for safety from witches through magical or religious means. But while many Christians in cultures with witchcraft ontologies regularly pray for God to protect them from witches, and while the Bible is filled with prayers, one cannot find a single instance in the Bible of a prayer for protection from witches.

In sum, in the absence of the larger cultural patterns associated with, and essential to, witch meanings, the Hebrew word *kashaph* is unlikely to have been understood by Jews as having similar meanings to *nthakathi* for the Zulu, *muoi* for the Kamba, *ndoki* for the Lingala, or *mchwari* for the Swahili.

In much of the world today, church leaders teach their followers to attribute their misfortunes to neighbors, relatives or colleagues understood as hostile and powerful witches. *One reason they do this is because they have read their Bibles.* Of course, how their Bibles were translated, and with what cultural, theological and pastoral implications, is a matter of deep import. If the above summary is correct, then the issues playing out in Kinshasa churches have contributing translational roots that go back all the way to the Latin Vulgate translation—a translation that influenced the whole history of Western Christendom. The fact that witch hunts thrived under Latin influenced Christian territories and not under Greek influenced Christian territories, raises interesting questions on the extent to which differing Bible translations affected this—with Western Europe influenced by the *maleficos* translation.¹⁰⁹

As Christians, many of us will find these issues deeply painful. But we must have the courage to ask difficult questions, the energy to engage these issues through the hard work of reading, of research, of the give and take of substantive debate, and of the grace to interact with other Christians in other disciplines and from other countries, constructively and substantively. May God give us wisdom.

We close with a reminder. It is helpful for all interlocutors to keep one aspect of the experience and approach of EPED pastors in view. Some theologians and anthropologists theorize about these matters with minimal attention to the fact that alleged witches are actual people who suffer actual consequences of being named a witch—the locus and cause of affliction for others. Some anthropologists perceive witch discourses purely as symbolic, metaphoric social commentary. Some theologians perceive the issues of witchcraft

purely in terms of whether or not one recognizes supernatural realities. But EPED pastors begin with the presence of a suffering child on the street, a suffering child who is there because someone accused him of having caused, for example, the death of his mother, through witchcraft. They confront the fact that an alleged witch is an actual person, and that when this person is a child, such an accusation raises profound moral, ethical, and practical questions of engagement. Furthermore, EPED pastors are also aware that the ministries of Christian pastors sometimes helped put that child on the street. And they recognize that flawed biblical and theological understandings sometimes contribute to the problem.

Our research showed that theological education made a positive difference for pastors. But perhaps not as much as it should have. Our hope is that this research report will inspire many others to generate a helpful body of writings reflecting diverse disciplines and ministry contexts that can be incorporated into the curriculum of theological schools in cultural regions where these issues are at stake.

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¹⁰⁹ Steve Rasmussen first suggested I check this dynamic out, given my argument about the importance of translation history.

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RESPONSES

What is Natural About Witchcraft?

Miriam Adeney

Traditional classic anthropologists—such as E.E. Evans Pritchard, S.F. Nadel, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Claude Levi-Strauss—have been agnostic about the existence of the supernatural, at least in so far as it might affect research. Still, they have recognized that people in many societies do believe in witchcraft. How have they explained this? In particular, what are the natural stimuli to a belief in witchcraft? This short reflection will reference some ethnographies which may provide a little historical background for the extensive research reported in the paper under discussion.¹

Functions and Fault Lines

It has been hypothesized that witchcraft and sorcery perform some needed functions in many societies, and because they are functional they are believable for the people in the cultures where they appear. They may function, for example, as an arm of law and politics, as a stimulus to economic distribution, as a cause for rupturing social relations which have become too cramping, or as a socially tolerable outlet for aggression, anxiety, or emotional purging and display. Witchcraft and sorcery are often intimately integrated into a culture, upholding and in turn receiving support from most of the other major institutions in the culture. As well, witchcraft and sorcery can be functional for individual members of society by providing opportunities for aggression, wealth, power, vengeance, prestige, attention, or psycho-sexual satisfaction (Adeney 1974).

Furthermore, in any given society some structured relationships will be more likely than others to breed tensions. It is along the fault lines of these relationships that aggressions will tend to flare out. Who bewitches whom may correlate with these structural tensions.

For example, among the Nupe of Africa witchcraft accusations traditionally have zoomed from men to women. Nupe marriages have tended to be stressful. Wives often are in higher economic brackets than their

husbands because women are the itinerant traders. Wives pay for children's education, son's bride-prices, and family feasts. Husbands who need cash may have to borrow from their wives. Yet the Nupe ideal is that the husband will command and control. Bewildered and plagued by low self-esteem, men project evil intentions and powers onto the women who wield decisive power in the actual world (Nadel 1960). By contrast, Dobu people in the south Pacific experience slightly different marriage stresses, and witchcraft accusations flow both ways between husband and wives (Fortune 1964).

Among the Mesakin and Korongo of Africa all the witches are men, and accusations simmer between impatient nephews and the uncles who must pass down their inheritance in these matrilineal and age-graded societies (Nadel 1960). Among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania, witch accusations fly between neighboring wives, whereas among the Pondo of South Africa they sizzle between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Wilson 1951). Again these reflect certain social strains specific to these societies. In Cebu in the Philippines, rural witchcraft/sorcery erupts over land rights, but in the urban environment it is prompted by alienation of affection (Lieban 1967).

Cultures and societies give a shape to witchcraft. Wherever it flourishes, Christian leaders should ask: What are the possible functions of witchcraft here? What outlets is it providing? What needs is it meeting? What channels does the society provide for expressing hostility and aggression, for stimulating economic redistribution, for ensuring justice, and for rupturing social relations which have become too cramping? How do people channel their diffuse anxiety? How do they experience deep cathartic emotional purging?

And what are the lines of tension in the local social structure? For example, the report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) identifies the step-parent/step-child relationship as a fault line that may contribute to witchcraft accusations, resulting in "story after story of

¹ These comments draw from classic anthropological studies which I researched during my graduate school studies, yielding a publication "What Is 'Natural' About Witchcraft and Sorcery" *Missiology: An International Review*, July 1974. Although dated, these ethnographies yield many intriguing details and theoretical frameworks.

the rather straightforward human dynamics discovered to lie behind allegations” (34).

Caveats and Elaborations

Regarding the excellent research in this report, three minor points and one major point will be explored. First, the report asserts that “whenever misfortune strikes, major efforts are exerted to identify the evil witch causing the problem, with special techniques and powers . . . ” (44). Yet this may not be the case everywhere. Clyde Kluckhohn asserted that Navaho, who value intense interdependence but who can grate on one another when confined together in their winter hogans, find outlets for expressing anger by accusing witches who are unnamed and “far away.” True, occasionally persons known and close at hand are accused. Then killing may result. But most accusations are against vague, distant witches. This allows Navaho an outlet for releasing stress while continuing to live together in harmony in close quarters (1944, 89).

A second caveat concerns several trainers’ view that persons do not harm others supernaturally. Interestingly, rather than fighting the view that humans can harm others mysteriously, Dr. Daniel Fountain built on it. Fountain successfully ran a major hospital in Congo from 1961 to 1996. In his public health campaigns, he taught, “If you know you should use a toilet, but you use a field, then you are purposely exposing your neighbors to harm, just as if you were doing sorcery against them. Similarly, if you avoid immunizations, you are exposing your neighbors to harm, just like a sorcerer” (2014).

A third point is a suggested addition. Asking “Where do we go from here?” the report begins with *New Hybridities* (40), referring to healthy contextualizations. It commends careful attention to (1) local Christian patterns, to (2) general cultural patterns in the local society, and to (3) Scripture. Besides these, anthropologist Jacob Loewen has suggested (4) reflecting on positive practices of churches throughout the world. He employed this in a Latin American tribe, where they explored alternatives in child education, prayer meeting styles, and communion resources. A range of illustrations stimulated local Christian imaginations (Loewen 1964, 246-7).

Worldview Reorientation

Structural anthropologists argue that witch beliefs give people handles for coping with stressful threats. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, says such beliefs help people move from an inability to control their destiny to “manageable malice” (1945, 95).

Malice, aggression, abnormality, anxiety, and tension are part of life, worked through in different ways

in different cultures. For Christians, however, battle should not be the preeminent focus for dealing with evil. This is my fourth reflective point. Mennonite anthropologist Paul Hiebert has asserted:

*The central issue is not power but holy and loving relationships.

*The way to victory is not primarily battle but the cross followed by resurrection.

*Satan is not independent and he never wins

*Human beings are responsible, not pawns of higher forces. (Hiebert 1994, 203-215)

In every society these truths will call for a radical reorienting of our worldview. Westerners may need this most, because we have been raised with a bias toward battle. Commenting further, Hiebert provided background:

Central to the IndoEuropean worldview was the myth of a cosmic spiritual battle between good and evil . . . In IndoEuropean battles, the good characters become like their enemies. They end up using violence, entering without warrants, lying, committing adultery, and killing without due process. All of this is justified in the name of victory. Righteousness and love can be established only after the victory is won, and are second in importance . . .

Relationships in the cosmos are based on competition . . . Battle is the center of the story. When the battle is over, the story is done. The final words are “and they won (or were married, or beat out a rival) and lived happily ever after.” But there is no story worth telling about the “happily ever after.” The adventure and thrill is in the battle, and to that we return again and again (ibid).

If this is our heritage, it is not surprising that belligerent attitudes seep into our daily life. Without our noticing, love and peace may be marginalized. While Congolese societies do not emphasize an Indo-European worldview, they do seem to emphasize a battle between evil and God. Here is where the training workshops and ongoing pastoral counseling of the EPED are so valuable. Here pastors learn more accurate translations of biblical terms, and more appropriate interpretations of biblical teaching—for example, that the demon-possessed whom Jesus delivered were victims similar to sick people. Here pastors rediscover the extensive biblical emphasis on care for the vulnerable, including children. Some of these pastors undergo dramatic paradigm shifts. Instead of forcing confessions from children, they now seek to nurture children and help their accusers deal with the social, economic, and psychological stresses that plague them.

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RESPONSES

Conversation Time has Come

Andy Anguandia-Alo

This research by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) on (alleged) child-witches is very detailed and methodically executed. I am convinced that the report will enforce an “Africa-wide and even global Christian conversation” among scholars from different disciplines. However, the belief-based nature of the concept witchcraft, like many other religious and cultural beliefs, may require scientific patience. Some of the topics for future conversations include the following points raised as responses to the present study.

Children are simply victims. In societies where people believe in witchcraft, children are less often accused of being witches. The case of Kinshasa seems to reveal a strategy to expel undesirable children, or those seen as economic burdens, from families by step-parents. Throughout the narratives in this report, we see step-fathers/mothers pushing pastors to confirm children’s witchcraft. Evidences presented are shallow and weak. Some pastors are receiving ‘gifts’ or bribes for practicing exorcism. It should be clear in the conversation that children are scapegoats for the social evil step-parents go through. These children are probably not be able to understand the social evils (poverty, unemployment, marital conflicts) they are accused of. Are they even able to conceptualize witchcraft? Debates on cases in Kinshasa ought to be treated under ‘child abuse’ rather than ‘witchcraft’. The judiciary can deal with such abusers and the pastors who take such opportunities for getting customers. Other conversations, like the universality of the idea of witchcraft, Satan, demons, witches can be discussed elsewhere than through child accusations in the courts.

The meaning of suffering is another conversation point raised in this report. There is much suffering in the world, despite technological progress. Moral causal ontology is relevant for theologians. The case of Job in the Bible is presented as a suffering not caused by his sins but for the purpose of a test. However, the Israelites’ exile in Babylon is interpreted by the biblical prophets as a judgment of God because the Israelites did not keep the Torah. In some African societies (surely among the Lugbara in Northeastern D. R. Congo), whenever someone (or a community) experiences suffering or repeated accidents, he would ask himself whether he had committed an unlawful act.

Such introspection created room for confession, sacrifice, reparation and healing (in cases of diseases). Socio-cultural anthropologists can look deeper into it.

In such communities, it is not a large step from an astrophysical causal ontology to a moral causal ontology. Often, the first ontology is a necessary step for establishing responsibility in the second. For instance, a person who sends a little child into a bush infested by venomous snakes would be held responsible if the child was killed by a snake. He would have ‘caused’ the death of the child. In the conversation, ‘causality’ will be clearly distinguished from ‘responsibility’, as happens in debates about climate change, and its ‘natural’ calamities. In such conversation, immediate cause will be distinguished from remote cause since some languages may not have separate words for the two.

Interpersonal causal ontology is the one that provokes more ink and saliva to flow. Before conversations move further on suffering and misfortune mystically attributed by other human beings, there is a need to clarify our conceptions and the terms we use to identify those human beings. One preliminary question for defining a ‘witch’ is whether a human being can possess or exercise evil occult power. For instance, can a human being’s soul temporarily leave the physical body and return into it? Is astral projection a reality or a folktale? If yes is the answer, while temporarily out of the body, can this soul incarnate itself into an animal (cat, lion, snake, bees, etc.), then harm other human beings? If the answer to these questions is no, then a witch should be defined as “an *imaginary* human being who can fly, metamorphose itself into an animal to harm people.” The debate about witches would be about a social fiction. Those harming children and adults based on such fiction should simply be arrested by the police. After all, human languages can produce terms referring to non-real beings of objects, such as ‘unicorn’, ‘Father Christmas’, etc. Despite a high occurrence of Father Christmas (like witches) in real communications and their full social implications, Father Christmas is not real. Unfortunately, witchcraft accusation has harmful and sometimes fatal consequences as we see in D. R. Congo.

The challenge would be to start a conversation with the premise that human occult power is not real.

Unfortunately, opposite beliefs are wide-spread, claimed to be based on facts, not only in matters of witchcraft, but also of other modern cultic brotherhoods, such as Satanists, Freemasonry, Rosicrucian, and many other secret societies in Africa. Those who practice astral projection in search of wealth, celebrity and power in D. R. Congo are said to be numerous. They harm other human beings by offering them as sacrifices, it is said. But the practitioners are not ready to open up for scientific research. Until then, conversations about astral projection and human supernatural powers will remain classified as social fiction, or we must say there are powers out there which people *experience*, but on which it is difficult to *experiment* for establishing the truth.

It is good that, with this report, the time has come for deep and systematic conversation about this topic of imaginary witchcraft. Facts-based conversation will help the debate move forward; beliefs-based conversation will degenerate into inter-confessional fundamentalist debates.

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Priest, Robert J., Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell. 2020. Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC. *On Knowing Humanity Journal* 4(1):1-51.



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RESPONSES

A Soteriological Response to the Congolese Pastors' Engagement with Children Accused of Being Witches

Collium Banda

1. Introduction

The findings in the study *Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC*, by Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020), highlight the vulnerability of African children, many of them orphans and step-children, to accusations of witchcraft. However, a fundamental problem highlighted in the study is a poor Christian doctrine of salvation in an African context where an enchanted worldview reigns supremely. Therefore, my response to the study by Priest et al. will dwell on the soteriological problems arising from pastors' endorsement of accusations of witchcraft made against the children. I dwell on the issues of salvation because I believe that our soteriological framework will shape our response and attitude towards the children accused of witchcraft and how we engage with the reality called witchcraft.

The question that emerges from reading the study is: Soteriologically, how can the endorsement of witchcraft allegations against children witches by some charismatic/Pentecostal (revivalist churches) pastors be evaluated? In other words, in terms of Christian salvation, what does it mean for the concerned pastors to endorse the allegations of witchcraft against children brought before them and implement an array of deliverance mechanisms such as forcing the accused children to fast and inducing them to vomit? This will be the focus of my response to the above named study.

2. The Christian Influence on the Belief in Child Witches in Southern Africa

It is important to first note how Christianity continues to influence and shape the belief in child witches in Africa. I come from Zimbabwe, in central-southern Africa, where common victims of witchcraft accusations are usually elderly people, especially elderly women. In traditional Zimbabwean communities,

children accused of witchcraft are often thought to have inherited it from an ancestor who was/is a witch. There is a strong belief that witchcraft is hereditary (Parrinder 1976, 124; Bozongwana 1983, 40). The Ndebele people say the child of a snake is a snake, *umntwana wenyoka yinyoka*, while the Shona people say witchcraft that exists within a family ancestry can never be eradicated, *uroyi hwedzinza hauperi*, to indicate that children from a line of ancestry that practiced witchcraft will inherit witchcraft. There is also a belief that a child may pick the practice up from a stranger who discards the spirit of witchcraft by passing it to the concerned child, or the child may be a victim of witchcraft by being bewitched by a spirit of witchcraft. Consequently, traditional Zimbabwean communities strongly warn their children against picking up lost items, especially objects found on crossroads (that is where people discard their unwanted spirits), touching or eating chickens and goats found wandering in bushes (that is how people send away their evil spirits), receiving food and things from strangers (they may be passing their bad spirits away) and indiscriminately shaking hands with strangers (they may be passing their evil spirits to you). Traditionally, in Zimbabwe, elderly people are much more likely to be accused of witchcraft than children.

However, with the rise of the African neo-Pentecostalism, a Christianized version of accusation of witchcraft against children is gaining momentum in Zimbabwe by accusing people of practising Satanism. News reports have cited several cases of allegations of school children practicing Satanism (Chaya 2015; The Chronicle 2017). Journalists from Zimbabwe's daily newspaper, *NewsDay*, Jairos Saunyama and Shingirai Vambe (2018) reported that in one school a student allegedly initiated several classmates into Satanism by giving them money and gifts. In plain terms, the student was accused of bewitching fellow classmates. Since Satanism is basically a Christian construct, the increasing number of school children accused of

Satanism is a modern Christianized trend of calling children witches. The increasing incidents of accusations of Satanism show the influential role of Christianity in both shaping people's ideas about witchcraft and also giving momentum to the belief in children witches. While conducting research on the fear of witchcraft among Christians (Banda and Masengwe 2018), we encountered a father who reported that his daughter, studying at a Christian secondary school, had expressed intense fears of fellow students who mysteriously 'stole' other students' intelligence causing them to fail their exams.

However, in Zimbabwe the momentum of belief in witchcraft has also come from itinerant witch hunters, called *Tsikamutanda*, a Shona word for 'step on the log' describing their method of determining if one is a witch. It is difficult to describe the *Tsikamutanda* because some appear like traditional healers while others operate like prophets from African Independent Churches. Against the *Witchcraft Suppression Act*, the *Tsikamutanda* roam around Zimbabwean villages cleansing the land of witches by exorcising the spirit of witchcraft from people accused of practicing it and destroying their tools of trade. Although the law forbids labelling any person a witch, the authorities have largely failed to decisively stamp out the activities of the *Tsikamutanda*, partly because some village authorities and ordinary people believe in the genuineness of the witch-hunts. It can be argued that African neo-Pentecostal prophets by their deliverance services also practice a Christianized version of witch-hunting and cleansing. The doctrine of inherited curses, in which witchcraft is included as an inherited curse, and the prevalence of deliverance services in African neo-Pentecostal churches and the witch-hunting and cleansing ceremonies of the *Tsikamutanda* are intensely opposed religious systems that work together to give momentum to the belief in witchcraft.

3. The Expression of Christian Salvation in Primitivistic Terms

In terms of Christian salvation, the endorsement of the belief in child-witchcraft as reflected in the response of the pastors in the study by Priest et al. challenges the essence of Christian salvation and how God saves people. While discussions may legitimately centre on debating the genuineness of the accusations of witchcraft against children, the question that still remains is: soteriologically, does requiring children to fast, confess that they are witches, making them drink a special potion of medicine, inducing them to vomit, shaving their heads, making them pass through fire or causing them to bleed, constitute a biblically informed way of liberating people from spiritual bondage? Therefore, a fundamental challenge with the African

neo-Pentecostal response to witchcraft is an unbiblical soteriological plan that is more informed by African Traditional Religions (ATR) than by Christ and his work of salvation on the cross.

A critical challenge is the endorsement and promotion of a primitivistic view of Christian salvation with salvation projected as liberation from evil spirits. In addition to undermining the universal sinfulness of humanity (Rom 3:23), a primitivistic view of salvation fails to understand that Christian salvation is primarily entering into a saving personal relationship with God. Ngong (2009, 14) criticises the growth of African neo-Pentecostalism for promoting a 'worldview that inordinately stresses on the effect of spiritual beings on daily life and the view of daily life as a struggle for power'. In the primitivistic view of Christian salvation, the predominant notion of sin is not humanity's broken relationship with God (Rom 3:23), but humanity's possession by evil powers. This primitivistic view of salvation often stops with preoccupation with gory visions of the power of demons while losing sight of the essence of the glorious biblical images that describe the state of the Christian believer. One has to ask how requiring children to fast, confess that they are witches, making them drink a special potion of medicine, inducing them to vomit, shaving their heads, making them pass through fire or causing them to bleed tallies up with the biblical view of salvation as being born again, being freed from all condemnation (Rom 8:1); being a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), being adopted as God's child (Rom 8:14-17), being rescued from the dominion of darkness and being brought into the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13) and having one's life hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). A view of salvation that predominantly views salvation in notions of freedom from demons, instead of salvation as the freedom from the power of sin and entering into a personal relationship with God is fertile ground for dangerous superstitious beliefs of child witches.

4. The Promotion of an Impersonalised View of God

The primitivistic view of salvation that condones accusations of witchcraft against children further promotes an impersonalised view of God. This leads to a utilitarian view of religion instead of personal relational religion with God. The pastors' response to the problem of witchcraft shows an impersonalised view of God because solutions to the problem of witchcraft are not searched for in the saving relationship with God but in a cocktail of impersonal measures such as the above listed procedures. Instead of leading a troubled person into a relationship with God, African neo-Pentecostals use impersonal religious methods that are used in ATR for relief from the spirits of witchcraft.

ATR are religions based on an impersonal power (Beyers 2010, 2). By impersonal power is meant that even though there is a firm belief in God (Mbiti 1990, 29), with personal attributes applied to him (Mbiti 1990, 33), yet he is largely viewed in impersonal terms because he is considered detached from the worldly affairs, having delegated them to a hierarchy of spiritual beings. In ATR access to God is through ancestral spirits, and various magical and mystical objects are used to draw from God the power needed for people's daily existence. Scholars use different names to describe the impersonal power in ATR such as Placides Tempels' (Magesa 1997, 50) notion of 'forces of life' or 'vital forces'. Turaki (1999, 182) highlights numerous names such as mana, life force, vital force, life essence and dynamism, high mysterious powers, and *mysterium tremendum*. At the centre of the pervasive religiosity in Africa is the quest to take hold of the impersonal power and control it for one's benefit (Mbiti 1990; Okorochoa 1994, 72; Magesa 1997, 33). In ATR religiosity and magical charms and religious practices such as fasting, and drinking special potions of medicines are often a means of tapping into the personal power. This means that religiosity has a utilitarian function; its duty is to keep one connected to the impersonal vital force in order to keep evil spirits such as witchcraft away from an individual.

Traditional Africans recognise that witchcraft can be either voluntarily or involuntarily acquired; therefore, Africans diligently protect themselves from being a victim or a practitioner (Banda and Masengwe 2018, 3). They safeguard themselves by wearing magical instruments like amulets around necks, arms, legs and waists, and they make incisions on their bodies through which powerful medicines are deposited into their blood to protect them from, and to counter, the effects of witchcraft, which Nyathi (2001, 21) calls "missile-repellents". Furthermore, traditional Africans protect themselves by endearing themselves to their ancestors through appeasing them and performing various religious duties towards them (Banda and Masengwe 2018, 3).

It is contended that the uncritical adoption and incorporation of the ATR worldview and impersonal methods of fighting the spirit of witchcraft blinds Christians from critically engaging, evaluating and questioning the objective genuineness of the belief in witchcraft. The impersonalisation of God by requiring children to undergo the above listed procedures kills a meaningful analysis of the reality of witchcraft. Dealing with accusations of witchcraft against children from God's personal nature may lead one to ask: if Christ projected such a positive view of children as an example to be followed by those seeking his kingdom (Mk 10:13-16), how can it be true that children can be witches? Furthermore, a response to witchcraft informed by

God's personal nature may lead Christians to realise that God's solution to the problem of sin and human problems such as witchcraft is not a cocktail of dehumanising and degrading violent activities against children. Rather, God's solution to our problem is his very redemptive personal presence (Matt 28:20). We find spiritual security by personally relating with God, not magically manipulating him. It is important to note that in Ephesians 6:10-20 the armour of God that Christians are commanded to put on to fight the devil is ultimately God himself and not spiritual gadgets. The belt of truth, the breast of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit and praying in the Spirit are all aspects of personally relating to God.

5. Conclusion

This response to *Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC*, by Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell, attempted to answer the question: Soteriologically, how can the endorsement of witchcraft allegations against children witches by some charismatic/Pentecostal (revivalist churches) pastors be evaluated? The response highlighted that a serious problem in the pastors' engagement with children accused of witchcraft is the impersonalisation of God which leads to superstitious solutions. The concerned pastors are challenged to view accusations of witchcraft against children from the perspective of God as a personal Saviour. God is personally interested in all the children accused of witchcraft.

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RESPONSE

A Biblical Scholar's Response to Issues in 'Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC'

Paul Cookey Ekpo

Introduction

The research project, 'Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,' authored by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) is a monumental empirical work about children who have been accused as 'witches' and of 'witchcraft' by Christian pastors in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The extensive project engages the subject of child witch allegations from different perspectives which include, anthropological, ethnological, sociological, historical and theological ones. It covers almost every aspect of the issues usually discussed on the subject matter. The role of the EPED team that assisted in the research project and in helping many pastors and deliverance ministers to come to terms with the evil of child witch allegations and persecution is highly commendable. The research is well thought out and takes into consideration all the details that are required of this kind of research.

Issues, Suggestions, and Recommendations

1. My response to whether girls are more frequently accused than boys (7) is that both sexes are accused irrespective of the sex. This is unlike the reference to the word *mekhashshephah* 'a woman who practices magic' in Exodus 22:17 [MT] where the Hebrew word is marked to emphasize that the women folk are more involved in the practice which may be the intention of the author for using the feminine gender. However, in Deuteronomy 18:10 the masculine *mekhasheph* is used by the Deuteronomist which I believe is used generally to refer to the practice and not just to the male practitioner alone.
2. The case of child witch accusations is usually 'status based', 'appearance based' and/or 'character

based'. By this I mean that the majority of children accused are from very poor family backgrounds of which some serve as houseboys or housemaids or servants (status based), some are unkempt, disfigured, physically challenged, weird, have body rashes, body and mouth odours, boils and wounds or sores (appearance based), and some are lazy, violent, shrewd, mischievous, heady, disobedient, sleepwalk, sleep-talk, talk to themselves, bedwet, are arrogant, abusive, disrespectful or cruel (character based). From my personal experience, by observation of children accused as witches and of witchcraft, and of interactions with adults who suspect and accuse children as witches and of witchcraft, the circumstances and description fall basically into these three categories. It is very rare or uncommon to see a child from a rich or wealthy family accused as a witch or of witchcraft, even when they are stubborn, abusive or even belong to a cult. Instead, their behaviour or predicament is usually attributed to a child who may be serving as a maid or servant in the house whose appearance and behaviour cause suspicion.

3. With reference to the age brackets (7) of the children who are mostly accused, it is not surprising that children between the ages of four to seven and eight to fourteen are the ones most frequently accused. Children within these age brackets who come from very poor families and serve as housemaids or servants are the ones most frequently accused. Again, the age brackets are not necessarily the factor determining the accusation, stigmatization and abuse, but their status, appearance and character are the major factors used for the accusation. Expressions like, *alo nyin ifot* ('you this little witch' or 'you this child of a witch'), *idiok ifot* ('bad or wicked witch'), *adia ifot*

(she/he has eaten witchcraft') are used to describe such children.

4. There is need to emphasize that semantically the word 'witchcraft' implies a teachable profession like 'blacksmith', 'handcraft' etc., and is practiced for a living. It is a means of livelihood not just to cause harm to people. It can be passed on from one generation of practitioners to another as a kind of occupation. But how are children taught the craft? There is need to clearly demonstrate the apparent contradiction in the understanding of the word 'witchcraft' and the claim that children become witches by eating 'witch food potion', or 'mystical witchcraft seed', etc.
5. The biblical words used to describe the occult such as *מכשפה*, *כשף*, *אוב*, *חבר*, *ידועני*, *נחש*, *ענן*, *קסם*, play a significant role in understanding how the occult operated in biblical times and need to be carefully studied from the Hebrew and Greek source texts. These words need to be given some attention as some Bible versions indiscriminately use the word 'witch' and 'witchcraft' to translate them. The practitioners were part of the royal council and entourage that provided counsel and guidance to administrative policies and adjudication for both national and international politics of their time. They do consultancy services and charge for their services (cf. 1 Sam 28). They were paid from the treasury of the State for their services to the State (Exod 7; Dan 1-4). They were often trained and given professional tutorials and qualify for their employment after being duly examined and found qualified and certified (Dan 1-2).
6. I find it difficult to be convinced of the existence of a so-called "mystical witchcraft seed" that empowers accused "witches" 'towards harm, evil and destruction and that this witchcraft seed can be transmitted into someone by means of contact with a gift of food, drinks, clothes, or toys" (40). As much as this seems to be a general belief particularly in Africa, it still lies within the realm of superstition and speculation. I consider this a propaganda orchestrated to keep the so-called deliverance ministers in business. The deliverance ministers cannot give any evidence to this claim. It sounds strange to me as a biblical scholar to read that "Witchcraft is the means by which Satan accomplishes his goals as articulated in John 10:10—"to steal, to kill, and to destroy"(40). This to me is a misapplication of the Scripture and an overloading of the obvious meaning of the text just to justify the claim to the existence of 'witchcraft' and a 'mystical witchcraft seed'. References to

Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 and Judas are also a misleading interpolation of the biblical texts to justify a speculation or superstition.

7. On the issue of the meaning of suffering and how in some cultures interpersonal causal ontologies are believed to be responsible, when instead of asking the question 'why?', the question 'Who?' occupies the discourse: This, to me, is a clear evidence of backwardness in such cultures. It is obvious that cultures where people are full of envy, jealousy and strife nothing happens without suspecting someone. In cultures where the 'Why?' question is asked, there is always advancement and there are less suspicions of mystical psychic use of power consciously or unconsciously to harm others. This can be attributed to education and enlightenment. The less superstitious a society is, the more realistic and capable it is to find solutions to the problems facing it. To find the meaning of suffering in witchcraft belief is unbiblical and antibiblical. The Scriptures are unequivocally clear that suffering is rooted in sin and human alienation from God. To reject God's gift in the person of Christ Jesus is to remain in darkness and never come to light. It is a known fact that wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is clearly and rightly preached superstition, ignorance and darkness, such as belief in witchcraft, do not have any stronghold. Those who use this belief to hold others captive and perpetrate wickedness against those they suspect, accuse and victimize, should be made to face justice and the consequences of their actions.
8. Satan, demons and witches (40): In response to this, studies have shown that the idea of linking Satan and demons to witches has its root in the period when people used magic for manipulating others, which is today called 'black magic'. It was from the time of Augustine of Hippo through the time of Thomas Aquinas that, within the religious circles, magic was associated with demonic and Satanic invocation. Prior to this period, it was merely concerned with the manipulation of nature for various humanitarian purposes, including fortune-telling. Reason shows that, if it is true, as claimed, that one can become a 'witch' by eating witchcraft seed which "can be transmitted into someone by means of contact with a gift of food, drinks, clothes, or toys" or alternatively, "may be transmitted in a dream, through sex, or acquired from one's mother while still in the womb" (40), it is a contradiction to bring in any satanic or demonic idea. In the Efik Bible and among the Ibibios the word 'Satan' is rendered 'Satan' and

'Edisana Spirit' is the translation for the 'Holy Spirit'. The Devil is called *Andidiok* which literally means the 'wicked one'. Since there is no such word as 'witch' *ifot* or 'witchcraft' *ifot* in the Efik Bible, there is absolutely no link between the concept of *ifot* and Satan or the Devil among the Efiks and Ibibios. Such links currently are only the influence of the brand of Christianity which links evil activities with Satan or the Devil and demons.

9. As a biblical theologian, I have not come across any biblical text that teaches the 'witch' or 'witchcraft' idea where some people, through evil occult power, are secretly the cause of other people's misfortunes. I agree with Priest, Ngolo and Stabell when they say, "But we wish to illustrate the possibility that Christians have fundamentally misread their Bibles, and thus that a larger conversation is needed that involves the biblical text, later translations, anthropological categories, and theological reflections" (43). This is never more true than now and there is a great need to help most Christians in this direction.
10. It is unfortunate that many Bible translations done in Africa are done by recruits who do not have a good theological background or expertise in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek or are knowledgeable in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics or even linguistics skills. This has drastically affected the indigenous translations, especially those ones that used the King James Version as their source text. Exodus 22:18 has been the key Bible text, particularly in the King James Version, that has been translated into most African indigenous languages that relate to 'witches' and 'witchcraft' practices. This is why Exodus 22:18 has been used to justify 'witch-hunt' of every form, including child witch victimization. Few indigenous translations, like the Korean and the Efik, do not use a word that carries the idea of one who has the power to harm others. From my experience also, it is true that "few contemporary pastors are utilizing this passage to call for the death of supposed witches" (43), however, many pastors are still ignorant about what the text of Exodus 22:18 really means and how it should be interpreted in the context of the text and in the contemporary society. Many ordinary Christians believe that the text should be understood literally as supporting capital punishment for those supposed to be witches, even though they would not follow through with the killing themselves.
11. The Hebrew and Greek source texts of Exodus 22:18 and cognate references to the Hebrew root

word *kashaph* and Greek word *pharmakous* when studied in their respective contexts are insightful as to how to understand this text. From my personal studies, there is no single instance where there was the practice of "witchcraft" in which people were believed to have the psychic power to do harm to others or be responsible for infertility, impotency, loss of property, loss of job, sickness, etc., of others by occult powers. This is well captured in pages 44 and 45 of the research project. More particularly, as it relates to the research concern on alleged child witches in Kinshasa, DRC (and indeed anywhere in the world), there is no evidence of children possessing "witchcraft" powers to cause harm to people in the biblical text.

12. To be able to tackle the menace of misinterpreting and misapplying biblical passages often cited to justify 'witch' and 'witchcraft' beliefs, Eugene Nida's observation as cited in the research should be taken serious: "Eugene Nida, the 'world's most influential Bible Translator,' complained in a *Christianity Today* interview that many Bible translators fixate on, and worship, words, but fail to understand that 'words only have meanings in terms of the culture of which they are a part'" (p. 44). There is need to harness the fruits of anthropology, sociology, theology (biblical/systematics/hermeneutics and exegesis/applied theology), linguistics, history and philosophy, to engage the biblical text as well as contemporary indigenous cultures to deal with the challenges of witchcraft beliefs, accusations, stigmatization and abuses, in every form and especially against poor vulnerable children.
13. I strongly agree with the conclusion of the authors that: "If the above summary is correct, then the issues playing out in Kinshasa churches have contributing translational roots that go back all the way to the Latin Vulgate translation—a translation that influenced the whole history of Western Christendom. The fact that witch hunts thrived under Latin influenced Christian territories and not under Greek influenced Christian territories, raises interesting questions on the extent to which differing Bible translations affected this—with Western Europe influenced by the *maleficos* translation" (45). This obviously applies to every other context in which people use their Bible translations to justify the victimization of supposed 'witches'.
14. There is need for pastors to be given proper theological education on the challenges of the society and how they can be solved without

compounding the problem due to misinterpretation and misapplication of the Scriptures.

15. There is need to have a broad-based curriculum that will combine different related disciplines to tackle the menace of witchcraft related incidents in the society.
16. There is need for a clear proactive action plan to deal with the issues of witch and witchcraft accusations, stigmatization and abuses. EPED is doing an excellent job and the membership should be extended to scholars who are recognized to be engaged in witchcraft related situations.
17. I strongly suggest that the research project carried out in Kinshasa, DRC, should be repeated in other parts of Africa and Asia and scholars from diverse disciplines be engaged to come up with more qualitative results that will change the course of history as it did in Europe.

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- Priest, Robert J., Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell. 2020. Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC. *On Knowing Humanity Journal* 4(1):1-51.



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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Accusations and Hybrid Formulations in Papua New Guinea

Philip Gibbs

The paper “Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” by Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020), tells of a new phenomenon in the Democratic Republic of Congo where children are being accused of being dangerous witches. The paper highlights the trusted role of Christian church leaders, including pastors, prophets, apostles, and intercessors in addressing these witchcraft suspicions and accusations. The focus is on findings from a survey of the experiences, understandings, and practices of church leaders in Kinshasa and of various activities of the churches. African churches have been central both in propagating child-witch ideologies, and in working to resist child-witch ideologies, accusations and deliverance practices.

This paper is a response from Papua New Guinea (PNG), on the other side of the world in Oceania, where witchcraft accusations are also a major concern.¹ The vast majority of Papua New Guineans profess to be Christian and Christian church leaders play a significant role in dealing with the phenomenon that has been termed “Sorcery Accusation Related Violence”.² This response will comment on the DRC report, with reference to epistemological and linguistic shifts and emerging hybrid formulations contributing to contemporary efforts to address the issue of witchcraft accusations from the PNG experience, particularly the

experience from the Enga Province in the PNG Highlands.³

In PNG, as part of the Sorcery National Action Plan (SARV NAP), research is being carried out in three of the twenty one provinces in the country to ascertain who is being accused of sorcery or witchcraft (the terms sorcery and witchcraft, though theoretically different, tend to be used arbitrarily in PNG).⁴ The research investigates where, why, how often, by whom and how sorcery/witchcraft accusations are changing over time. It also investigates what accusations lead to violence at times and not at other times and what regulatory systems exist to overcome sorcery/witchcraft accusation related violence. After almost three years the research includes records of 557 cases, of which 178 (32%) have led to violence and even death.

Some elements of the PNG experience are similar to that described for DRC in Africa. For example, the issue of interpersonal causal ontology whereby people ask not only why a misfortune occurred, but rather who is the malevolent person to blame for the trouble. This may sound far-fetched, but all too often (sometimes due to torture or fear of torture) the accused appear to enter into the sorcery narrative, leading to public confession of their guilt. There have been occasions where persons accused of witchcraft will argue over the body of a dead child, accusing one another of consuming vital

¹ Papua New Guinea (PNG), situated in the Western Pacific, above Australia, is home to some seven million people. The majority of the people live as self-employed farmers and agriculturists. PNG is culturally diverse with over 800 languages. Witchcraft and sorcery beliefs are common among many of the ethnic groups there.

² In the year 2000 census, 96% of the population identified as Christian. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination with 27%. Others major churches include Lutheran, United Church and Seventh Day Adventists. Pentecostal Churches were 4% of the population in the year 2000, but have grown rapidly since then (Gibbs 2004).

³ The Enga Province is one of twenty-one provinces that make up the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. Sorcery and witchcraft is not part of Central Engan traditional culture. Such beliefs were found in areas bordering the province and they began to spread within the province only after 2010.

⁴ Background to the research is available at: <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/improving-impact-of-interventions/>. Research is funded by Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Australian aid program).

organs of the child, while at the same time saying that they themselves have disposed of part of the child's heart.

There are aspects of witchcraft belief in PNG that are different from that found in central Africa. In PNG, so far, few children are accused. Our study of over 500 cases has uncovered only two involving accusing a child under 11, and twenty one cases of accusations against young people between the ages of 11 and 18 years. In seven of these cases, the youth were the sole accused, while in the other cases, the young person was accused along with other family members and was not the primary suspect. Accusation of children under 11 years is rare in PNG, and that of youth is uncommon. Middle-aged persons between 41 and 60 years comprise over half of those accused. They are more likely to be male or female depending on the location in the country.

In the provinces we have studied in PNG, village leaders and family members are the most likely actors to make an attempt to resolve the accusation in a non-violent way. Police have made an attempt in less than one in five cases. An attempt by a religious figure/pastor to resolve the accusation varies depending on the location. It is highest in the Enga province in the Highlands (47%), and substantially lower in the island province of Bougainville (15%) and around the capital city Port Moresby (8%). Led by the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission, the various churches have produced a National Church Strategy to address sorcery accusation related violence.⁵ Catholic Bishops have taken a lead in condemning the violence and in questioning the reality of witchcraft, whilst Pentecostal and Revival churches often presume witchcraft/sorcery is real while offering support for deliverance from unwelcome spirits and evil forces.⁶

In PNG there has been debate about who are the victims of witchcraft. At first people identified the victims as those thought to be harmed by the witch or who face misfortune due to the malevolent actions of the witch. Gradually there has been an epistemological

shift whereby people recognise that the so-called victim may have no causal relationship with the accused, and that the true victim may be the person falsely accused of witchcraft. This transition from accusing people, to recognition of the victim as the one falsely accused is slowly taking hold. Gradually, people move from presumption of guilt towards presumption of false accusations. The explanations for these shifts is the subject of ongoing research. A related shift has seen a move from reference to "sorcery violence" to "sorcery accusation violence". The former term was associated with the earlier sense of the term victim above, and the latter term highlighting that the violence follows from being accused.

There are also linguistic shifts occurring. For example, the term used for witchcraft throughout PNG is *sanguma*—a term that may be borrowed from the southern African term *sangoma*—healer or diviner.⁷ In the local language of the Enga Province people use either the borrowed term *sanguma*, the borrowed term Satan, or the local term *yama nenge*, the latter being a new composite term, literally meaning "spirit of jealousy that eats".⁸

In the Enga Province, during big events like, pig exchange ceremonies, funerary feasts, and the giving of bride wealth, people kill pigs and share the meat with other people. People explain that *yama* is the jealous or lustful thought or feeling coming out of the person that goes into the one who is seen eating the meat, and that jealous or lustful feeling can cause sickness to the person eating. The lustful desire to eat, referred to as *yama* is what some people now associate with the imported concept of *sanguma* (witchcraft). Some say that *yama* has developed into *sanguma* or that *sanguma* is the *yama* spirit "developed to the next level". Even more complex is introduction of the term Satan. In parts of Enga, influenced by some churches, one finds a linguistic shift from *yama nenge* to the term "devil" or "Satan".⁹ This leads to increased fear because while *yama nenge* comes from a human feeling or desire, Satan is not human, so people affected

⁵ Sorcery violence faces holy war (2019).

⁶ Catholic Bishops Conference PNG/SI 2019.; Robbins, 2004.

⁷ McCallum 2006.

⁸ The Enga language translation of the New Testament does not include the term *yama nenge*. Simon the magician/sorcerer in Acts 8:9 is said to practice *topoli mana*—the practice of a ritual specialist. The magician Bar-Jona in Acts 13:16 is said to be a *sambo potopesa*—a false prophet. The term used for witchcraft in Gal 5:19 is a combination of *timango minao* and *tomokaepi minao*—literally ghost-holder and poison-holder. The slave-girl said to have an evil spirit in Acts 16:16 is said to be a *wanaku enjele koo paleta*—literally a girl with a bad angel sleeping in her. The possessed man from the tombs in Mk 5:2 is also said to be *akali enjele koo paleta*—a man with a bad angel sleeping in him. One can see how the translators of the New Testament had to use borrowed terms like *potopesa* (prophet) and *enjele* (angel) to translate such concepts into Enga. In everyday life an increasing number of people are using borrowed terms such as *sanguma* or Satan.

⁹ Sil Bolkin 2018.

have far less control. As noted by Priest et al. (41), the advent of Christianity has fostered new hybrid formulations, and sometimes the new “witch-demonology” acts as justification for utilizing deliverance methods on people understood to be the cause of other people’s afflictions.

Consider the following example from a Lutheran pastor in the Enga Province.

When you look at this sanguma issue, the root cause is the evil spirit. The primary focus of Satan is trying to use people to accuse others. They are accusing others of taking the heart of a human person. When we go to the doctors, we find out that the heart is still there. There is no teeth mark or sign of sanguma eating a human heart. . . . The devil is falsely accusing the person. Then the person is tortured. That is all controlled by the devil and Satan is getting the glory. . . . Because of our ancestors in the Garden of Eden lied to God, we were cursed by God. That is the root cause of all evil. Now the devil is playing that trick again and people start believing in it, and start accusing one another of sanguma and torturing innocent woman and girls.¹⁰

The pastor interprets *sanguma* (witchcraft) to be the work of an evil spirit identified as the devil, or Satan. While acknowledging the work of doctors he sees witchcraft accusations not simply as a person accusing another but rather from the big picture or viewpoint of the Genesis myth, of a universal tendency of people to be tricked by Satan. Such a viewpoint has implications way beyond the lustful feelings of *yama*.

Priest et al (40) refer to new hybridities as admixtures of meanings, categories, assumptions, actions and intentions. Healthy hybrid formulations result in contextualization, while flawed hybrid formulations result in syncretism. New hybridities emerge in PNG with reference to varying viewpoints or frameworks of ideas and beliefs through which one perceives and interprets reality. We call them worldviews. Our research identifies three principal worldviews: a magical worldview, a Christian worldview and a scientific worldview. Each of these worldviews gives rise to a different type of causal reasoning, emotions and ultimately behaviour. For example, in a situation where a person has died, the magical worldview is likely to support an interpersonal causal ontology in which a malevolent person (witch/sorcerer) is the proximate cause of the misfortune or death. A Christian worldview supports a faith-based causality in

which God is the author of life and Satan is the opponent. The Christian prays with hope for a desired outcome, but life and death matters depend on whether one is allied with God or Satan as the ultimate cause. A scientific worldview promotes a rational view of the world with a scientific paradigm and laws of physical causality.¹¹ Following a scientific worldview one will rely on the views of medical personnel or in the case of death, the findings of a post mortem.

These worldviews need not be held in isolation since the different causal reasoning systems can co-exist resulting in hybrid understandings where a person might hold all three worldviews at the same time. For example, a priest may offer a patient the sacrament of the sick with blessed oil (magical), commend the person in prayer to the will of God (Christian), and follow the physician’s advice on what medication to take (scientific). He may even pray that the medication will be effective. In the case of sorcery accusations we have heard from nurses how they feel afraid of the tortured person accused of witchcraft lest they may in fact be a witch, yet they tend to the patient because he/she is a human person with the gift of life from God. At the same time they follow doctor’s orders to dress the person’s wounds. All three worldviews are at play in such cases and a simple bio-medical view would not be sufficient to fully understand the situation. Our research investigates how people decide to allow one worldview to dominate, and how and for what reason(s) one would change from a magical worldview that confirms the identity of a witch to one that could sustain alternative identities.

Christian priests and pastors in PNG are involved in awareness, defence and deliverance ministries, in response to witchcraft accusations. Amidst linguistic and epistemological shifts they are raising moral, ethical, and practical questions, while dealing with worldviews that rely on differing causalities. This is further complicated by theological trends promoting the demonization of the accused thus raising doubts about their identity and value as a human person. The challenge is to bring theological, scriptural, cultural and psychological insights into the debate in order to aim for an optimal solution.

¹⁰ Interview by William Kipongi of Pastor Jeremiah, Wapenamanda, 25 March, 2019.

¹¹ Subbotsky 2004.

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RESPONSE

A Dysfunctional Worldview

Paul Gifford

The great virtue of this study by Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell (henceforth simply Priest et al.) is that it reveals in all its starkness the enchanted *imaginaire* of Kinshasa's revivalist pastors—their determination to seek spiritual causality for this-worldly occurrences. I know there is a debate about situating this *imaginaire*, of linking it to a particular form of Christianity. Since, not least for brevity, we must use labels, I will call this mindset 'Pentecostal' (admitting that Priest's label 'revivalist' is perhaps less contentious, because it allows us to avoid debates bearing on the origins and nature of classical Western Pentecostalism). I am well aware that there exist Pentecostal churches that explicitly repudiate this mindset, but I am satisfied that they are a negligible minority. I am also convinced that the greatest single reason for what is called Africa's 'Pentecostal explosion' is that a form of Christianity has arisen that allows full play to this enchanted mindset, something the mainline churches were historically very reluctant to do. Priest et al. well show that this mindset is found more widely—the study includes Independents, mainline Protestants and Catholics—and shows (with the sampling limitations they outline) that the outlook of all is quite similar, thereby also illustrating the phenomenon called the 'Pentecostalisation' of the mainline churches.

Why is it important to flag up this Pentecostal (or revivalist) worldview? Because for many observers it is almost axiomatic that African Pentecostalism is a major vehicle of modernity. For the late Peter Berger, the spread of Pentecostalism is probably the best thing to happen to the developing world. With its stress on motivation, entrepreneurship and discipline, this is the Protestant work ethic reaching the third world. It will do for the developing world what some say Calvinism did for Europe in the 18th century.

In 2008, South Africa's Centre for Development and Enterprise, heavily influenced by Berger, produced a report on Pentecostalism entitled *Under the Radar* which makes great claims for the public effects of Pentecostalism. The report is influenced by 'the claims of sociologists of religion that Pentecostalism has a special affinity with market-based development, and a kinship with what historians call the "Protestant ethic"; a cluster of beliefs, attitudes and habits that underpinned the spectacular economic growth of

north-west Europe during the industrial revolution' (Centre for Development and Enterprise 2008, 9). Encouraging entrepreneurship is considered the main characteristic, so much so that the report actually urges the South African state to promote Pentecostalism in the cause of the country's development (34).

David Martin has spelt this out fully: 'The lineage running from Pietism to Pentecostalism is linked positively to modernity in respect of the domains of gender, secular law, transnationalism, voluntarism, pluralism, the nuclear family, peaceability, personal release and personal work discipline, consumption, modern communication, social and geographical mobility—as well as changes in mediation, authority, and participation' (2005, 144). In other words, in all these areas, from gender to law, from work ethic to exercise of authority, Pentecostalism is bringing Africa into the modern world.

I think these positive assessments require that one focus only on motivation, entrepreneurship and personal life skills (which I readily admit are prominent in many of these churches). If one considers only them, the effects must of course be positive. But these positive evaluations hardly advert to the underlying world-view which Priest et al. lay bare so starkly here, and which I regard as much more significant. To the extent that African churches build on this enchanted worldview, the effects seem far less positive.

Many readers will know of JDY Peel. Peel, as well as being a personal friend and mentor, was an anthropologist of considerable repute—he won the Herskovits Prize, the award given by the African Studies Association for the best scholarly work on Africa published in English the previous year, and he won it not only once but twice, a feat only one other scholar has equaled. Already diagnosed with the cancer that would kill him in 2015 but as alert as ever, Peel spent many months of several of his last years in the Robertstown area of Liberia where his wife was promoting human rights with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). During these visits he would send 'Letters from Liberia' to a group of seven or eight friends. The letters tell of accompanying his wife on her duties, not the least of which was to attend witch-finding sessions where her task was essentially to monitor ('*without intervening in local cultural activities*')

that no illegal force or violence was employed. Peel describes these occasions with admirable academic objectivity, but after recounting one witch-finding session in which 22 villagers had confessed to being witches and the village had managed to reduce the community's witch-cleansing fee to US\$200, Peel's academic objectivity fails him. He writes that these recurrent witch-finding procedures '(drive) away most of my anthropological relativism and (make) me feel like a missionary: "O may the Lord open their eyes" . . . What is more depressing: the humiliation of these wretched souls by their neighbours and kinsfolk for their absurd supposed misdeeds, or the spectacle of poor people in a poor community blaming themselves for their poverty, with the connivance of a state that preaches development at them?'

Not the least interesting point of Peel's outburst is his assumption that a missionary would take a less neutral stance than an anthropologist towards such witchfinding. However, Christians of any sort are today very reluctant to fault any aspect of African culture, for African culture has become something sacrosanct. It is quite understandable why this should be so. As Paul Bowers has argued, the most traumatic event in the history of Africa was its encounter with the West, which led not only to a loss of political control but also to a damaged self-understanding. As a result, since Independence the dominant preoccupation in all African intellectual life has been resistance to continued Western economic and intellectual hegemony, and the affirmation of African identity and authenticity vis-à-vis the West, especially by affirming its identity with Africa's traditional heritage (Bowers 2002, 109-25). African culture has become a non-negotiable pivot around which much African theologizing turns, most evident in the (predominantly Catholic) project of 'inculturation', and given a recent expression in Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator's *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (2018). There is much of value in this book, as one would expect from a former Jesuit Provincial of East Africa, but glorying in a mindset that finds spiritual forces pervasive is not without hazards: the same mindset that leads to preserving groves of trees is the very mindset that leads to identifying children as witches.

The study by Priest et al. does more than simply spell out how this enchanted worldview has led several pastors in Kinshasa to identify waifs as witches. It has raised a much bigger issue. I have recently argued that in the last few centuries a new consciousness has arisen which has peripheralised seeking causes for this-worldly events in the spirit world, and has developed a repertoire of causes on another plane altogether. This

new consciousness has not *disproved* the existence of these spiritual forces, nor the possibility of their activity, but it has peripheralised them as responsible for this-worldly situations and events. This cognitive style of analysing objects and events on a mundane level of causality has given us air travel, computers and antibiotics (it has also given us nuclear warheads and acid rain, but here I am concerned with accepting the reality rather than highlighting its challenges). This new consciousness (which of course has raised all sorts of novel—and serious—questions for Christian theology) is almost the definition of 'modernity' (Gifford 2019). Yet the churches studied here perpetuate a world-view holding Africa back; they are among the powerful mechanisms preventing Africa from taking its rightful place in the modern world. Thus the conclusion of David Martin's study: 'Pentecostalism in Africa is a collective raft pointed with determination towards modernity' (2002, 152), must be considered profoundly mistaken. It is the huge benefit of this study by Priest et al. that it helps make the dysfunctionality of this worldview inescapable.

The other point I would raise is the relationship between the Bible and this enchanted *imaginaire*. Priest, as one who 'accept(s) the authority of scripture', suggests that these pastors may have 'fundamentally misread their Bibles', and gives considerable attention (of immense sophistication) to the translation of individual Bible passages. I would by contrast argue that this enchanted worldview is not so narrowly a matter of biblical interpretation, much less of interpretation of particular passages. Consider the *Deliverance Bible* of the Nigerian Daniel Olukoya, the founder (in 1989) and head of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries. The church claims that its regular Sunday attendance at headquarters gives it the largest single Christian congregation in Africa (a 2012 church magazine gives the figure as 200,000). It has spread widely, even outside Africa; the same magazine lists 83 branches in Britain (*Monthly Miracle* 2012, 21-23).¹ For Olukoya the entire Bible is concerned with witches, demons, spells and curses. It is not that particular texts (even key texts) lead him to the view that witchcraft is operative everywhere. Already convinced of this worldview, he turns to the Bible and finds this understanding throughout. Olukoya singles out 35 texts which as it were encapsulate the message of the Bible. These are texts like Gen 15,16; 49,1-7; Ex 2,1-9; Jer 7,18; 44,17; 44, 19—it is unnecessary to go on, except to note that for most of us these hardly lead to Olukoya's

¹ Of course, as with so many such statistics, these are calculated to impress as much as to convey data.

convictions at all.² Clearly, Olukoya is not deriving his position from the Bible, but reading his prior convictions into the Bible. If, like Okukoya, one is determined to find this worldview in the Bible, one obviously can. A better translation of particular texts would hardly affect this.

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² For detailed analysis of the issues here, see Paul Gifford, 'A contemporary Nigerian Reading of the Bible', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 152 (2015), 38-56.

RESPONSE

Christian Pastors and Alleged Witches in Kinshasa, DRC. A Response.

Wanjiru M. Gitau

A resurgence of witchcraft accusations has been observed in countries that are predominantly low on the Human Development Index (HDI) scale. The composite impact of poverty, as in Kinshasa in this report predisposes to factors of ignorance, illness, misfortune and family marginality that are correlated with the accusations. Fair enough.

To me, one critical dimension needs additional research by Christian anthropologists. The question of whether the accused have superpowers that supersede physical reality with capacities that are unavailable to normal human beings obscures the actual problem: the apparent inhumanity, or capacity for evil by the core accusers and their harmful behaviors towards the accused.

There is a dimension of human personality worth considering, then correlating with the child-witchcraft accusations in Kinshasa and elsewhere: the question of narcissism. In recent years, behaviors of prominent persons have illuminated narcissistic tendencies and reintroduced public discourse about human beings' inclination to evil. Psychologists describe the narcissistic personality disorder as a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of importance and entitlement concealed behind a façade of humility and benign benevolence. Behind the mask of extreme confidence lies a deeply fragile and vulnerable self, though narcissists never admit weakness. Rather they expect uncompromising compliance and are said to lack the capacity to empathize. They are unable to comprehend the destructiveness of their narcissistic behaviors towards their co-dependent victims and vulnerable subjects.

What does this have to do with witchcraft accusations, and with this report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) in particular? It occurs to me that the focus of analysis and prognosis in this and other writing on the subject of the accused—children in this case, or elsewhere, vulnerable elderly men and women, and the various consequences for the accused, and interventions to help the accused obscures the real problem—that there are some people who are inclined

to be evil. I think research needs to be focused on the pathological narcissism of accusers, the evil they cause, including manipulation gaslighting others as accomplices in the accusations.

Having recently read materials relating to the narcissistic personality, it occurred to me that pathological narcissism is the closest we come to an ontological description of how evil—as extreme self-centeredness, and resultant harmful behaviors directed at others—manifests in a human person.

Erich Fromm, a psychologist who fled Nazi Germany spent his career trying to understand why normal people allowed Nazis to rise to power and attempt the annihilation of a whole race. In *The Heart of Man, Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Fromm coined the term *malignant narcissism* to describe extreme, exploitative selfishness, the pathology at the root of the vicious destructiveness and inhumanity. While it is possible that a sizable portion of humanity are relatively harmless narcissists, malignant narcissists are driven by malevolent envy that is dead set to destroy the object of their envy. Fromm thought Hitler exhibited the *quintessence of evil*: a man totally lacking the emotional aspects of a conscience, yet a brain quite capable of calculated manipulateness. A psychopath, he observed, may be indifferent to the feelings or fates of others and might not actively want to inflict harm or control. But malignant narcissism, more than vanity, is the maladaptive form of self-obsession.

As a child, I knew an extended family member whom I may now describe as a narcissist. He had the same qualities as those who accuse children and vulnerable women of being witches. This man took distinct delight in subjecting women, including his mother, his wife and little stepdaughter to spiteful malice. Custom and taboo were insufficient to stop him from beating the daylights out of a five-year-old for a normal thing as losing control of bowel movement. He threatened physical harm to in-laws and disrespected his elderly mother while he charmed his way into social spaces to divide others. In the world I grew up in, the idea of witchcraft accusations was absent. I realize now,

had such a concept existed, he would have accused his little stepdaughter and his mother of being witches.

This private story links narcissism to radical evil in certain human beings. The evangelical understanding of evil is tied to the Fall of Adam and Eve. While the Fall sets the theological foundation for imagining what is wrong in the world in a generalized theological sense, it is inadequate for describing why the world has such characters as Hitler, who perpetuate what Fromm referred to as sociological narcissism, the calculated inclination to bring evils like the holocaust or genocide. It also does not explain what Hannah Arendt referred to as the banality of evil, the tendency groups of people, like soldiers and bureaucrats, or villagers for that matter, to blindly contribute to destructive actions at the command of malignant narcissists. It also comes short of elucidating why a familiar individual can cause unbearable suffering to persons in one's care for no reason except a malignant will to power.

I think that witchcraft accusations, particularly as directed towards children offer an opportunity to move beyond the hypothetical question of whether such superpowers as ascribed to accused witches exist to the ontological reality of evil as resident in some humans. The dimensions of witchcraft accusations—proclivity to attack an assumed witch, complicit hypocrisy of onlookers, and the “othering” of certain groups—these may situate concrete research on people who seem to be patently hardwired to generate and perpetuate the unimaginable.

Popular references seem to suggest that narcissism begins in a distorted childhood with an unloving, or an excessively doting parent who uses the child to satisfy their own ego. In the absence of positive mitigation, such a child may grow up into a narcissist who might take on deeply pathological behaviors that seem to invite what may be affiliation to dark powers or demonic possession. Iterative research on pathological narcissists as accusers, and the psychosocial vulnerabilities of the accused would also help to locate the idea of witchcraft itself as a category among other categories that analyze human moral agency. Correlates of witchcraft may then be found in societies that for instance, do not have witchcraft in their lexicon, but are equally capable of destructive actions towards the vulnerable.

In conclusion, there are individuals that seem hardwired to carry out evil. But I think so far, it has been difficult to research “evil” as an anthropological category. I think witchcraft accusations offer that anthropological category to Christian anthropologists. Such research might correlate this to the dark power of Satan, spirits, demons, and related issues of agency, victimhood and consequences in the larger world.

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RESPONSE

Reframing Thinking and Action: A Way Forward in Responding to Child Witch Accusations Through Contextualised Participatory Engagement

Susie Howe and Paul Stockley

We welcome this significant contribution to research on the issue of witch accusations against children and the involvement of church leaders. This type of survey of pastors and in depth analysis appears to be unique (we're not aware of any similar research in other localities), and the authors identify the many challenges of getting valid research data. Yet, the lack of *research* should not be taken to imply a lack of *evidence* for this phenomenon (of which there is an overwhelming amount), and should not diminish the urgency for action. Nonetheless, the wrong course of action will not help, and may actually hinder, finding solutions.

Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) set before us the challenge: "*Where do we go from here?*" and they remind us this is not a mere theoretical exercise. In their article they highlight that every day the pastors of EPED¹ "... confront the fact that alleged witches are actual people who suffer actual consequences of being named a witch ... and that when this person is a child, such an accusation raises profound moral, ethical, and practical questions of engagement" (45).

In this response we share our experience of a contextualised, theologically-informed model of engagement which has had a highly positive impact on church leaders. This approach has often led to radical shifts in thinking and action, mobilising many to now champion the cause of protecting children from child witch accusations.

From the outset of our early encounters with this issue in 2012, SCWA² recognised the importance of engaging with church leaders from across all the church

streams, since, as Priest et al. note, "churches today, for good or ill, arguably more than any other social institution, play a central role in influencing people's understandings and ideas about child-witches, and their responses to children perceived to be witches" (9). Working with local NGOs and churches, particularly in the DR Congo and in Togo, this model begins with facilitators running focus groups to explore the underlying root causes, the everyday realities, and the typical responses to the issue of children accused of being witches. While this may seem a very open-ended approach, it was essential to identifying seven significant touch points (or key themes), where people's thinking determines their actions.

We then invited theologians to give insight and enable us to create a guided conversation around each of these touch points, to open up the possibility of alternative ways of thinking and hence of acting. On this basis we initiated action forums, exploring the themes emerging from the research in a guided manner with around forty church pastors and other influential leaders, through a process of theologically-informed reflection and dialogue. From the learning outcomes of these activities, we proceeded to develop a resource for church leaders to use in local workshops. Entitled *The Heart of the Matter*, this interactive training material fosters cultural critique and affirmative engagement around the seven key themes (as identified and explored earlier), namely: welcoming children as a gift of God; accepting personal responsibility for decisions and actions; understanding child development and trauma; acknowledging God's sovereignty; identifying

¹ EPED: Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse, a Congolese NGO based in Kinshasa.

² SCWA: Stop Child Witch Accusations «stop-cwa.org» is a coalition of predominantly Christian agencies and individuals who are responding to this issue.

the role of pastors; appreciating how the community can help to protect children; and applying the law to advocate for children's welfare. Each topic seeks to address one of the underlying beliefs or root causes of child witch accusations. *The Heart of the Matter* was successfully piloted in four localities (five local workshops in total) in DR Congo and Togo, before being finalised and made freely available.³

Immediate outcomes of the local workshops exceeded expectations. A review of the attendees' questionnaires and personal testimonies evidences a positive change (often to a significant degree) in the understanding of many participants, and their expressed attitudes towards children who may be accused. Initial indications were very encouraging, but we needed to know: Is this a momentary response, or an enduring change? Is it merely an internalised sentiment, or will it lead to wider community impact and outward interventions? Further evaluation is essential to ensuring that the resources provided and interventions initiated actually make a real difference in thinking and actions over the longer term. So one year or more later, we carried out follow-up surveys with the facilitators and participants. These surveys showed that not only was the change in perceptions and understanding lasting, but it had also led to advocacy and practical action by many participants.

In some testimonies we find descriptions of interventions similar to those of the EPED pastors, as outlined in the report by Priest et al., namely: questioning the basis of child witch accusations; addressing the family dynamics (who is accusing whom, and why); looking at other influences (such as poverty); calling out the harm that results to the child; critiquing the logic of suspicion and fear which drives deliverance ministries; sharing newly acquired scriptural insights; and ultimately working to transform the narrative. Some of the local workshop attendees have significantly adapted and reused their new insights and learnings in multiple contexts including: campaigns within the wider community, educating church congregations (their own and neighbouring churches), sharing insights with local neighbours, and seeking reconciliation in their own extended family. Others have since been involved in rescuing and defending children who are accused and abused, and encouraging local authorities to act on children's behalf.

But the change seems to begin with a personal epiphany, as these testimonies⁴ exemplify:

In my personal life, as a result of the . . . valuable teaching in the training, I see myself as responsible for the consequences of my own behaviour, and I must not seek someone who is behind my sufferings or a scapegoat, because in the Bible there is no case where a child is accused of being a witch because of someone's misfortunes.

Pastor in Lubumbashi, DR Congo

I noticed a big change in my life. The training I received opened my eyes on many things concerning children. Before, I used to believe that disability and some children's behaviours were linked to curses, or a spell cast on the family, or demon possession. But the module on normal childhood development and the impact of trauma led me to understand that mood changes, sleep difficulties, aggression have nothing to do with the demonic. Since then, my approach when faced with such behaviour in children has changed. I understand them better. I understand the child now and accept them with love, and work with them to change their behaviour. This training was for me a light that illuminated my darkness.

Pastor in Lomé, Togo

This change in understanding and attitude to children then leads to a change in how the church leader responds to children, particularly those who are accused. This is crucial, because of the pastor's influence in the wider community—as Dr. Priest highlights, quoting anthropologist Filip de Boeck who writes, “. . . it is important to note that church leaders themselves are most often not the source of witchcraft allegations against children [but] merely confirm (and thereby legitimize) accusations and suspicions that already exist within the child's family environment” (22).

Again, testimonies from the follow up surveys show that many of those who had attended the local workshops were now responding in a new way, seeking to cause no harm to children who have been accused, and leading to greater harmony in family relationships.

One mother brought her own daughter to me, suspecting that she was a witch, simply because she was having nightmares. When I spoke with the girl, I discovered the nightmares were being caused by the games that were being played by her group of friends. I was able to explain this to the mother. The girl

³ The Heart of the Matter / Le Cœur du Sujet, currently available in English and French, is due to be published in Kiswahili and Lingala in 2020. Online source « stop-cwa.org/search/resources?name=heart ».

⁴ Note: All excerpts from testimonies of pastors are anonymised, translated from French, originals retained on file.

stopped playing with this group and the nightmares stopped. The family is now living happily together.

Pastor in Goma, DR Congo

My half-sister has a daughter who is 16 and who was still wetting the bed every night and was doing badly at school. This was all attributed to witchcraft, and she was believed to be under the control of a powerful witch, which was why she was wetting the bed. She was abused and mistreated and traumatised by everyone in the family. . . . I started to teach the family, showing them that what they were doing was all wrong. I explained that wetting the bed could be for many reasons, rather than being linked to witchcraft. I told them about the effects of trauma, or maybe she was simply overwhelmed, or even afraid of waking the others. Eventually they understood, and the girl is living with the family without difficulty. They have stopped mistreating her and she now rarely wets the bed.

Pastor in Goma, DR Congo

Several church leaders have testified to a significant ‘reversal’ in their approach. They have changed from being accusers to becoming advocates, now standing up and speaking out for children accused of being witches.

In our nation there is a phenomenon called ‘kitshundo’ which means ‘deliverance’. This involves shaking, hitting, shouting, inappropriately touching a man or woman (or child) to ‘deliver’ him or her from possession of witchcraft. It all starts with either a prophet who influences them, or a sudden change in the behaviour of the child, often because of the way he is being treated by the family and by a refusal to take responsibility. But rather than pile all the blame on the head of the child, I mobilise, raise awareness, and spread the message to church congregations so that they know that this is not right, and how they should act in such circumstances.

Church leader in Goma, DR Congo

While church leader influence has potential to be a major catalyst for change, other sectors of society need to be involved. Municipal authorities (mayors, town or village leaders, magistrates, police) also need to be aligned to support children, deterring those who accuse and abuse, and holding those who do so to account. One example is in Masisi, DR Congo, where recently a group of church leaders, inspired by their new insights, approached the local authorities to ask if they could share their learning with the police, who rarely intervene in cases of child witch accusations and

associated violence, and were even known to accuse children of being witches. The local authorities and police have accepted this offer.

These are a selected sample of the outcomes of *The Heart of the Matter* training resource. Nonetheless, this approach is only reaching a relatively limited number of people in specific localities. Creative initiatives using other media are essential to extend the conversation into a broader society-wide modality. Engagement via TV, film, and radio is needed. Member agencies in the SCWA Coalition have created audio Bible studies and radio resources based on *The Heart of the Matter* material, to great effect.⁵ These address the same seven key themes in a similar manner, opening up an alternative narrative to these situations, creating possibilities for change.

Changes that we have seen from this approach are not necessarily on the level of deeply held belief as to whether witchcraft exists (or not). Rather change is evident in the belief as to whether this particular child is a witch and responsible for this particular misfortune, and more generally, whether these children are witches and responsible for these misfortunes. Ultimately, regardless of beliefs that are held, the key outcome question is: How are children to be treated?

Further engagement is needed using a diversity of effective modes of reframing thinking and action. We acknowledge the problems identified by Priest et al., especially: a hybrid fusion of scripture and culture; deeply rooted beliefs in mystical powers; and the need to making sense of suffering. We are also sensitive to the need to consider carefully our use of words and terminology, especially being aware of the problematic interplay between scripture and local language meanings. At the level of church leadership, pastors need exposure to these alternative perspectives and skills earlier on, during their theological training. And at the local community level, we are now developing resources focused on parents and the family context.

From our experience, we have learnt the importance of . . .

- Working with church leaders; showing respect, humility, and a willingness to listen and learn; using patient and gentle persuasion rather than a confrontational approach.
- Creating space for open, safe, respectful listening and dialogue.
- Carrying out research into the roots, realities, and responses to accusations of witchcraft against children and adults so that effective, holistic responses can be created.

⁵ Also available at online source: «stop-cwa.org/search/resources?name=heart». Full evaluation of the impact of these resources is in process.

- Using a multi-faceted and holistic approach which includes tackling the underlying issues that may trigger child witch accusations, including poverty.
- Providing research-based, contextualised, theologically under-pinned training resources and practical strategies to help bring about change.
- Forming strategic networks of church leaders with theologians and those from other disciplines, including links with community-based agencies able to influence local values and attitudes.

Finally, we must keep in focus that this is not a mere theoretical exercise about the potential of occult powers to engage human agents, but it is real children who are being tortured, and real families who are being torn apart. Child witch accusations can also paralyse entire communities through fear, suspicion, accusations, and reprisals. When SCWA was founded, we were told it was impossible to influence deeply-entrenched beliefs and practices, and to stop violence against children accused of being witches. However, the authors hope we have shown that through creating opportunities for open dialogue and discourse, and providing practical training resources, significant positive change in individuals, churches, and communities is possible.

Taking a wider global perspective, Priest et al. state that “the seriousness of the issues, and the difficulties they pose for Christians, and the implications of our engagements for the credibility and witness of Christian churches across time and space, would suggest the importance of an Africa-wide and even global Christian conversation among church historians, biblical scholars, theologians, missiologists, and anthropologists over the issues and their implications” (40). We would welcome this, and also respectfully add that such a conversation must lead towards intentional, collaborative, practical interventions at national and local level, for the sake of the countless children and adults who are living as outcasts today because they are accused of being witches.

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The **SCWA Coalition** “Stop Child Witch Accusations” has been actively functioning as an advocacy and mobilisation group since January 2012, and was formalised in May 2014. We are a coalition of individuals and agencies responding to the reality of children experiencing serious harm or the threat of harm due to accusations of witchcraft or belief in malevolent spiritual influence, and we work with churches and partner agencies on location to engage with the problem of harmful beliefs and practices.

RESPONSE

Social Instability, Churches, and Child Witchcraft

Michael Jindra

The EPED team of Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell (2020) should be complemented on their project and write-up. This is a tough issue that needs sensitivity to local dynamics, a strong methodology, and the admirable goal of making a difference. The issue brings up core issues of the relationship between Christianity and culture, both of which are dynamic and changing in this situation, complicating the picture even more.

The growth of witchcraft accusations and in particular child-witches, is puzzling but not totally shocking in this context. Instability has riven this part of Africa—political turmoil and violence from the colonial through post-colonial eras, the ravages of HIV/AIDS and more insidiously, the influx of new communicative technologies that brings new entrancing images and narratives, the latter through Nollywood films and internet videos that feature witchcraft as a lead element.

How might this context affect the growth of child witch accusations? One could say that the above instability has created a perfect storm of social order breakdown—both of the state and even more importantly, the family. The EPED research indeed uncovers the connections between family instability and accusations, with accused children often found in step and broken families.

Kinship relations have been the bedrock of order through most of Africa, where the relatively new state structure retains only a loose hold. The reciprocities and hierarchies of family, based on elders, have provided most of the order. The most basic kin rituals, birth, initiation, and especially death, were part of this structure.

The rituals surrounding death are traditionally the biggest life-cycle rituals in Africa, unlike the West, where weddings take precedent. Death rituals, however, have been decimated by the breakdown or overturning of social order. Formerly, and across most of Africa, children were kept from exposure to things associated with death, like funerals. Now, however, children have actually taken over much of death management in Kinshasa. Priest et al. utilize the work of anthropologist Filip de Boeck, who has observed these changes, and

who also noted the rise in child witchcraft accusations. He reports that youth have taken over the “management of death” in Kinshasa, sometimes hijacking funeral processions, making accusations of witchcraft against family members, creating a ludic and sometimes violent atmosphere and demanding money from passersby and family members to acquiesce them (De Boeck 2009).

These are all signs of a breakdown in social order, not entirely surprising in a dynamic, urban place like Kinshasa, at a remove from the land/kinship/political order connection of rural areas. Without kinship, there is a breakdown, a free for all. Where kinship structures are strong, the ancestors are strong, and witches are weaker. The possible replacement, the State, is notably weak and sometimes makes things worse, not better.

This leaves the churches, themselves very diverse, ranging from established churches like the Catholic to independent, sometimes unstable churches. Christianity has had profound effects on notions and practices surrounding personhood, death and misfortune (Jindra and Noret 2011).

In the past, elder men usually controlled society. Men even controlled the afterlife. Personhood, and the status and dignity that came with it, only developed through time, and only by specific acts of fertility or power, like obtaining titles or marrying and having children, who would appeal to you as an ancestor through ritual acts after you die. The dead were also feared because of their association with death pollution and their power to curse after death if neglected by descendants.

Christianity, in contrast, brought dignity and personhood to all classes of people (though at times unevenly and sometimes for cross purposes, as in supporters of apartheid). Christianity grants personhood and the rights that go with it at birth (or before). Where before, in many areas, only certain people were granted an afterlife and the rituals associated with it, Christianity granted burial rites and thus personhood to everyone. Along with other changes, this had a revolutionary effect throughout the continent, giving

rights to people who never had it before, both socially and politically. Because of this, it was often youth and women who were most strongly attracted to Christianity. Perhaps, given the topic of this article, it went too far, and people began to attribute powers to children that they never had before, including the power to do evil.

Children also provide convenient scapegoats. Unstable times and disorder create a need for scapegoats, and children are the most vulnerable. This theme, stressed most by social theorist Rene Girard, throws us back to basic human social relationships, the inevitable conflicts that occur and how societies through history have dealt with them, often by finding scapegoats. Girard argues that people bond, and even entire cultures form, by acting out against scapegoats, a process found throughout history, most notably by Nazis against Jews in the 20th century, but more also more recently against immigrants, including in places like South Africa. Girard argues that Christ, as a scapegoat, was uniquely innocent, and would not be surprised that the scapegoats here could be said to be the most innocent/vulnerable, children, perhaps Christ-like in their own way.

What is the contemporary role of churches in the child witchcraft phenomenon? Churches are some of the strongest institutions throughout Africa, unlike in the West. This gives them power, but like any strong institutions, they are prone to abuse. They evidently played a role in sustaining the accusations, and at times made money off the treatment of child witches. The exploitation of people by church leaders is something found in many places, but certainly here. The role of the EPED team, however, is crucial in limiting and perhaps ending the damage.

As Priest et al. say, it is Christians themselves who are best placed to influence this, like Susan Emmerich a Christian environmentalist who did what secular environmentalists could not—convince religious, conservative Chesapeake Bay fishermen to use sustainable methods of harvesting seafood (Emmerich 2009). Perhaps to combat Nollywood films and lurid YouTube videos, stories and metaphors need to be utilized to create doubts about child witch accusations, as EPED attempts to flip the narrative from children as perpetrators to children as victims.

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RESPONSE

Christian Pastors and Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC

Nzash U. Lumeya

The article by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) on Christian pastors and children accused of witchcraft in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, is a very well documented research paper. It sheds a bright light on the issue of family brokenness in some local families. Priest et al. have gathered a substantial amount of helpful data on witchcraft. It is informative and effective in raising the issue. It does not pretend to be a panacea but a sensitive and didactic instrument toward a constructive conversation regarding powerless children in Kinshasa.

Their bibliography, field research, interviews, and comparative and quantitative data all appropriately inspire readers to join this multidisciplinary conversation. The series of didactic tables distinguishes between terms such as “Kinshasa pastors, Christian pastors or church/churches”. Thus, one understands that “Kinshasa pastors and churches” is limited to the 713 Kinshasa pastors that responded to the questionnaire. Table 3.1.4 on page 18 reveals the church traditions of these Kinshasa Christian leaders. Priest, Ngolo and Stabell state that, “While it is likely that Kinshasa pastors share many of the same ideas about witches as others in their community, they nonetheless serve as influential authorities and thought leaders who affirm, formulate, and propagate the mix of ideas about witchcraft that is present in Kinshasa”(37). According to the authors, “it is in these Kinshasa churches, not in Muslim mosques, where allegations of child-witchcraft proliferate and flourish” (38). So, Priest et al. affirm that many of these Kinshasa pastors teach people to attribute the misfortunes in their lives to witches, including child witches.

I think that this Kinshasa cultural mind set needs transformation. This change in the way of coping with the cause of misfortune could learn from Congolese tradition and Jesus’ teachings. Both advocate for community listening. When someone is accused of wrong doing, the wise judge could include a given community during the hearing and the deliberation. Their input could assist decision makers to reach a just and compassionate verdict.

From Individualistic to Community-Based Hermeneutic

The Congolese traditional extended family is hospitable and very relational. When a member suffers, the community participates in solving a given problem. Witch accusation does not escape the extended family’s evaluation. Female and male mentors examine the accusations and make their respective recommendations. Most of the time these recommendations seek for relational and peaceful, harmonious solutions. When someone is accused of witchcraft, the elder calls on family members to participate in the decision making process, because in this culture affection is more than effectiveness. In the case of a child offender, a compassionate member within the extended family will volunteer to take care of him/her. Since these mentors belong to the same extended family, they will address the offense in a way that mends the relationship and corrects the unacceptable behavior of a child. Belonging matters more than misconduct. As a result, these traditional villages don’t have homeless children.

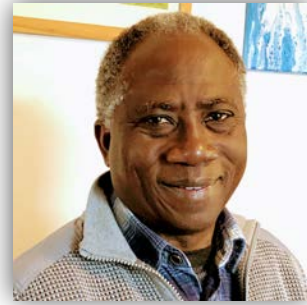
Kinshasa Pastors and Children

For more than two decades, I have been serving our Lord Jesus in Kinshasa as a local church pastor, overseer of 30 Mennonite Brethren local churches, and mission instructor. Our pastoral experience has taught us humility. The same way that Jesus, the great Shepherd or Pastor, received children, is the same way we are receiving children including those accused of practicing witchcraft. The mind of Christ has allowed many pastors to humble themselves to take care of the least of these. Some pastors have adopted children and put them back to school; others are asking the extended family to identify a host mentoring family for their accused child. Once found, the local church comes alongside this child within the context of a given affectionate nuclear or extended family. These new settings provide them with Christ-centered mentors.

These humble ways of tackling the problem of a child accused of witchcraft invite the accusers to participate in repairing the relationship with the accused child. Pastors and the local fellowship of believers listen to the Holy Spirit as they guide broken families in the way of restored relationship. The Bible enlightens this path. Obedience to Jesus as our suffering Servant enables pastors to propagate the message of forgiveness. Jesus loves children. When they are accused of witchcraft, Kinshasa pastors could incorporate Jesus' way of getting the community involved in a peaceful resolution. Jesus came to save them also from their sins. Repentance is core for the transformation of our way of life. God taught us to follow him in letting him mend broken relationships and strengthen his Kingdom. There is hope in Jesus. The letter to the Hebrews reminds the people of Jesus in Kinshasa, "Since the children have flesh and blood, Jesus too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

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RESPONSE

A Theological Critique of Witchcraft: Ruminations from a Fellow African

Hans Madueme

Accusations of witchcraft are matters of life and death in many parts of Africa today. They unmask the enduring human struggle to find happiness and meaning in a fallen, often perilous world. This publication by Bob Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Tim Stabell (2020) is brimming with wide ranging implications for the future of biblical Christianity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—indeed Christians everywhere should listen in, for there are lessons aplenty.

I am grateful to the authors and to their team for this landmark research. Since there is so much to discuss, I am relieved that other contributors bring their expertise to issues I cannot dwell on here. In what follows, I shall focus my remarks on two salient theological areas that deserve further scrutiny—supernaturalism and Scripture.

The Dilemma of Supernaturalism

In their analysis of the perspectives among Congolese pastors, the authors write that “very few Kinshasa pastors are inclined to categorically deny the very possibility of witch causality. To do so before a Congolese audience would be to lose credibility. It would signal unbelief in the supernatural realities widely understood to be taught in Scripture. It would imply capitulation to white secularist unbelief” (34). This is very telling. It is okay for *Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse* (EPED) pastors to deconstruct child-witch accusations; it is even okay to fight tooth and nail on behalf of children accused of witchcraft—but to *deny* witch causality outright, oh never! *That* is going too far, they worry, a caving into the post-Enlightenment naturalism of the West.

These Congolese pastors agree that child-witch accusations are a social and pastoral blight. Why then do they refuse to abandon witchcraft beliefs entirely? Once we see the situation from their perspective, such attitudes make sense. For most Bible-believing Christians alive today, the standard Western view of the world is inimical to faith. African traditional religion, by comparison, is far closer to the mentality of Scripture.

In the biblical picture, the realm of science and empirical things is only the *visible* portion of an unimaginably richer reality. The cosmos is teeming with supernatural beings, including holy angels and malevolent demons. As the apostle Paul explains, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

Modern interpreters tend to demythologize this biblical teaching about demonology. Walter Wink, for example, famously argued that the scriptural language of “demons” refers to the corruption of social structures and institutions within human societies—*not* to supernatural beings (1984; 1986; 1992). No Christian should sanction such blatant naturalism. The inspired text portrays the devil and his minions as supernatural creatures with personality, will, power. Thus, many Africans assume that, from a Christian perspective, indigenous religious assumptions are more or less trustworthy. Since they share the Bible’s supernatural view of the world, the default African traditional religion is innocent until proven guilty.

But this inference is mistaken—and it hides a multitude of sins. The fact that African traditional religion and Scripture share a supernatural worldview should actually lead Christians to *more* caution, even skepticism, about their indigenous beliefs. “Supernaturalism,” after all, comes in many shapes and sizes. Indigenous African ideas about the invisible realm may be more *or less* helpful depending on how much they align with Scripture. Just because African religious beliefs are supernatural does not make them biblical. To wit, this study by Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell provides sufficient evidence that witchcraft beliefs in the Congo are *not* biblical. At best, they are misinformed superstition; at worst, they are loathsome to God.

The Dilemma of Holy Scripture

Pastor Wallo Mutsenga tells us that symptoms of witchcraft include weight loss, bedwetting, talking

during sleep, waking up tired, forgetfulness, depression, bad hygiene, and so on. Witches are usually sickly and tainted by a mystical witchcraft seed—a malicious force that “can be transmitted into someone by means of contact with a gift of food, drinks, clothes, or toys . . . [or] in a dream, through sex, or acquired from one’s mother while still in the womb” (40). Mutsenga also claims that witches can turn into cockroaches, lions, rats, mosquitoes, and other animals (22). One report describes widespread beliefs that witches not only harm others by psychic powers, but they can transform “into an animal (owl, cockroach, ant, cat, crocodile or snake) in order to get into the victim’s house” (Cimpric 2010, 18). Such testimonies abound in the primary literature, but they have no basis in Scripture.

The biblical passages often cited by Africans do not support witch-demonology, i.e., the idea that the devil empowers witches to inflict harm on others and, therefore, that Christians should engage in deliverance ministries to liberate those in demonic captivity (Onyinah 2004, 2012). There is, of course, a form of demonic deliverance taught in Scripture and epitomized by Jesus (and his disciples), and with which I am in complete agreement. My point here is that none of the standard passages support the distinctive African concept of *witch causality* (e.g., Exod 7:11; 22:18; Lev 19:31; 20:6; Deut 18:10-12; Isa 8:19-20; Jer 27:9; Dan 2:2, etc.). A careful analysis of each of these passages would show that none of them sanctions the idea of an “evil person (male or female) said to harm others through inborn psychic power” (7).¹ Priest and his colleagues have laid out much of that evidence, particularly with reference to Bible translation, confirming that a wide gap lies between Scripture and African witch discourse (43-45). This problem is urgent and demands further attention.

Ironically, African witch accusations may reflect the work of Satan. As the authors write, “When we accept false child-witch accusation against orphans, we are inclined to treat orphans as dangerous and evil. Thus we are motivated to do the work Satan desires, rather than what God calls us to, to love and protect orphans” (37). The rituals that have developed around witch-demonology bring to mind the situation in late medieval Catholicism. At the dawn of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church prescribed good deeds, indulgences, pilgrimages, and other penitential rituals to relieve people burdened by sin. Luther’s Reformation was a protest against such extrabiblical practices. Does

Christianity in Africa need a similar Reformation in its extrabiblical views of child witches?

So far, I have noted that many African Christians conflate traditional religious beliefs and biblical supernaturalism. I have also suggested that the Protestant Scripture principle (*sola scriptura*) rules out indigenous notions of witchcraft. At this point, two related worries loom large: First, if African Christians are persuaded by my argument, will that open the door to secularization?² The logic would go like this: if witch causality is mistaken, then everything we Africans have thought about supernaturalism falls apart.³ The worry, then, is that my argument unwittingly sanctions the idea that supernaturalism is a childish myth we should set aside. Second, missionary history tells a cautionary tale—does my critique of witch causality commit the same error as early nineteenth century missionaries who dismissed the emic concerns of millions of African Christians?

In the first place, I do not apologize for privileging *sola scriptura*. Any theological tradition that does not habitually align itself with the teaching of Scripture deserves to die. “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa 40:8). In the second place, taking the Bible seriously is not a Trojan horse for the compromises of Western Christianity. True allegiance to Scripture is a long way from the “excluded middle” Paul Hiebert warned against in his classic essay (1982). As believers who are united with Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are de facto protagonists in a life-and-death spiritual warfare. African Christians can help the global church retrieve an unflinchingly biblical supernaturalism. However, African Christianity will only lead the way if it jealously guards the canonical witness and its rule over the life of the church.

Scripture is the very word of God handed down to us by the apostles and prophets. Robert Yarbrough rightly argues that the future of global Christianity lies with *populists* rather than *elitists*; populists, he writes, “are apt to read the Bible in ‘populist’ fashion, meaning they find the truth of Christian doctrine affirmed in the ‘historical’ documents the Bible contains. ‘Elitist’ reading, in contrast, often denies saving efficacy, or accuracy, or even relevance to the biblical writings” (2019, 9). By God’s grace, African Christianity at its best is a populist movement that embraces all of Scripture and applies it directly to our lives in the twenty-first century.

¹ The limits of the present forum prevent such an analysis here, but see Priest (2019, 9-13) and the research by the Nigerian scholar Paul Cookey (e.g., Cookey 2015, 2019).

² One recalls the title and theme of Chinua Achebe’s classic novel *Things Fall Apart*. Denying witchcraft potentially threatens an entire worldview and culture, not just an idea.

At the same time, populist faith is not immune from corruption. Such manifestations of Christianity are often “ignorant, conservative in culpable ways, anti-intellectual, manipulative, and immoral through complicity in sins like racism, nationalism, and materialism” (Yarbrough 2019, 41). It is therefore noteworthy that theological education has a corrective effect on witchcraft attitudes. For example, Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell write: “Theological education had a small but significant effect on pastors’ inclination to believe in the guilt of accused children. Specifically, pastors with formal advanced theological education were less likely to endorse accusations than were pastors whose only training was informal in the context of church ministry” (32; see also 27, 29). Reliable theological education is an urgent need for African pastors. While I recognize that the academic accoutrements of seminary training have not always served the gospel well in the West (theological liberalism flourished despite—and sometimes *because of*—academic training!), African Christianity tends to lie at the other extreme. The lack of theological leadership among pastors is a breeding ground for syncretistic and heretical Christianity. These matters are much easier to diagnose than to cure, for theological education (or lack thereof) is an extremely difficult problem in the African context. It nonetheless plays a central role in this discussion.

Some Concluding Thoughts

In much of the witch discourses in Kinshasa, Christians seem to be searching for a practical theodicy.³ They are haunted by life’s deepest questions: Why do evil things happen in the world? Why am I going through this particular suffering? Who is to blame for my present predicament? These are ancient, eminently human questions. Augustine, Origen, Irenaeus, and other early church fathers—almost all of them fellow Africans—had much to say on these matters. As an African-in-diaspora, my judgment is that the witch theodicy should be retired for good; it is myopic and reductionist. It superficially conflates indigenous beliefs and Christian concepts, and it overlooks Scripture and broader Christian theological reflection on evil and suffering.

In his book *Why Do Men Barbecue?*, Richard Shweder observes that every culture has a causal ontology, a way of making sense of pain and suffering. He describes seven different causal ontologies, among them the *biomedical* causal ontology associated with Western medicine. Job’s friends, on the other hand,

appealed to what Shweder calls a *moral* causal ontology—our misfortunes are the result of personal failing or sin. The most common causal ontology globally is the *interpersonal* causal ontology, “the idea that one can be made sick by the envy or ill will of colleagues, neighbors, and associates” (2003, 77). One might conclude from this research by Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell that African Christians should abandon witchcraft ideology *and* its associated interpersonal causal ontology. I agree that Christians should abandon witchcraft beliefs, but I think they should retain a *modified* interpersonal causal ontology. To be sure, the typical human-to-human causal ontology associated with black magic and evil eye is a pagan concept, but Scripture routinely depicts *divine-to-human* and *demon-to-human* causal ontologies. For example, God regenerates people; he smites sinners with disease and even death (e.g., 2 Kgs 15:5; Lk 1:19-20; Acts 12:23); he heals sickness in answer to prayer (e.g., 2 Kgs 5:10-14; 20:1-21; James 5:14-16)—not always, but sometimes. Demons, though mere creatures, can possess individuals and instigate human afflictions (e.g., Lk 13:10-17; Acts 10:38)—not always, but sometimes. The Christian position is thus consistent with a modified interpersonal causal ontology, though not exhausted by that category.

This fine study on witchcraft beliefs in Kinshasa signals a need for a compelling practical theology for lay Christians in Africa. In their analysis of cultures with the witch idea, Priest et al. write: “there is strong evidence in such societies that people not only feel deep insecurity, but that they respond to this insecurity by methods thought to protect from the witch attacks of neighbors, relatives, or colleagues. Such methods may include use of protective charms and amulets, or of prayers to God for protection” (43). Instead, pastors should be offering a robust theology that produces men and women who are confident in God’s sovereignty and his promise that the Spirit who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Such a theology affirms the reality of Satan and the powers of darkness but only as a subplot in the biblical story. Demonic forces are definitely real, but they are not the main attraction in the canonical drama. The focal plot is the triune God redeeming his people. As Luther said, the devil is *God’s* devil; he can do nothing without divine permission (e.g., see Job 1-2). Believers are more than conquerors, for no power on earth or in heaven can ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (see Rom 8:37-39).

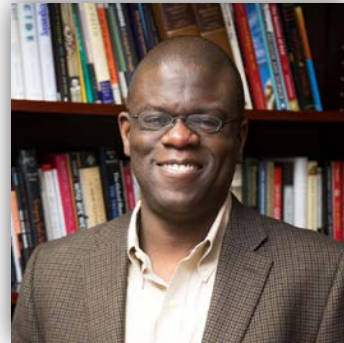
In sum, we need African Christian theodicies over against syncretistic witch theodicies. We need a richer,

³ I am ignoring the academic debates surrounding Christian theodicy. Here I am using the term “theodicy” loosely, to capture the human desire to make sense of personal suffering and misfortune.

supernatural, and truly *African* theology, magnificent in all its glory, yet always in continuity with the catholic tradition and rooted in the whole counsel of God.

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RESPONSE

The Bible's Cultural Mandate, Child Witches, Cognitive Authority, and Christian Pastors

Robert Guy McKee

First, I thank the authors—Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell (hereafter, Priest et al.)—and all others concerned, especially the 713 pastors surveyed, for the tremendous work behind this article (2020). I think it not only an invaluable substantive prod to continue a vitally needed conversation, but also a solid theological-anthropological contribution to the same. May God, revealing whatever its dross, use its gold to help deliver many from the shamefully horrific consequences of child-witch allegations.

My contribution to our conversation is that of a Christian anthropologist who thinks that, according to Scripture, created humankind, by God's command, has created and continues to create their cultures, and that they have done and continue to do so either legitimately, reverently to God's glory or illegitimately, irreverently to God's shame. This, at heart, is the idea of the cultural mandate, as grounded especially in Genesis 1:28 and 2:19-20a.¹ It is a core idea of my own Christian anthropology,² which I began to develop during my Ph.D. studies at the University of Rochester in the 1980s³ and have been able to teach in recent years at Dallas International University.⁴ Witches, according to this Christian anthropology, have phenomenological reality in many of the world's cultures as products of our fallen, inveterately idol-making imaginations; what

they (witches) *cannot* have, since Scripture nowhere has God, the Creator of *all* things, having created them, is hard, ontological, really-real-in-*that*-sense reality. Thus, this anthropology has me agreeing with the Congolese theologian to whom Priest et al. refer at one point—the odd man out who, at the 2015 EPED-hosted workshop concerned, would *not* confirm, to his audience of pastors and other church leaders stunned by his apparent apostasy in this regard, that he recognized witchcraft as real, or some people as really witches able to harm others through their witchcraft (34). In other words, this anthropology deconstructs witches as utterly incapable of the kinds of harm of which nearly all said-workshop attendees apparently believe(d) witches indeed capable; it has me disbelieving completely in any ontological reality or power of witches to cause harm; it has me denying categorically the possibility of witch causality. And this goes for child witches, as for any other such special category; and it goes for African witches as alleged *sui generis* African reality, as for any other such alleged *sui generis* reality.

Before I would grant, however, that I have now, by publicly reaffirming such a view,⁵ cemented loss of all credibility/cognitive authority on witch-related matters with even a vast majority of African Christian church leaders, permit me to add, please, what I will *not* accept

¹ See, e.g., Walke (2007, 220-221), Morris (1984, 41-44), Pearcey (2005, 47-49).

² Christian anthropology, germanely here, is not the same as Christian-perspective anthropology. The former, grounded explicitly in the Bible, is a different *kind* of anthropology than secular-humanistic anthropology (normally not marked as to religious-philosophical commitment); the latter is simply open about its Christian perspective within the secular discipline. Meneses (2000) and McKee (2014) exemplify the former; Howell and Paris (2019) exemplifies the latter, while also noting and explaining the difference between the two (2019, 252-254).

³ The first paper I wrote about this, I wrote for a theory seminar the second semester of my second year of graduate school. I then attempted to present a conference version of it, twice without success, at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association. McKee (1998) is what I was eventually able to present at a different professional association's quinquennial meeting.

⁴ Formerly, the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, where I have been teaching since 2010.

⁵ Please do see McKee (2012), the published form of a 2011 Evangelical Missiological Society conference paper, for the initial widely-public avowal of my view of witches.

as reasonably responsible. First, I will not accept the charge of unbelief in supernatural realities—not of ones that I understand to be taught in Scripture; for I definitely do believe in such. Among others, ones in which I do believe are: the one living God; demons/fallen angels, with Satan as chief among them;⁶ angels; miracles—e.g., of healing; spiritual gifts—e.g., of teaching; heaven and hell.⁷ The reason I believe in all these is, I see each taught amply enough in Scripture. Conversely, the reason I do *not* believe in any supernatural reality to witches or witchcraft is, I do *not* see witches taught in Scripture, not other than via the type of manmade, powerless idols—i.e., not other than as an imaginable-but-absent-from-Scripture token of a manmade-idol type. In this regard, I am more than persuaded by Priest et al.’s translation/interpretation of *kashaph* in Exodus 22:18, *not* as “witch” or any other kind of “evil secret killer” capable of harming others by their supernatural power, but rather as some kind of public magico-religious professional “with an identity similar to that of African diviners and traditional healers” (43-44).

Second, I will not, as reasonably responsible for loss of cognitive authority in our discussion, accept any charge that is *ad hominem* attack rather than well-reasoned rebuttal argument. An example at hand of such a charge is “capitulation to white secularist unbelief” (34).⁸ While I reject this, in any case, as untrue of me as represented by the witches-as-idols deconstruction of McKee (2012), its disqualifying logical flaw is it fails to engage the argument and instead attacks the person. Entertained seriously, this could hardly object to such like *ad hominem* countercharges as, e.g., “clinging to black African-traditional-religious superstition” (my invention, for the sake of the argument here). Scholarly discussion, I respectfully submit, should be above such. Our Congolese theologian colleague deserves better, as do Priest et al. for arguing as they have against any “evil secret killer” translation/interpretation of *kashaph* in Exodus 22:18. They have reasoned cogently from Scripture for the “public magico-religious professional” translation/interpretation they recommend (43-45). Further, they do not declare themselves as among those who

“categorically deny the very possibility of witch causality” (34). More than reasonably, then, their translation/interpretation must be granted place in the discussion.⁹ In any case, what Scripture says, if anything, about witchcraft and witches, is what should be authoritative in our discussion, and it is this that pastors and other church leaders need to learn and teach, in Africa and around the world.

As discernible above, my theological-anthropological path to not believing in any supernatural reality to witchcraft or witches has been greatly influenced by the cultural mandate. This mandate, as I understand it, has God commanding humankind to construct, to His glory, their cultures. (God does not present the world’s peoples with their cultures; for the greatest part, we make them, in obedience to the mandate, whether or not consciously.) Wherever, then, in any of our cultural constructs, we ascribe to created things attributes God did not give them, or, more generally, wherever we fail to ascribe to God alone the glory¹⁰ due His name, we turn God’s glory into shame, loving delusions and lies of our own creation (Ps 4:2). According to the mandate, we must not construct our cultures or cultural-scientific knowledge so; we have no right, before the one living God at the center of the garden, in whose face we respond to the mandate, to do so.

Thus, to start with transgender as an unrelated (and also controversial, I realize) example, we have no right to take “[t]he biblical reality of male and female created by God” and, ascribing attributes of one sex/gender to the other, replace that reality by “the idea that a surgeon’s knife and cross-sex hormones can make anyone into the gender of their choice.” This is because that replacement idea is ours; it certainly was not God’s design or work in His creation; it is impossible, in any case, to thereby “change a man into a woman or vice versa” (Heyer 2019).

Thus also, closer to witchcraft and witches, we have no right to ascribe divinity to the sun, moon, stars, or any other part of God’s creation, with such ascription a step preliminary to worshiping them—yet that is how all such false gods/idols are made. And, very importantly, “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their [i.e., the nations’] idols cannot speak; they must be carried

⁶ As regards simply the supernatural reality of demons, I think Lewis (1982) wonderfully instructive.

⁷ On miracles, I like, theologically, both Lewis (2015) and Metaxas (2014).

⁸ A similar, overlapping charge, which I confront as a red herring in McKee (2012), is that of “Western rationalistic failure to understand ‘African realities’” (2012, 18). This charge, too, is *ad hominem* attack rather than well-reasoned rebuttal.

⁹ This argument strikes me as Priest at his missiological-anthropological best. Whoever its source, I believe the discussion will do itself a grave disservice if it does not duly appreciate the strength of the theological-anthropological argument here.

¹⁰ Not to mention the power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, praise, worship, greatness, majesty, splendor, and all else, biblically, that is His due.

because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good” (Jer 10:5 NIV 1984).¹¹ God did not create anything to be worshiped; worship belongs to God alone. It is not God who created any of human history’s innumerable false gods/idols; rather, very clearly, it is we who have created them all.

Thus finally, hitting home now, we have no right, even in our respective cultures’ most well-intentioned efforts to explain misfortune, sickness, and death, to imaginatively-discursively create any witchcraft/witch power, nor, further, ascribing it to whichever category(/-ies) of human persons, to create thereby witches and witch causality—yet that is precisely how all witchcraft and evil secret (via witch causality) killers have come to be.

Helpfully here, before exemplifying this last with Mangbetu (Democratic Republic of the Congo)¹² witchcraft ideas, let us remember several clear biblical truths:

1. By the end of the creation week of Genesis 1, God completed His work of creation. Thus, no created thing, Satan included, has created anything besides what God created in the beginning (Gn 1:1, 2:1-2a; Col 1:16). Also, there is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that God created witchcraft; and humankind can only ever speak into existence/discursively construct phenomenological reality.
2. All that God made, including humankind, He saw was very good (Gn 1:31).
3. All of humankind, by Adam’s sin, acquired a sin nature (e.g., Rom 5:12, 7:25); the Bible nowhere says, implies, or even allows that humankind or any part thereof thereby acquired witchcraft, its potential, or anything of the sort.
4. God alone is to be feared/revered/worshiped (e.g., Ex 34:14, Ps 96:1-9, Jer 10:1-16, Mt 4:10, Rv 22:9).

The Mangbetu peoples acquired much of their complex of witchcraft, oracles, and magic by borrowing from the Azande.¹³ When I first encountered

Mangbetu witchcraft ideas in the 1980s, they included each of the following:

- that its power rested in an organic, gourd-shaped, luminescent appendage on the small intestine;
- that this appendage, called *nótú* in Mangbetu, was inherited unavoidably in both same-sex lines—meaning, if a child’s same-sex parent was a witch, so, unavoidably, were they;
- that it commanded its bearer to bewitch their victim;
- that its power caused wasting sickness, which, if not effectively countered, ended in the victim’s death;
- that its luminescence gave evidence, at a distance, of a witch walking about at night, by this witch light emanating from their mouth and anus;
- that it was discoverable on autopsy.

Biblically, including by the mandate, I do not see any ground for our believing that these or any other such witch-related ideas could ever have ontological reality; rather, I see great reason to recognize them as manmade, God-shaming constructs, capable of any harm or good only as we would idolize—create idolatrously—and effectively fear/worship them as realities. God did not make them; neither Satan nor any other created person or thing has the power to make them; we made them, such as they are—imaginary cultural phenomena; cultural constructs (as opposed to God-created ontological reality). We deal with differing “realities” around the world because they are differing cultural constructions; Scripture nowhere has God having created differing *sui generis* realities for this continent and that, such that African ontological realities are or can possibly be different from those of any other part of the world. Bolivia’s Siriono do not have witches, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Mangbetu do, as a matter of *cultural* difference. Satan, father of lies that he is, behind these and every other God-shaming cultural scene, surely delights to wreak all the havoc, misery, and destruction of which he is capable; what he cannot/does not have the power to do is to effectively change the nature of any of God’s creatures by imbuing it with any

¹¹ “[N]or can they do any good”—not to be overlooked here—evidences biblical proscription of “white” (protective, benevolent) witchcraft as well as “black,” since it too is idolatrous.

¹² I simplify here by my use of “Mangbetu”; what I studied more narrowly for my dissertation (McKee 1995), I called there “Meje-Mangbetu” and have since come to call “Meegye-Mangbetu.” My Ph.D. studies of Mangbetu grew out of languacultural interests from my first of two terms of SIL-assisted Mangbetu language project involvement, ca. November 1980-July 1983.

¹³ Concerning Zande and Mangbetu witchcraft, oracles, and magic, see, respectively, Evans-Pritchard (1937) and McKee (1995, 467-468). The former, in my view, is a true classic of British social anthropology; the latter is an appendix mention, in a dissertation on basically unrelated subject matter, of Meegye-Mangbetu witchcraft, oracles, and magic.

attribute(s) that God did not give it at creation. In sum, Satan cannot, biblically, make people into witches.

And how are pastors and other church leaders to act in all this, assuming they conclude they can do so biblically? Whatever their title or particular ministry, they must stop functioning as *shaman-diviner* pastors and leaders, especially if, as shaman, they sometimes abuse and even kill¹⁴ alleged child witches, not one of whom is a witch at all, and because divination is so clearly proscribed biblically.¹⁵ They must learn and teach faithfully from Scripture witches as manmade idols—as scarecrow idols that no one need fear, as worthless idols that can do neither harm nor good.

To summarize: It is the Bible's cultural mandate and other Scripture, not white secularist unbelief, that deconstructs the idea of witches generally, showing alleged child witches to be innocent victims of illegitimate, God-shaming cultural construction, not real witches capable of supernatural misfortune or harm to others. To surely prevent all wrongful abuse of alleged child witches, Scripture, understood as teaching thus, must be the cognitive authority Christian pastors trust. Hopefully, Priest et al.'s finding that "pastors with formal advanced theological education were less likely to endorse [child-witch] accusations than were pastors whose only training was informal in the context of church ministry" will prove a giant step toward this end.

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¹⁴ See Brown (1989) for a widely-known example, from Aguaruna (Peru), of the "dark" side of shamanism.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:10, 1 Samuel 15:23, 2 Chronicles 33:6, Jeremiah 14:14.

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RESPONSE

Comments on Christian Pastors and Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC

Carol V. McKinney

The authors Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell in their article on “Christian Pastors and Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC” (2020) began by very carefully defining the terms witchcraft, witch, and bewitching from an African perspective. Witchcraft deals with issues of explaining evil, the inexplicable, the malign secret causes of misfortune, illness, and death. Witchcraft beliefs answer the question of why misfortune, illness, evil, or death happens to one person at a specific time and place and it does not happen to another person who was also there at that place and time doing the same things. It explains the intersection of events, time, and people. It provides the ultimate etiology. Those with witchcraft beliefs also recognize the immediate cause of those problems (e.g., an automobile or motorcycle accident, illness, etc.). Yet almost all deaths, other than those of the very elderly who have fulfilled their functions in life or who have died because of God’s punishment for the person’s actions, are attributed to witchcraft. It is the ultimate cause of death that must be dealt with; it is that cause which Western style medicine fails to address.

This belief system is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, missionaries and Christian church leaders have often either not addressed this issue or done so poorly. Today Christian pastors and other religious church leaders are the most important functionaries in many sub-Saharan African countries, and they need to provide a response from Christianity to help people know how to deal with it. Today this has become a contested area of culture with some Christian pastors making and even affirming witchcraft accusations, some praying for deliverance from witchcraft of those accused, some not knowing how to deal with it, and some caring for those accused. This is a much-needed study from these Christian pastors’ perspective on child witch accusations in DRC, an epicenter for such child witch accusations.

The children accused are often those in areas of social cleavage in society. For example, stepchildren may be accused of witchcraft by their non-biological parent with a biological parent tending to protect their

own children. If children have physical disabilities, other related psychological problems, some unusual behaviors, or are orphans, they may be accused of being witches. In some African cultures, children are not accused of witchcraft; in fact, when I was talking with an African pastor’s wife, she knew of cultures that do accuse children, but she thought that such accusations were not credible.

The results of witchcraft accusations on children include insults, threats, food deprivation, and often eviction from their homes. This results in thousands of children living on the streets, finding food wherever they can, seeking to survive, and where they are further victimized as rejects from society. The EPED organization seeks to care for these children. The authors state that in DRC there is a law that it is illegal to accuse a child of being a witch. As I read through the article, I kept looking for what the police were doing about enforcing this law. I did not find any examples where that was the case. They leave it to the pastors to deal with this important social issue impacting the youngest and most vulnerable in the population.

When I was living in Africa, the longer I was there, the more areas of the local culture I found that were impacted by witchcraft beliefs. While theoretically a witch does not volitionally cause illnesses, misfortunes, and death; those accused of witchcraft are asked to confess to having done so as though they have acted volitionally. If pushed to its logical conclusion, there is a point at which the entire logic of witchcraft beliefs can be questioned; yet many do not do so. For example, it seems incompatible to claim that witchcraft is an unintentional use of spiritual power and to warn witches to desist from using their witchcraft to harm others. Some call the intentional use of witchcraft-substance against another person “voluntary witchcraft.”

Accusation of witchcraft for adults provides a check on anti-social behavior and encourages social conformity. Witchcraft accusations teach the population to relate well to their families and friends, to be respectful, to contribute to the community in helpful ways, and to avoid things that are hurtful to others—e.g., anger,

physical altercations, etc. This situation reminds me of the blind beggar whom Jesus healed as recorded in John 9:1-12. Jesus' disciples asked who had sinned, this man or his parents, that thereby caused his blindness. They too changed the question from why he was born blind to who sinned and caused his blindness, such as we see in DRC. Jesus rejected their assertion by saying that neither this man nor his parents sinned to cause his blindness.

The authors identify as problematic the fact that in many (most?) sub-Saharan African cultures there is not an ultimate evil being in their spirit world, namely, Satan. If there is no ultimate evil being, people still need to explain evil, misfortune, illness and death. In traditional African culture the belief is that people cause evil by their spirits leaving their bodies, often during sleep or inattentiveness, to meet with other spirits in the spiritual realm, resulting in evil, misfortune, illnesses, and death in the physical realm for some other people. Pastors must teach their congregants about the activities of Satan, namely that he is a liar and deceiver. The false accusations against children come from him. In contrast God calls us to love and protect children. Jesus specifically said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:16).

The authors used a questionnaire format for this study. In all they distributed questionnaires to 1000 pastors and received responses from 713 respondents. A question I have is, would oral interviews with pastors rather than having pastors fill out questionnaires have enhanced the responses received? In the case of the DRC respondents, there was no control over the context in which pastors filled out the questionnaires. Another question is, to what extent do the pastors have a functional literacy level or less. Passing out questionnaires discriminates against pastors who are only functionally literate or illiterate. Requiring the skills of reading and writing would have impacted their responses. For example, the low response rate from the pastors in the Kimbanguist churches could have been mitigated by having pastors and others in pastoral positions interviewed rather than requiring written responses. Oral interviewing would likely have taken longer, though with a group of prepared interviewers, it could have been done expeditiously. When I sought responses from an African population to an interview schedule that my research assistant and I had developed, we administered it orally to each respondent. I observed that the use of a written questionnaire resulted in a group coming together to discuss each question in order to arrive at the "correct" response. Even after pretesting the questionnaire and revising a few questions, some questions were still ambiguous.

The authors readily admit that they did not catch all of these. This is a common problem when administering a research instrument. It is hard to anticipate how people will interpret specific questions.

In the results of the questionnaire over two-thirds of the respondents reported that in their sermons they teach that misfortunes may be caused by child witches. Thus, pastors themselves are a major source of these child witch accusations. They are often those who make accusations against specific children, seek confessions from those children, and hold deliverance services.

In reporting basic demographics about the population, I failed to see statistics on the marital status of female pastors, healers, etc. Frequently in traditional African culture, there were specific roles for unmarried or divorced single women, namely they often became diviners and herbalists. If this statistic were provided, it would have answered the question of whether the role of female pastors' positions has continued their religious functionary positions from their traditional culture. A further statistic missing was whether any pastors were found to have no education. For example, what education have the pastors in Kimbanguist churches received?

There is a good discussion on ministry titles of the respondents. I found that African independent churches often have a more extensive list of positions that congregants may fill than is true of more mainline churches. For example, I found in the Cherubim and Seraphim churches in Nigeria, there were positions named senior mother in Israel, mother in Israel, special apostle, most senior apostle or prophet, senior apostle, evangelist, prophetess, leader, etc. These positions enable people to be involved and to receive recognition in these churches.

Where I lived in Africa among the Bajju in Nigeria an individual is conceived of having both a physical body and a seed. The seed is the living part of a person, the part that is the reincarnated soul of an ancestor. I have conceived of the seed as equivalent to the soul or spirit of an individual. In speaking of the "mystical seed of witchcraft" are Priest, et al. speaking about the inherent evil of one's spirit, our original sin nature? How does that relate to the reincarnated seed of an ancestor? A further question that the researchers addressed briefly is the role of demons in the context of witchcraft beliefs. If a child is accused of witchcraft does that mean that a demon is believed to have entered the child? If so, how are demons identified? More focus on this issue would be helpful. Christians often identify demons having entered people who cause trouble for others. Since pastors often hold deliverance sessions for those accused of witchcraft, are they seeking deliverance from demons?

The authors found that church networks appear to be central to the spread of child witch ideologies and

deliverance practices. This is a key takeaway from this research. Pastors and church leaders need to take the lead in combatting these ideologies and teaching about God's love for all, including of children who are accused.

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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Accusations in Comparative Contexts: The Early Modern European Witch-hunts and Alleged Child Witches in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Kenneth P. Minkema & Phillip D. Davis

First, we want to congratulate Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) for completing this significant and thought-provoking study on a sensitive and unsettling topic. The length and depth of the work, and the range of participants that the research team involved, is impressive. We trust that the insights gained will provide a foundation for further approaches and increased understanding across constituencies. We therefore consider it a privilege to be asked to respond.

We come at this project as historians of early modern Europe and colonial North America. Therefore, our comments will concern the European and settler colonial witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which an estimated quarter of a million people were unjustly accused and some 50,000 executed. We hope that, through a contextual, comparative approach to current-day child witch accusations in Africa, our comments will be useful. Specifically, we will address the translation of Scripture as a factor in the European witch accusations; the development of demonology and of the concept of the witch in the European imaginary; the social function of witchcraft accusations; the interrelation of witchcraft accusations and children; and the role of clergy and other societal leaders in encouraging or turning back accusations.

The Bible provided a touchstone for defining the reality and nature of witchcraft, and for prescribing punishments of those judged to be guilty of it. In the European context, at least two issues arose that are worth mentioning. First, the act of translation was often inaccurate or value-laden; Hebrew and Greek terms were wrenched into vernacular idioms or preconceptions, and certain terms were interpreted through convenient cultural filters. Second, prosecutors of witches used a hermeneutic of selectivity, focusing only on scripture texts that suited their purposes while losing

the wider view of Christian charity and uplift. What was thought to be the “literal” sense of Scripture was actually misleading and, in the wrong hands, dangerous.

Through the medieval period, the Reformation, and beyond, distinctive conceptions of demons and of witches developed within European cultures. These constructs consisted of a blend of elite and popular beliefs, as well as a synthesis of ancient folk practices and Christian teachings, catalyzing in times of plague, religious wars, and economic hardship. The conception of the witch undergirding the peak of the European witch-hunt in the early modern period originated in the late fifteenth century in and adjacent to the Swiss Cantons. Inquisitors interpreted various magical folk practices in the alpine regions of Switzerland, the Dolomites, and southwestern Germany as demonic, often combining them and associating them with witchcraft. Demonological tracts describing the necessary connection between witchcraft and Satan were well-distributed among theologians and inquisitors in that region by that time and became common theological fare throughout Europe and colonial North America shortly thereafter. In fact, many churchmen attending the Council of Basel (1431-1440) were also authors of early demonological assessments of witchcraft, Johannes Nider most notorious among them. His *Formicarius* (1436-7), which was an essential link in the development of the stereotype of the witch, framed witchcraft as a threat to the authority of the church.

The history of witchcraft in early modern European context also demonstrates the inflammatory and systemic effects of religious conflict, war, and epidemics on fears of witchcraft. Some of the first witch-hunts in all of Europe occurred in northern and western Switzerland in the areas where the Dominican Inquisition targeted the remnants of the Waldensian movement around the turn of the fifteenth century.

Western Switzerland in particular remained a hotbed of witchcraft accusations during the Reformation, as a continuous wave of religious refugees fled France. Many refugees in Switzerland came from Savoy, which was stricken by waves of plague in the sixteenth century. Fears of disease coupled with overcrowding, the friction of growing religious pluralism, and the threat of religious wars made Pays de Vaud, the area around Geneva, and the western rim of Switzerland as a whole one of the busiest zones in the history of European witch-hunts. The same factors—as well as economic hardship and famine—contributed to fears of witchcraft in early modern German states as well.

One way to relieve uncertainties—to which the authors allude in referencing Richard Shweder's "interpersonal" causal ontology—was by finding scapegoats. That need for relief became most pressing as the boundaries of the body were ruptured in the early modern Euro-American context. By that, we mean that many witchcraft accusations in that context can be described as attempts to explain inexplicable biological malfunctions, including deformed or still-born babies, infertility, the health of plants and animals, and various other bodily traumas. We might expand the list of questions included in Schweder's causal string—the question of "why" was not only converted into "who," but also "how?" The proposed answer was often witchcraft. This study demonstrates ample correlation to the reality that witchcraft becomes most real in Kinshasa, as it did in early modern Europe, when inexplicable trauma arises in everyday lives.

Speaking generally, Europeans viewed Satan and his subservient devils, along with lesser unholy beings, as physical, malevolent forces locked in a cosmic conflict with God and his angels, out to corrupt and destroy the church. To prosecute this conspiracy, they posited that devils sought covenants with witches, and met with them regularly in grotesque gatherings called "sabbats." These anxious theological perspectives were made available to the populous as explanations for natural disasters and afflictions of all kinds. Meanwhile, the stereotype of the witch evolved from including adult men and women, from upper and lower classes, to that of the "hag," an older woman, usually widowed, poor, possibly vagrant or dependent, unsociable, and contentious. Consequently, women, and especially elderly and poor ones, were disproportionately accused, and women were among the great majority of those executed, to the extent that the European witch-hunt has been equated with gynocide, or women-hunting. Accusations and executions in early modern Euro-American context, then, functioned as a way to remove burdensome weight from the community. Such removal acted both as scapegoating and as mitigation of the responsibility in Christian community to care for the poor, the ill, and the handicapped, creating a way to

skirt laws designed to make communities do just that, such as those in Massachusetts Bay Colony during the seventeenth century.

The demography of European and New World witch accusations from the late fifteenth to the late seventeenth centuries was therefore different from that which prevails today in the DRC, with children as accused. This is not to say that there were not cases in the early modern Euro-American witch-hunts in which children were accused: witness Finnmark, in northern Norway, during the early 1660s, in which six girls were accused of witchcraft; or Salem, Massachusetts, in the early 1690s, where four-year-old Dorcas Good was accused of being a witch along with her mother. However, the numbers pale in comparison to those in Kinshasa and surrounding areas.

Even more, children in Euro-America were usually accused of witchcraft in order to compel them to implicate others, especially *adult* members of their own family, who were seen as the real source of bewitchment. This is what happened at Finnmark, at Lancashire, England, in the early 1610s, and at Salem. Two of the primary accusers at Lancashire, Jennet and James Device, aged nine and eleven years old, respectively, helped send their sister, mother, and grandmother to death. Young James was also executed as a witch. And little Dorcas Good was coerced into accusing her mother, reflecting the belief that witchcraft was hereditary, inherited from parents or other older relations. Indeed, in early modern Euro-American accusations, children were not commonly accused but were rather accusers of relatives and neighbors.

The role of the child-accuser was a traumatic one in European and American witch trials. Children who accused their fellow townfolk of witchcraft were subject to the scrutiny of the entire town themselves. At Salem, Justice John Hathorne and other magistrates made it clear that recanting testimony would open the door to murder charges, even for child witnesses. Since the Court of Oyer and Terminer relied heavily upon spectral evidence for convictions, the young female accusers' words carried the weight of life and death for the accused. If any of the child or teenage accusers were to break rank, as Mary Warren briefly did, they risked being prosecuted for witchcraft themselves. This created a dire atmosphere for the rotating cast of girls at the heart of the Salem episode, which was deeply manifest in the aftermath: Ann Putnam, one of the most active of the Salem child accusers, issued a heavy apology to the Salem community some years after the crisis. Dorcas Good, whose mother was executed partially on the basis of her testimony, was deeply disturbed her whole life.

One major finding of this study of alleged child witches is the role of the clergy and other religious leaders. This certainly was a lesson from European

history, in which theologians and pastors, as well as jurists and magistrates, were instrumental in formulating and prosecuting the intellectual and legal foundations of witch theory. As in Kinshasa, clergy and law enforcement officers largely encouraged and legitimated accusations, making theological assertions of Satan's activity available to their communities as recourse for explaining natural disasters, misbehavior, bodily malfunctions and malformations, and afflictions of all kinds. Looking again at the Salem hysteria, the minister of Salem Village, Samuel Parris, deliberately created a climate of fear and conspiracy regarding demonic threats to the local church, prophesying about the threat as a means of extending his personal power. Salem Village was located in Essex County, the ministers of which came together as a very influential voice of authority, but they were ambivalent at best on how the magistracy should prosecute accusations, and their lack of clarity permitted the continuation of trials and executions. But there were other religious and political leaders who, exercising a healthy skepticism and a concern for consistent rule of law, stepped forward and finally succeeded in putting a stop to the proceedings. Although witchcraft accusations by no means ceased in British North America or in the United States, most were dismissed as motivated by interpersonal or psychological issues. A well-informed and impartial clergy was essential to this process.

One difference between the landscape of today's Kinshasa and the early modern Euro-American context is worth exploring further. The aforementioned role of demonology in creating the stereotype of the witch is unquestioned. Moreover, there is a close connection between the judicial authorization of spectral evidence (via particular demonological theologies) and the involvement of children in early modern Euro-American witch-hunts. Without spectral evidence, there was little ground on which to accuse children or to employ them as accusatory witnesses in Euro-American witch-hunts. A different kind of Christian theological and ritual affirmation and propagation of child accusations occurs in current-day Kinshasa, one that appears directly related to the influence of Pentecostalism and the intermixing of Pentecostalism and local magico-religious practices. We might open new hermeneutic territory by comparing Pentecostal theology and spiritual warfare to late medieval and early modern European demonological works espousing the use of spectral evidence.

Another proposition: How does religious competition (see pages 5 and 35) affect witchcraft beliefs and accusations? The "religious marketplace" of Kinshasa certainly does not resemble fragmented, violent European contexts in the late medieval and early modern periods, but a sense of religious sectarianism or at least competition is present in both. It may be that

for churches to articulate and particularize their authority in competitive or unstable religious environments, the issue of otherization in general, and witchcraft in particular, becomes more prevalent. The ability to detect witches is a form of power and authority—potentially redolent both in our context and in Kinshasa. It may also affect the motivation of church leaders seeking to identify witches, sometimes even unprompted.

We have attempted to offer what we hope are some helpful reflections on child witchcraft accusations in Kinshasa, as laid out in this foundational study by Priest and his colleagues, resourcing the historic European witch-hunt. Scripture translation, demonology and the witch concept; the social function of witchcraft accusations through scapegoating, witchcraft accusations and children, and the role of clergy and other leaders are some of the salient comparative issues that can be brought to bear on the Congolese situation. We hope that these historical lessons offer solutions that are culturally sensitive yet that correct injustices.

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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Accusations and the Christian Church's Response

Joyce Dainess Mlenga

Introduction

In Africa, belief in witchcraft is as old as the continent itself. It is a reality. The belief remains strong despite the introduction of Christianity, education and western civilization. The early European missionaries to Africa tried in vain to fight the belief by prescribing heavy penalties against the alleged accusers of witchcraft. The African pastors who came after them were not successful either. Many Africans live in fear of being bewitched and nearly every sickness, death or misfortune is interpreted as being caused by witches and wizards, and more recently, Satanists.¹

Mbiti defines witchcraft as “a manifestation of mystical forces which may be inborn in a person, inherited or acquired in various ways” (Mbiti 1975, 165), while Evans-Pritchard describes it as “the belief that humans are capable of invoking, practicing and exercising a psychic force for the primary purpose of hurting or killing other humans, and engaging in other malevolent activities” (Evans-Pritchard 1937, 347). Both definitions paint witchcraft as being evil and a source of harm on those it is directed. In fact, “witches are thought to be a personification of evil” (Amanze 2002, 64).

Generally, all societies realize that human beings are weak, and at one time or another they experience pain, illness and other kinds of misfortunes. When such things happen, people come up with culturally oriented explanations, which may include witchcraft (Moro & Myers 2010, 276). Such explanations may influence a victim to visit a diviner or traditional healer in order to identify the witch. Considering that human beings have a tendency to look for a human source of misfortunes and other evil things happening in their lives (Wendland & Hachibamba 2007, 177), witchcraft has ended up being a perfect explanation for these

misfortunes. In the language of Shorter, witchcraft has a functional purpose:

Witchcraft accusation enables individuals to exonerate themselves and to receive public acknowledgment that they are ‘on the side of the angels’ that misfortune is not due to their own incompetence or even their own sin, but to an enemy who is the enemy of the whole community. Witchcraft is a form of auto-salvation or self-justification (Shorter 1985, 96).

This write-up is a response to the article entitled “Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” written jointly by Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020). The article reports findings of their research which was carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) about alleged child witches and the role the church plays in dealing with the issue of child witchcraft accusations. Of interest to me is the great role that churches in DRC play, more especially, pastors of EPED (*l'Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse*), of confirming whether a child is a witch or not, and praying for those accused so that they can be delivered.

The Shift from Diviners to Churches

The findings of the study by Robert Priest et al. show that churches are preferred over diviners when it comes to the task of identifying witches and delivering accused. This has resulted from the fact that many church leaders claim to know who is a witch and how to deliver the alleged child witches from witchcraft. To state in their own words:

While in the past, diviners, shamans, and traditional healers were the religious professionals that people trusted to understand, explain, and address witchcraft

¹ Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a Satanist as someone who worships Satan, but in Malawi it is often used in a broader sense to include “witches.”

realities, today in Kinshasa Christian pastors are the authorities people frequently rely on for help (37-8).

A few explanations have been given for this shift from traditional practitioners to church leaders. First, it is believed that traditional healers only pretend to help those who consult them, while in fact, they cause harm to them. There is an increasing belief that the traditional healers themselves are actually witches (Mutsenga in Priest et al. 2020, 11). This assertion has also been made by some people in Malawi. Studies show that some people, whose children are accused of witchcraft do not consult diviners because, instead of helping them to be delivered, the diviners will simply advance the children in witchcraft (Machewere 2006, 14).

People's reasoning in the past for taking issues related to witchcraft to traditional practitioners was that of "send a thief to catch a thief." It is believed that the witchdoctors who were able to "remove" witchcraft from those accused were also practicing witchcraft; in fact, they were considered to be "experts", and this qualified them to solve the problem of witchcraft accusations (Mlenga 2016, 176).

Secondly, the fact that people are now taking their witchcraft issues to the pastors or prophets shows that the traditional practitioners are either failing, or the pastors have shown that they can deal with the issue. A study done in Malawi reports of instances where the diviners were considered to be unsuccessful. In the study, one pastor reported of having prayed for several children who had been to traditional diviners, but were not assisted. The diviners did not succeed in removing the witchcraft from the children (Chipeta 2009, 4).

Thirdly, the shift has come about due to the establishment of prophetic ministries in many African countries. Prophets are endowed with the gift of uncovering the hidden things, including issues to do with who is a witch and who is not. The fact that people were turning to diviners shows that the church did not show that it was able to help with these witchcraft issues until the prophets appeared in the pulpits. The prophets claim to sense who is a witch and who is not, and confirm it in the hearing of both the accused and the accusers. Fourthly, the fact that people are taking traditional issues to pastors can be an indication that

some pastors have started to display behaviour which is similar to that of traditional healers.

The Role of Pastors in Dealing with Child-Witchcraft Accusations

The fact that many people are now turning to pastors and the church to have their traditional problems solved is definitely placing a big responsibility on the church, more especially, the pastors. This being a new development, it is very likely that the church leaders are overwhelmed, and at times may not really know how to respond to issues of witchcraft accusations.

Confirmation of Child-Witchcraft Accusations

Priest et al. have stated in their study that witchcraft accusers now turn to intercessors, prophets, and pastors for help (22). The authors did find out that the mentioned church leaders are not the source of witchcraft accusations but legitimize what is already existing. In other words, they just confirm the accusers' suspicions.² This makes sense because mere pastors are not expected to originate the accusations, as they may not be endowed with gifts of prophecy, through which they would be able to discern who is a witch or not. Normally, one would expect prophets to do so.

Furthermore, there is a strong similarity between what the church leaders, especially prophets, do during deliverance and what traditional healers do when carrying out their work. In the case of the Ngonde of Northern Malawi, diviners carry out an exercise called *Kusecha*,³ which is derived from the English word "to search." In the context of the church, prophecy time is more like a "searching" time; a time for prophets to smell out who is a witch or not. Just like the pastors in DRC legitimize and confirm suspicions which already exist within the child's family; many diviners do the same. Diviners often look for hints in order to confirm whether one has been bewitched or not, or whether the one accused is a witch or not.⁴ For instance, in the event of death or sickness, a traditional practitioner often asks if the patient ever quarreled with anyone, or stepped on any strange thing. If the client agrees with him, the

² This idea is also supported by J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. In his study, he found out that witchcraft is reinforced in people's minds both by Christian preaching and by its coverage in the media. See "Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 39, No. 1, January 2015.

³ This is the process in which a traditional diviner speaks to his clients personally, to inform them about the past, present and future events affecting them. For more on this see Joyce Mlenga, *Dual Religiosity in Northern Malawi*.

⁴ It is not always that they look for hints, there are times when they discern it themselves. The traditional healers are believed to possess supernatural powers which give them discernment.

diviner just confirms that he or it is responsible for the death or sickness.

Readiness of Pastors to Deal with Issues Related to Witchcraft

The fact that people no longer trust the traditional diviners and healers should be good news to the Christian church. Therefore, the church must seize the opportunity to give proper guidance to those who seek help from them. For a long time, many mainline churches in Africa have been trying to stop their members from consulting diviners and traditional healers by prescribing heavy disciplinary penalties, with little success (Mlenga 2016, 298). Since no amount of disciplining is yielding results, much more must be done in order to assist both the accusers and the accused from the pastoral approach.

Many Africans believe that traditional problems do require traditional solutions. Now that the church is perceived as a place where people turn to seek solutions to their traditional problems, including child witch allegations, it is imperative that it should equip itself to provide spiritual solutions so that it does not betray the trust that people have in it.

The church should be proactive instead of being reactive to the situation concerning witchcraft. For a long time, the only role that many of the mainline churches have been actively playing is to suspend or excommunicate those who seek assistance from diviners for various reasons. It is pleasing to note that revival groups and charismatic churches play an important role in dealing with the issue of witchcraft, because witchcraft is grouped together with demons, and they consider delivering people from witchcraft as important:

Any theology that will take the African worldview seriously will have to deal with issues of witchcraft [and] demon possession . . . Neocharismatic theology deals with these issues by asserting the victory of Christ over the principalities and powers . . . Many pray for those afflicted by witchcraft, exorcise demons, and even free those that participated in the occult (Nyika 2015, 56-57).

The church must take contextualization and enculturation of the gospel seriously so that Christians find solutions to their “traditional” problems in the church, and because Christ is the answer to every problem. The church must endeavour to fulfill its mandate on earth, rather than abusing and

manipulating people for its own gain. The study done by Priest et al. reports of a pastor who confessed that he was praying for deliverance to market his church, not really to help those who came to him for pastoral assistance (11). In another case, a pastor is seen making unbiblical conclusions on indicators of child-witches (23). All this shows that the pastors are not properly trained or equipped for these emerging issues.

God’s missionary task is a serious one, and those who go into it must take it seriously by equipping themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills while seeking guidance from God through prayer and reading his word. Rather than instilling fear in the people, the church must be seen to be helping people to be set free from fear. The success story of transformation which EPED has achieved through its conferences must be taken to many parts of Africa so that pastors can understand their role amidst these witchcraft accusations.

A study from Malawi also shows that the mainline churches are not very ready to solve some problems related to witchcraft. When approached with issues to do with witchcraft, some church leaders do advise their members to consult traditional healers because they believe that issues of witchcraft can only be dealt with by them (traditional healers) and not the clergy (Chipeta, 2009, 3).

Another interesting thing is that in Malawi, children who are considered to be practicing witchcraft⁵ are often taken to pastors not of their church, but of other churches. Church members are able to differentiate the powers that their pastors have. Some are able to fix the problems, while others cannot. The Pentecostal and charismatic pastors are preferred over those of mainline churches. These churches encourage Christians not to fear witchcraft because it is believed that it has no power on those who believe in God. They are under God’s protection.

Conclusion

Witchcraft is a reality in Africa. It cannot be wished away. No amount of talk that witchcraft does not exist will help. The idea is entrenched in the minds of Africans, and it is difficult to uproot. The church leaders have a daunting task of dealing with issues associated with witchcraft, whether they like it or not. Since many people are turning to the church for solutions to child-witchcraft accusations, the church must be properly equipped to deal with the issue. The church must be careful when dealing with the issue so that it does not appear to be involved in child-witch

⁵ It must be noted here that children in Malawi were not necessarily accused of witchcraft, but there was a period in Malawi in early 2000s when there were a lot of confessions from children that some adult women were teaching them witchcraft. This is no longer common. The confessions have since subsided.

accusations, but must look for long lasting solutions which will not victimize children or any member of the society.

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RESPONSE

Do Witches Exhume Dead Bodies?

Esther Mombo

“Why are we having only two weeks of vigil for your mother, for your father we had one month.”

Life after death, or the afterlife, is a subject of interest in most religious traditions in many societies. Writing about African Traditional Religious beliefs Mbiti observed that “in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present because personalities are retained, social and political status are maintained, sex distinctions are continued human activities are reproduced and the wealth or poverty of a person remains unchanged”(Mbiti 1969, 161). As well as this, the fears of the people about witchcraft also remain the same. In real life people fear witchcraft and witches, at death the people fear that witches will exhume the dead body and use it for ritual purposes.

This is in line with the definition of witches as observed by Wehmeier and Ashby, who define witchcraft as “the use of magic powers, especially evil ones” (2000, 1371). The concept, witchcraft, therefore refers to the use by some people of evil magic powers to harm or cause misfortune to others. Witchcraft is therefore regarded as “. . . the supposed power of a person to harm others by occult or supernatural means, without necessarily being aware of it” (ibid). Kritzinger (2004, 180) describes the African witch in almost similar terms: In Africa, witches are always viewed as evil, and are not always female. In many African countries, it is believed that witchcraft runs in the family and that one is born a witch. Witches are believed to have a natural inclination to carry out evil, making people ill and even causing death. After death in some communities they are believed to exhume the bodies to use them for ritual practices, for example among the Abagusi, my own group. I will tell my own story:

My father died thirty years ago and we were young and could only depend on our relatives to plan and conduct the funeral. While as children we would have asked to do things differently we were not allowed. His grave was dug in front of the house as is custom and built with cement at the bottom. The coffin was covered with iron sheet and a metal before the grave was covered. There was a vigil for one month from 6pm to 6am in the morning. The vigil

was done by both men and women taking turns each night to come and stay. My mother and the women had a vigil spot and my uncles and other village men had their spot. In the morning they shared experiences of the vigil. I did not participate in the vigils as I had to go back to my school the same as my brothers and sister. When I returned to visit my mother, I heard stories about the vigils and how committed the team was to make sure that the witches did not get my father. After one month they would not bother.

In November this year my mother died and, unlike my father’s funeral, as siblings we had time to plan our mother’s funeral and to execute it. With the support of the church and the larger community, all aspects of the burial were adhered to, for instance the preparation of the grave. With fear of witches exhuming the body, the grave was dug to a depth of seven feet, it was cemented inside, it was covered by an iron sheet, before filling the grave with the soil. My mother’s funeral went well and we were happy that we had given our mother a good send off. After the funeral of my mother, and when the crowds had left, family and close relatives stayed behind as is custom. My brothers and sisters shared with each other when they were to depart as most of us work away from home.

Two of my siblings said they would be home for two weeks because they had taken leave. Immediately one of my relatives asked why we were not staying longer to hold vigils for my mother. Were we not aware of witches exhuming bodies? My relative went on at length to explain how the bodies are exhumed and taken away to be used by witches for witchcraft. While my mother was ailing occasionally we were asked if we had checked with the African healers as much as we were using hospital medicine to treat her. We did not venture to follow up on the discussion about checking if my mother was bewitched. For some people they would exclaim that whoever sent this disease to my mother would also suffer, God will repay him or her. During the funeral no one spoke publicly about witchcraft, so I was surprised that we were being told to keep a vigil and look after my mother’s grave in case the witches take her body.

A number of things could be deduced from the discussion about keeping my mother's vigil. Even though there have been thirty years between my father's funeral and my mother's funeral, the beliefs and worldview about witches has not changed. In a newspaper report a journalist observed that "Kisii is infamous for witches, real or imagined. And none strike as much terror as those said to prowl graveyards in the dead of the night, and falling upon fresh graves to dig up decomposing corpses. They eat them, so goes legend. The very thought of a loved one's body getting exhumed and eaten sends a cold shiver down the spine of many among the *Abagusii*" (Nairobian 2019). These are the fears that gripped my relative in raising the matter of the vigil with us.

Along with the time difference in the period of the two funerals, the church members oscillate between the two worldviews even in the current time: the world of the existence of witches which is deep and the world of not taking note of them on the surface. The reality is that, in cases of life and death when there are no answers, there is a comfort in bringing the witches into the picture and not ignoring their existence or the power they hold. The general view of the church as an institution may be that the stories about witches are mere imaginations, but individuals take the stories seriously when they are directly affected.

What is the connection between this and the report about child witches in the Congo (Priest, Ngolo and Stabell 2020)? In most of the stories about the children accused of witchcraft, the child has a sad background, of not being wanted. To culminate the hatred the child is accused of being a witch. The child in the first place is a burden to the family, and to get rid of the child they accuse them of witchcraft which is emotive and people believe it.

Not until we explain and respond to the questions that arise at the times of death, will the fears of witches cease to be part of our worldview. Likewise, until we sort out issues of unwanted children like in the Congo, compounded by poverty, children will continue to be accused of witchcraft to enable families to get rid of them. I have two points with which to conclude: First, the ministry of exorcism that the church seems to have undertaken is a difficult one, and second witchcraft is not the real issue—the real issue is how we deal with a patriarchal society where children who do not fit a family setting as a result of broken marriage or the death of one parent. So witchcraft is not the real problem, but it is a peg on which the questions of life are hung.

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RESPONSE

Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC: A Response

Paul M. Mpindi

Introduction

Let me first introduce myself, as this will explain my take on this crucial subject for the future of the body of Christ in Kinshasa (Congo), and in the rest of the body of Christ in Africa.

I was born and raised in Kinshasa in the context of a conservative church that didn't know much about spiritual warfare. Sensing God's calling over my life, I left home to attend seminary, first at an Evangelical seminary in Bangui (Central African Republic); and later at a Reformed seminary in America.

Although I am an African, my church tradition and theological training didn't prepare me correctly on how to deal with the supernatural worldview that dominates our African culture. It was only after my doctoral studies that I became aware of the existing biblical teaching and practices regarding spiritual warfare. I have been since involved in spiritual warfare training, teaching and ministry for the past 10 years (please see my French book on the subject: *Cure d'âme profonde et délivrance spirituelle*, published by Presses Bibliques Africaines [PBA] (2014).

Here then are a few comments about the subject of: child witches in Kinshasa (DRC) in response to the report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020).

1. Yes, Witchcraft is Real and Children Witches are Real in Kinshasa!

It is a commonplace to assert that witchcraft is real in Africa, and particularly in Congo. No true African will ever doubt that. The powers of darkness are real and pervade the African worldview.

The phenomenon of child witches is not recent in Africa. Always, in most African tribes, children have been bewitched early in life, because they are easy prey. Most child witches were bewitched by members of their own family. The following story comes from my personal experience with deliverance ministry.

A few years ago, while I was ministering in Kinshasa, I received a Christian couple in their forties. The man was suffering from a sudden and inexplicable blindness. While ministering to them, the couple told me that two of their young children, their 14-year-old daughter and their 10-year-old son, confessed that they are the cause of their father's blindness.

As I listened to them, I grew concerned that this Christian couple had fallen prey to spiritual falsehood. In my mind, I dismissed their explanation and asked them if they could allow me to meet these kids privately without them being present. Indeed, the following day I met the two children privately. I started by asking them if their parents put words in their mouths about them being witches. The kids said, "no". I then asked them if they were witches. They both said, "yes". I asked them how they became witches. The oldest one explained that she became a witch at age 10 or so, and she is the one who recruited her brother to become a witch as well.

I then asked them if they are the ones who made their dad go blind. They both said, "yes". I asked them why, and they said that making their dad blind was the only way they could save his life because their aunt, the person who made them witches wanted them to kill their dad, but they refused. In order to avoid being killed themselves, they had to somehow hurt their father, and they chose making him blind instead of killing him.

I ended up ministering to these two kids, first leading them to Christ, then making them renounce the devil and sorcery as well. These two kids told me so much about the inner workings of the dark world. It was impossible for these two little kids to know so much about sorcery without themselves being sorcerers.

2. Yes, Untrained, Overzealous, and Heretical African Pastors are the Problem!

As argued before, child witches have always been part of the African traditional communities. But what is troubling is that untrained, overzealous, and mostly heretical African pastors are the ones pushing a negative narrative that indiscriminately labels all problem children as sorcerers. Not only do these pastors often accuse innocent children of sorcery, but they also use unbiblical deliverance practices on people who need spiritual deliverance.

Now, using child witches as a “one size fits all” answer to poverty and life crisis is one issue, but using unbiblical deliverance practices to address this phenomenon is another issue that the body of Christ in Africa must deal with urgently.

Indeed, most Western missiologists marvel at the impressive growth of Christianity in Africa. But it is my contention that actually African Christianity is not “growing”, instead African Christianity is “swelling”. And my fear is that it won't take long for this unhealthy strand of Christianity to burst!

3. Yes, this Unfortunate Situation Can Be Fixed!

My own experience as a theology professor and a deliverance minister in Africa is that most untrained and heretical Christian preachers who are destroying the church in Africa today are open to teaching. Our yearly trainings and conferences throughout the continent see thousands upon thousands of these pastors come and receive teaching with an open heart. Many of them do change.

Now the challenge is to find ways to address this crisis that would be both biblically sound and practical. Here are three avenues that we could follow that would greatly help our church leaders who minister in the area of spiritual warfare in the African context:

a) Let Us Recognize the Reality of Child Witches

One of the dangers we face as Christian leaders in Africa is of simply ignoring the reality of the crucial impact of the supernatural in the African worldview; but those who are careful students of Scriptures find a clear similarity between the biblical worldview and traditional African worldviews.

Both in biblical and in traditional Africa worldviews, there is a clear continuity between the supernatural and the natural worlds. In the Bible as well in Africa, there is but One True God, creator of the universe and mankind. Both in the Bible and in Africa, the One True God, is surrounded by a host of angels, good and bad! And these angels interact with the human

community in every life situation. Indeed, the only major and decisive difference between the biblical and African worldviews lies in the *nature and work of Christ*, the Son of God, the only True Mediator, and the multiple human and spirit mediators found in the African worldview (see the discussion of the subject in my book, *Manuel de morale chrétienne en milieu africain* (2014).

When Christ replaces African ancestors as the only True Mediator between God and the community of the living and the dead, then African Christianity will gain in biblical doctrinal soundness, and ministry efficiency. Indeed, most untrained African pastors and deliverance ministers are bringing trouble and chaos in the body of Christ, because of their syncretistic approach which mixes Christ with traditional spirituality. But once the christological debate is won, and Christ becomes the only and sole Ruler and Mediator between the human community and God, real or imagined child witches will no longer fall victims to the syncretistic forces in action now.

b) Let Us Put in Place Lean Teaching Systems to Train Untrained Pastors

Because of the large number of untrained pastors and church leaders already ministering in Africa, the traditional teaching model of Bible schools and seminaries won't be enough to answer this challenge. Africa is overdue for serious electronic and online biblical and theological training platforms. These electronic and online biblical and theological training platforms have the advantage of helping African church leaders to be equipped at their own pace without having to leave their local churches.

For these electronic and online biblical and theological training tools to be effective, they have to be written taking into accounts the diverse Protestant denominations in existence in the continent. Written within the context of the larger African evangelical body of Christ, these electronic and online platforms will help unify both the theology and praxis of the African church. And this will help in eradicating not only the child witches phenomenon, but also the continuing phenomenon of traditional syncretism affecting African Christianity.

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RESPONSE

A Contribution to the Conversation

Mike Mtika

This very interesting research by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) seems to be a case study of the work of the Church vis-à-vis child-witches, with EPED coming in to counter absurd child-witch deliverance activities by the Church. The research deals with the *what* question; it does a wonderful job here. On the other hand, it does not seem to engage in the *why* question. Perhaps this is for future research. I think digging into the *why* question would help address the roots or foundations of child-witch accusations and deliverance schemes. Focused on the *what* questions, addressing the matter is understandably rooted in the absurdity of the practice rather than its root causes. The important unanswered questions that stand out to me include what exactly has led to the involvement of the Church in legitimating child-witches accusations and deliverances? Is it revivalism? Is it the rise of prophesying in the Church and why such a rise? The research is silent on this thus leaving the reader to take misfortunes as the foundation of child-witches and the resulting involvement of EPED in helping the Church to deal with the issue.

More specific to the matter, the authors state, “central to the new and emerging cultural patterns is the identification of children as the locus of witch agency and harm” (33). This is definitely a worrying situation that the children may be the locus of witch agency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; it may not be so in other places. In Malawi, my country of origin, there is a common belief that adult witches use children in their witchcraft. Specific to the children issue, how exactly do children become witches; how do they emerge and acquire these witchcraft powers? How is it that the signs that identify witches have attained the seemingly sacrosanct role in identifying child-witches? In the case of Berthe, what is it about bed-wetting, talking in her sleep, and poor health (35) that is witchy; how come people have accepted these as evidence that she is a witch? Further, the authors write “while most pastors’ understandings of witchcraft in all likelihood do not differ fundamentally from the understandings of Kinshasa’s population as a whole, pastors nonetheless play central authority roles in justifying, reformulating, and socially transmitting the complex of ideas related to child witchcraft” (38). Again, authors write, “African churches have been central both in propagating child-

witch ideologies, and in working to resist child-witch ideologies, accusations, and deliverance practices” (38). What is the origin of these pastors’ views? What has pushed the churches into this behavior? What is sustaining this behavior? I think the research does a wonderful job of describing what is going on and what EPED is doing, but seems to be circumventing the root of child-witch accusations. The proposed ways of addressing the matter thus tend to focus on the absurdity of accusing children as witches. I think we get trapped into similar problems of the 1800s and early 1900s. Missionaries condemned certain behavior on the basis of the absurdity of the behavior. There was little reasoning given to complex situations or the socio-cultural underpinning of the behavior. Female genital mutilation is an example of an absurd pointless practice, and the argument to stop it on the basis of its absurdity is valid. However, an understanding of the socio-cultural context behind the practice followed by engaging the people to re-shape that socio-cultural meaning would bring the needed, insightful, and sustainable change.

I find it very interesting that the authors argue for engaging in discussions concerning “hybridities of meanings, categories, assumptions, actions, and intentions indebted to some combination of Scripture and culture” (40). Many other items for engagement are proposed. Great work. Hybridities must take us to the root of behavioral practices. I cannot tell, from the research, what is behind child-witch accusations and the legitimacy the Church gives to this. It seems misfortune is a main factor in these accusations. Why have misfortunes had such an influence, why have the signs been accepted as evidence of witchcraft, and why has the Church engaged in the legitimation of child-witch accusations? These remain unanswered questions.

I must make an observation before proposing an alternative insight into the witchcraft matter. I think the shamans, traditional healers, and witch doctors the authors discuss (cf. 10) refer to different situations at least in the case of Malawi, my country of origin. A traditional healer or traditional doctor is one who knows traditional medicine (herbs and such other stuff) used to heal someone suffering from all sorts of illnesses. There is a whole hierarchy of them. One

traditional healer may refer a patient to another regarded more knowledgeable on a particular illness. The witch doctor is one who does engage in traditional healing but is also able to defeat witches; he or she has power over the witches. I think witch doctors are similar to shamans except that in the case of shamans there may be no connection with witches. Thus, witch doctors may tell who is a witch or not while the shaman can only talk of evil things that a person is experiencing. The pastors in the Congo engaging in telling who is a witch from a spiritual perspective seem to be combining “shamanism” and “witch doctoring”.

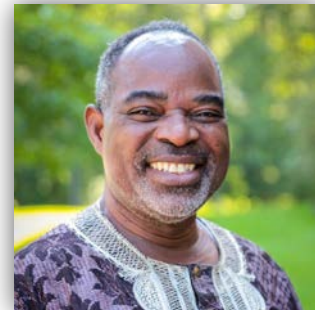
My proposed view—witchcraft can be understood from its supernatural influence rooted in the socio-cultural context and the sinful heart, for all of us “have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory” (Romans 3:23). Jesus was tempted to change stones to bread at a time he very much needed food. He was able to do this, but doing so entailed falling into the evil one’s deception. People in Lystra thought Paul and Barnabas were gods; they could have accepted the labels and become famous. However, Paul and Barnabas reacted by tearing their clothes and telling people they were not gods (Acts 14:11-15). We see situations in society where people are drawn to those claiming supernatural influence over something (illness, protection, riches, fame, witchcraft, spiritual discernment, etc.). Witch doctors have had such influence. For Malawi, Soko (1987) and Kalinga (2011) report of Nchimi (Witch Doctor) Chikanga, a famous witch finder who operated in northern Malawi during the 1950s–60s. There was Simbazako, also a famous witch finder operating in the central region of Malawi in the 1970s–80s. There have been many similar witch finders and “protectors” from witchcraft. All claim to have supernatural power to find witches but also protect people from being bewitched. Similarly, so called “men and women of God”, as has been the case with witch doctors, draw people on the promise of miracles that they can engage in through prayer or other spiritual practice. There is a human tendency towards such supernatural stuff. So called “men and women of God” are falling into the deception by the evil one. If they engage in something supernatural like delivering a child believed to be a witch, they get the honor, money, fame, etc. It happens outside the Church; it has invaded the Church not only in places like Kinshasa but all over the world. I have had a good share of dialogue with such “men and women of God”—who are basically acting like witch doctors—claiming to have some supernatural influence. This is the problem of the Church not only in Kinshasa, but worldwide.

A correction: the authors write, “While the concept of a high God was common in many African societies prior to the presence of Christianity, the concept of a Satan figure, of a powerful and evil supernatural being

as the discursive focus of evil, as the opponent of God and the good, the leader of a host of demonic beings similarly inclined, was absent . . . Ancestral spirits and nature spirits were often understood to exist, but were not understood as ultimate opponents of God or the good” (41). I have little knowledge of insightful anthropological studies on the matter but it seems to me that the matter of good versus evil and the hierarchy in the good and in the evil have been realities in the Malawi culture that I am familiar with. They may not have used terms like Satan but that there was some hierarchy in both the good and the evil world was apparent. The argument that the “witch’s power was understood as personal and psychic or magical, but was not normally thought of as power derived from sentient nonhuman spirits” (41) does not seem to represent the understanding people have of witchcraft in Malawi. People talk about demon-possessed, that an evil spirit has entered someone. Such contexts of understanding sets the power of good (God) against evil (devil) in the supernatural non-human world.

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RESPONSE

Overview of the Work of the Pastoral Team for Children in Need (EPED¹) in its Struggle Against the Problem of So-Called Child-Witches in the DR Congo

Abel Ngolo

1. Social Context and Issues raised by the Phenomenon of So-Called Child-Witches

In the Democratic Republic of Congo in general, and throughout the city of Kinshasa in particular, the phenomenon of children accused as witches represents the greatest of dangers to family and social stability. It constitutes an important challenge for political actors and for civil society. This is because so-called child-witches—or more accurately, children baselessly accused of witchcraft—are victims of an unacceptable evil that has been growing in Congolese society (see Priest, Ngolo and Stabell 2020).

There are multiple causes that lie behind accusations of witchcraft involving children. Family instability, inability to stay in school, malnutrition, armed conflict, the rural exodus resulting from different aspects of poverty in Congo, all figure among the predominant social realities that result in children being accused as witches. A number of careful observers have argued that this phenomenon did not make its appearance in the DR Congo until around the 1980 with the advent of a number of new religious sects. It should be noted that these sects have become a fundamental reality of the local context, given their exponential growth from that time to the present—growth that has been spurred on by a diverse set of practices, beliefs and discourses that vary somewhat from one denomination to another.

As a result, the Ministry of Justice has granted legal personality to thousands of new churches, ministries,

and sects. Others exist without legal standing, functioning on the basis of provisional authorization delivered by municipal authorities, and this in defiance of the law. These new religious movements have long engaged in well-developed practices of exorcism, and they sometimes play a significantly negative role in magnifying and lending legitimacy to fears and beliefs that result in children being accused as witches.

Today, accusations of witchcraft are a veritable tsunami, a tidal wave that is sweeping across all of Congolese society. It is important to emphasize that "these accusations are very complex and are part of a panoply of tools that people deploy in the context of an economy in crisis. This economic reality has created so many difficulties that it has become impossible to count them all. Moreover, such difficulties leave in their wake many disoriented, uprooted, insecure and, therefore, vulnerable families. It is in this context that families naturally begin the search for a solution, and often the simplest answer appears to be the best. With this comes the temptation to accept as the only possible and definitive answer: It must be the fault of these children. Children thus become the scapegoats for explaining the family's problems."²

It should also be noted that families affected by such accusations of witchcraft are suffering from a loss of direction, a kind of disorientation, and are thus unable to participate meaningfully in a proper decision-making process or to find real answers to their real questions. Frustrated, uprooted, unprotected, helpless and hopeless, and therefore unmotivated, these families

¹ Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse.

² Excerpt from a paper read by Reverend Abel Ngolo at the Theological Forum on Child-witchcraft Accusations held in Nairobi, Kenya, from March 1-5, 2016.

experience fear beyond their ability to endure, all because of the different problems that they face in their lives.

Among its various activities, the Pastoral Team for Children in Need (EPED) has at times brought together pastors for the purpose of sharing their experiences with each other. Through such gatherings we have heard several pastors say that it is families that are largely responsible for bringing such accusations against their children. To put it plainly, biological families are the hinge on which accusations of child-witchcraft turn. In light of the testimony offered freely by these pastors, it is clear that accusations directed against child victims are at the root of all kinds of terrible events that happen both in nuclear and extended families. It is always possible to find children who can be labeled and considered as Satan's little minions and/or as dangerous burdens who have been assigned the task of destroying the family.

It is unquestionably the case that the main actors in the validation of child-witch accusations come from the ranks of pastors, shepherds, apostles, prophets, archbishops and other Christian leaders. Through pastoral dialogue or counseling, they use their authority to affirm or deny accusations brought by family members. The case of Cedrick Kalume (11 years old) provides a clear example. He told his story as follows:

After the tragic death of my little sister, my dad took me to a church called Mpeve a Nlongo (Holy Spirit) in the municipality of Masina. My dad told the pastor about our family's bereavement, whereupon the latter subjected me to continuous interrogation and intimidation, forcing me to confess that I had committed the crime. After my confession, he made me fast from food and water for three consecutive days, and poured olive oil on my eyes morning and evening for my deliverance. After all this, when we returned home, my mother and father drove me out of the house. That's why the street has become my home.³

Thus it is that there are thousands and thousands of children who are tortured and at times burned to death, who die of hunger, who driven from their family home and who are then forced to live on the streets. All this happens because, in the name of the church, some of its leaders practice a type of "therapy" that is criminal in nature, wrongly accusing children as witches. Clearly, those who practice this kind of pastoral ministry are

engaged in heresy, though it has yet to be called such. They should never have been allowed to establish this new type of Christian "ministry," nor to usurp the ministry of other established churches. Their actions are self-condemning. Moreover, self-arrogation of pastoral authority is always illegitimate; such practice would never be excused by any ecclesial body worthy of the name.

2. The Social Status of Children Accused of Witchcraft

It is terribly shocking to describe the social status of a child in crisis, and all the more so when it is one who has been accused of being a witch. The term currently used to designate such a child is the Lingala word, "Ntshuor" (in the city of Kinshasa the older term "Ndoki" is gradually disappearing).

In sociological terms, children who have been accused as witches are lost in anonymity, loneliness, marginalization, and alienation. They belong nowhere and to no one. They feel misunderstood, betrayed, oppressed, disappointed, alienated, degraded, without importance to anyone, disconnected, unheard, rejected, not taken seriously, and often driven out of the family home. They are, in short, mistreated in every conceivable way.

To paraphrase the words of Marie-France Le Heuzey,⁴ children accused of witchcraft feel that they have lost control over their lives. They constantly replay past scenarios of abuse through repetitive games involving all or part of the trauma they have experienced, or through recurring nightmares full of terrifying content. Sometimes traumatic memories reappear in the form of hallucinations. Children who have experienced rejection of this kind sometimes succumb to sleep disorders. They may have trouble falling asleep, or find that they wake up during the night for no reason. This can lead to irritability, anger, difficulty in concentrating, a decline in academic performance, and other behavioral struggles.

3. Actions Taken by the Pastoral Team for Children in Distress (EPED) in the Face of These Problems

All of this represents an attack on the ideal image that we have of children, but also of their families and of society in general. Thus, in an effort to address this

³ Interview with Cedrick Kalume, conducted on January 6, 2014, after EPED social workers succeeded in reinserting him in his family with his paternal uncle in the Lemba Commune of Kinshasa.

⁴ Marie-France le Heuzey, « L'enfant maltraité, le regard du pédopsychiatre, *Revue Cairn Info*, posted on January 1, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.3917/lae.081.0026>

distressing situation, EPED has formulated a three-fold pastoral praxis, namely: (i) personalized pastoral care for children in crisis, (ii) pastoral care for families through collective action, and (iii) pastoral care for the community.

First, with regard to the personalized psychological and pastoral care for children and adolescents in crisis, EPED has since 2011 developed a new therapeutic methodology called "The Sidewalk Project" supported by material provided in "The Green Bag" which is designed to give children visual tools as an aid to reflection on their situation.⁵

This new approach is designed for use with children in need and/or those accused of witchcraft. It focuses their attention on various pictures contained in "The Green Bag." Each of these pictures provides an opportunity for children to regain a more balanced view of themselves and of their individual lives. The images are eye-catching and are chosen with a view to providing children with a chance to take stock of their own self-understanding. This approach promotes healing of emotional trauma in the children's individual lives, encouraging restoration through interactive biblically-based materials that emphasize God's love for children. Thus whatever degree of exclusion a given child has experienced, this material contributes to the rebuilding of self-esteem, the development of individual capabilities, and the opportunity to participate in the life of the church and of the wider society.

To illustrate how this form of therapy works, take the example of the lives of two different children, Simon (15 years old) and André (14 years old). Both of these boys were accused as witches and driven out of their home by their own birth-parents. One of the EPED pastors, Josué Mabele, took them in and cared for them. Four years later, Simon has been accepted into the Medical School of the University of Kinshasa, after having graduated from high school with good grades.⁶ André, meanwhile, has been welcomed back into his extended family by one of his uncles. He too has graduated from high school. Thus it is possible that working together we can transform adversity into opportunity, and share with the world the glory of serving Christ through the compassion that we show to vulnerable children. EPED is very grateful to Pastor Josué Mabele Oye Ngamiku for the way that he has proven himself to be a champion for children by

demonstrating the dramatic difference between the criminal "therapy" that is witch-accusation over against an approach based on compassion and on God's love for children.

With regard the second element of EPED's praxis—"pastoral care for families through collective action"—EPED aims to support families through various activities that allow them to meet together, strengthen ties among themselves, build relationships of trust, and pursue collective socio-educational goals. For this purpose, EPED instituted a network called REAAP⁷ whose goal it is to help those parents who have come to the EPED's attention to find answers to questions they have about the education of their children. This network seeks to make a variety of programs available to all families—programs that aim to support parents in their role and to develop their parenting skills. REAAP thus engages in the following activities, among others:

- leading discussion groups among parents
- organizing parents into groups for the purposes of reflection, research, and/or training, and thus engaging them in the construction of knowledge regarding positive parenting
- providing economic support for vulnerable families through a microcredit program
- pastoral dialogue and home visits

The third component of EPED's praxis we refer to as "pastoral care for the community." Here the purpose is not to mobilize the community at large, but rather to equip the Church so that it is able to engage with the needs of the wider community. Seen this way, this element of our praxis is definitely "social" in the sense that the church is encouraged to address the felt needs of the community in which it is located. Among the basic elements of a process of church mobilization we would include: (i) the transmission of a vision for this type of ministry to pastors, (ii) the transmission of this same vision to the congregation, (iii) the establishment of a well-defined group tasked with the management of this initiative, (iv) recruiting volunteers, (v) training volunteers, (vi) supporting volunteers.

It is important that we communicate a vision to both pastors and to lay members of the church so that they will engage in the kind of action that will ensure the protection, well-being, and safety of children.

⁵ The Sidewalk Project was initiated by SGM Lifeworlds, based in London, UK. This is a unique approach to providing psychological and pastoral care designed for use with street children, using interactive biblical material highlighting God's love for children.

⁶ Reverend Ngolo provides the actual grade (62%) that Simon achieved. That seems low by American-Canadian standards, but in the Congolese system, this is a reasonably good mark.

⁷ REAAP : Réseau d'Ecoute d'Appui et d'Accompagnement des Parents (Parent's Network for Mutual Listening and Support).

If the church is to engage with the wider community around it, the church itself must first be stirred to action. Only then will it be able to mobilize the community so as to encourage the community to take responsibility for its own needs. This approach is different from others that have gone under the label of “Church mobilization” in that once the church itself has been challenged to take action, it becomes an enabler rather than a provider. In other words, rather than itself providing answers for the community’s needs, the local church seeks to transmit a vision to members of the wider community, and to give that community the capacity to identify and address its own needs. Thus the local church works *with* the community rather than *for* the community.

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RESPONSE

What is the Disease? Engaging the Problem of Witchcraft in Africa

David Tonghou Ngong

In “Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” Robert Priest, Albert Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020) have engaged one of the most critical issues in contemporary African Christianity—the issue of witchcraft in general and the accusation of children as witches in particular. By conducting their ethnographic work in Kinshasa, a context where the accusation of children as witches has led to dire and deplorable consequences for these children, they not only bring the issue into sharper relief but also intimate that it should be addressed with some urgency. As the research shows, accused children have been thrown into the streets and some of them have died because of these accusations. Given that the churches play a significant role in the accusation of children as witches, sampling the views of pastoral leaders about the issue, and working with them to think through how it may be assuaged, appear to be significant steps in the right direction. Given that pastoral leaders are thought leaders in their churches and communities, working through them to limit the accusation of children as witches appears to be one of the best ways to address the problem.

Another significant contribution the project makes is that it helps us to see that belief in witchcraft and the accusation of children as witches is not only found in Pentecostal churches, as recent literature on the issue seems to suggest, but cuts across church traditions and even the educational level of pastoral leaders. This leads one to wonder whether this is so because of what has been called the Pentecostalization of African Christianity (the claim that Pentecostal beliefs and practices have spread to other church traditions) or whether it predates this recent phenomenon. Perhaps more work needs to be done to determine why all

church traditions in Kinshasa appear to be affected by the phenomenon.

As I read through the article, however, a pressing question that came to me was one that was raised by the medical anthropologist, Gwyn Prins, regarding the theory and practice of colonial medicine in Africa. In a very influential essay entitled, “But What Was the Disease?,” Prins argued that colonial medicine inadequately conceptualized foundational issues relating to illness and health in Africa, thus proposing solutions for healing that did not quite hit the mark. An adequate conceptualization of foundational issues regarding how an illness such as sleeping sickness was spread and contained in precolonial Africa, he suggested, would lead to better handling of the illness.¹ Similarly, an adequate diagnosis of foundational issues leading to the spread of the accusation of children as witches need to be made if the matter is to be adequately addressed. By focusing on the moment of accusation and what pastoral leaders may do about it, it seems the project focused on addressing the symptoms of the illness rather than the foundational issues that gave birth to them. Also, by focusing on the moment of accusation the project seems to diagnose the foundational issues as located in individual and family dynamics. But what if the foundational issue is bigger than specific individual and family dynamics? What if the foundational issues are located in the social and cultural imaginaire into which people are socialized and from which they draw their interpretations of the world? What if this imaginaire is seen as central to the growth of Christianity in Africa, as the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako claimed?² Is the Christian faith or Christian theology capable of arresting an imaginaire that seems to give it life? Would challenging

¹ Gwyn Prins, “But What Was the Disease? The Present State of Health and Healing in African Studies,” *Past & Present* 124 no. 1 (August 1989): 159-179.

² Kwame Bediako calls this imaginaire the “primal imagination,” and sees it as the central context for the spread of Christianity in Africa. See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 85-89.

this imaginaire not place Christianity in the unenviable position of the proverbial crocodile that eats its own eggs? What if the foundational issues are located in a political economy that daily saps the lives of the damned of this world, many of whom are found in Kinshasa?

These questions led me to see two broad dynamics that need to be engaged if we are to put a significant dent on the imagination that gives birth to the accusation of children as witches in some places in Africa. The first is what I have called a spiritualized imagination which often bends towards spiritual interpretations of the world. My own work as a theologian has focused on contesting the spiritualized imagination in which the notion of witchcraft is located. This imagination has been hailed in the study of African Christianity as the fertile soil that has led to the growth of the Christian faith in Africa. Thus, rather than challenging this imagination, it is sometimes presented as an imagination that needs to be nurtured in order to fend off atheism or the westernization of African Christianity. In “Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” our authors note this issue in comparing the situation of witchcraft accusation in Africa today and colonial America. The tension between challenging this imagination and the adverse effect it may have on Christian belief is one that needs to be wrestled with. Some basic questions this imaginaire raises include the following: how can one save the church from an unholy alliance with the accusation of children as witches while at the same time ensuring that Christian belief is not adversely affected? Does Christianity enjoy the possibility for growth only where the witchcraft imagination is preserved? If so, can Christianity adequately engage this imagination in order to stem the tide of accusation of children as witches? If it can, what would need to be done for such accusations to diminish? “Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches” points to some directions that may be taken in addressing these questions, but the questions remain open.

Our authors inform us of the process of training pastoral leaders to critically engage the accusations of children as witches, part of which is the charge that these pastors should treat the accusations as allegations rather than fact. Among these pastors, however, challenging the central issue of belief in the existence of witches is seen as quite problematic if not corrosive to Christian belief. Many of them seem to assume that to be Christian is to believe in witches so that, in one case, a pastor who attempted to challenge this belief was seen as unreliable. However, my own work has

challenged this way of thinking, arguing that a central way of engaging the issue of witchcraft in Africa is to present a frontal challenge to the worldview that gives it life. While the individualized pastoral response this project encourages may begin to challenge this worldview, the fact that the pastors who administer the process themselves do not seem to be critical of the belief in witchcraft seems to skirt the foundational problem for the symptom. It may well be that challenging the symptom may eventually lead to addressing the foundational imaginaire that breeds it. However, a direct challenge of this imaginaire is still needed.

A further foundational dynamic that animates the belief in, and accusations of children as, witches is political and economic. This political and economic foundation is described as follows by the CIA Factbook:

Despite a wealth of fertile soil, hydroelectric power potential, and mineral resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) struggles with many socioeconomic problems, including high infant and maternal mortality rates, malnutrition, poor vaccination coverage, lack of access to improved water sources and sanitation, and frequent and early fertility. Ongoing conflict, mismanagement of resources, and a lack of investment have resulted in food insecurity; almost 30 percent of children under the age of 5 are malnourished. The overall coverage of basic public services—education, health, sanitation, and portable water—is very limited and piecemeal, with substantial regional and rural/urban disparities.³

In this context, life has become very precarious and uncertain for many. The family dynamics in which the accusation of children as witches often takes place is not unconnected to this precarity and the attempt to understand and explain it. A pastoral engagement of the situation therefore should take into account how this broader political and economic dynamics continuously engenders this unwholesome imagination. Focusing on individual families, as this project does, may alleviate the suffering of these accused children but it also focuses on the symptoms rather than the foundational issues.

It has often been argued that modernity has not limited witchcraft accusations in Africa, as some thought it would. My own work has argued that the broader modern conditions that may limit such

³ *The World Factbook*, The Democratic Republic of Congo, “People and Society,” available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cg.html>. Accessed December 18, 2019.

accusations have been skewed in Africa.⁴ This point is emphasized by the anthropologist Ralph Austen who argues that witchcraft accusations diminished in Western Europe under modern conditions of industrialization. In Africa, however, modernity came with significant marginalization of the many who live in conditions of what has been described as abjection.⁵ It is this condition of abjection that the CIA description of the situation in the DRC captures. African modernity therefore represents the dark side of modernization, a rapacious version of modernity that encourages cannibalism often captured in witchcraft accusations. African modernity is not the kind of modernity that will dent belief in witchcraft but rather one which raises prospects for accusations. This modernity has therefore led to the accusation of children as witches. Pastoral care in the context of the accusation of children as witches should therefore not be limited to family dynamics but should also address the broader economic and political issues that characterize a cannibalistic modernization in Africa. How this should be done, is the question to be probed.

Two broad dynamics, therefore, need to be kept in mind in any attempt to address the issues of the accusation of children as witches in Kinshasa and other parts of Africa—Christianity's blessing of the imagination that breeds these accusations and the rapacious political economy that creates abjection and penury. These accusations may hardly be adequately addressed if these are not also engaged.

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⁴ See David T. Ngong, "Stifling the Imagination: A Critique of Religious and Anthropological Normalization of Witchcraft in Africa," *Asian and African Studies* 11 (2012): 144-181; Idem, "Reading the Bible in Africa: A Critique of Enchanted Bible Reading," *Exchange* 43 (2014): 174-191.

⁵ Ralph A. Austen, "The Moral Economy of Witchcraft: An Essay in Comparative History," in *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Jean and John Comaroff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 89-110.

RESPONSE

Straddling Two Worlds: Christian Leaders' Responses to Witchcraft Accusations in DRC

Mwenda Ntarangwi

Growing up in rural Meru around Mount Kenya my siblings and I heard many stories told by our parents and grandparents both as tools of entertainment as well as education. Those stories were a combination of what we today refer to as “edutainment”. Reading “Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC” (Priest, Ngolo and Stabell 2020) took me back to those stories. The article reminded me of the complex world that we live in and its multiple realities. That world entails the daily practice of completing chores, interacting with family and friends, going to school, and eating and sleeping, among others. Then there is the world of the living dead inhabited by relatives or ancestors not physically present with us but near enough to watch over and protect us. And there is also the world of evil where bad spirits reside. Those are the spirits responsible for disease, accidents, evil, and anything bad that happens to people and the community. There were also stories and warnings of what to do and not to do including, don't climb a castor tree; when your palm itches you are going to receive money; when you trip on something on the road someone must have mentioned your name; and if you hear an owl hoot someone will die in the village. We took these cultural realities in stride and made them part of our lives. They informed our sensibilities as we engaged fully with life. We also listened to stories about Christ and being Christians because both our parents and grandparents were Christians. We knew that these two sets of stories had something to do with how we lived and interacted with the world around us. We also learned that Christian stories were considered more important. Sometimes both worlds converged in animal stories meant to teach us certain values that were also Christian. One of the stories that I heard and which

stuck with me is a story of a hyena that was walking on the road and smelt food from up ahead. The hyena, we were told, kept going towards the aroma until it came to a fork in the road. The hyena agonized over which branch of the road to follow to get to the food because both had the aroma. In the end the hyena could not decide and took both roads, putting two legs on each of the branches of the road, until it split into two and died. The story was meant to warn us against greed and signal the need to make decisions. As a Christian trained in anthropology I now can see that engaging with the two realities of Christianity and local philosophical thought within which I grew up provided an important formation as a member of a community that converted to Christianity. It is a formation that makes me sympathetic to the practices addressed in this study and may explain why I enjoyed the insights the authors provide.

It seems like the pastors in Kinshasa discussed in this study by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell have figuratively had moments akin to that of the hyena—straddling two worlds. They straddle the world of the accusers of children as witches and that of offering alternative narratives and belief based on Christianity. Throughout the paper the authors present church leaders as the new mediators of the accusations of witchcraft (as opposed to traditional healers and diviners) because of their central role in mediating between this and the other world of evil. This is not surprising because as shown in another study that Robert Priest was involved in, African pastors are considered the most influential leaders among Christians in Kenya, Central African Republic and Angola.¹ Kinshasa pastors are clearly helping respond to modern day witchcraft brought by modernity and its

¹ See “17 Insights into Leadership in Africa,” available at www.AfricaLeadershipStudy.org.

discontents. As the Comaroffs note, this modern day witchcraft is “a mode of producing new forms of consciousness; of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities” (1999, 284). Indeed, Priest, Ngolo and Stabell point to the local conditions of material and political insecurities that bring distress to the city population, and in turn lead to people seeking ways of explaining their misery. Because in the context in which Kinshasa inhabitants live they have to find causality and so they turn to “trusted” methods and ideologies which are anchored in witchcraft. But now that the accused are children, the very future of their communities, the pastors have to negotiate these cultural challenges carefully. They ought to understand, as the Comaroffs continue to state, that dealing with modernity calls for an understanding of modern day notions of witches who play a key role in explaining phenomena, “Because witches distill complex material and social processes into comprehensible human motives, then, they tend to figure in narratives that tie translocal processes to local events, that map translocal scenes onto local landscapes, that translate translocal discourses into local vocabularies of cause and effect” (1999, 286). But the kinds of witches being presented in Kinshasa are seen as bringing about suffering and evil to the people.

As a cosmopolitan city, Kinshasa has its share of these mixed images of modernity and poverty where locals are struggling to reconcile the idea of prosperity and the reality of poverty and suffering. It could also be because children are dependent on adults and adults are by social obligation expected to fend for them. Unable to do so these adults find ways of blaming the children for their challenges. When increased material and even spiritual insecurities of this modern age loom large as promises of post-independence prosperity are met with poverty and dwindling opportunities for stability in the family and community, then witchcraft accusations abound. Many migrants to cities find it hard to maintain the community practices they had enjoyed in the rural areas and yet often seek to replicate them. There is actually an interesting relationship between the idea of community and material prosperity that falls into the hands of witchcraft accusations. As Freidus shows for rural Malawi, “the idea of community can be interrogated through the idiom of witchcraft, as it is often considered a gauge of social stability or instability at the village level” (2011, 21). One cannot help but wonder how these individuals who accuse children of being witches would reconcile the biblical call by Jesus in Mathew 19:14 to “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Given that many Kinshasa residents confess to a Christian identity they must find ways of skirting around such a clear message.

After reading through the study I realized that many accusers of child witches get away with it. I saw two things happening through the process of accusing children—first, the accused children have maladies that cannot be easily explained and second, they are such a burden to caregivers that the caregivers need a way out. The best trusted way seems to resort to the culture’s belief in what causes evil or what is the source of bad things happening to people. As the study shows there are people who are skeptical of the allegations, but because they are powerless they are forced to go through the regimen. It is, however, good to see that some pastors are not convinced about these accusations and often offer alternative narratives. Such alternative narratives help reorient some beliefs and may lead to social change. Chinua Achebe’s classic novel *Things Fall Apart* provides a similar example of how Christians provided an alternative narrative to local explanations of evil that changed their community’s social practices. Achebe writes about the evil forest which was considered to be inhabited by evil spirits lurking in the community. When White missionaries came to the community and asked to be given land on which to settle the community members gave them the evil forest with the assumption that the evil spirits would kill the missionaries. The missionaries were not welcome to the community but the village people did not outrightly kick them out. They wanted the spirits of the evil forest to fight and kill them. But after a while of missionaries living in the evil forest, the local people noticed that instead of dying the missionaries were actually thriving. How could that be? Did they have stronger spirits than the local ones? That would be the beginning of doubt towards the efficacy of the evil spirit narratives and the changes that were to later be registered in that community.

In my own community in Meru, Kenya there was a similar scenario. When the first missionaries arrived in Meru they were given space in a place called Kaaga (a place of diviners) where the local people did not want to settle, and therefore a good place to give to uninvited foreigners. When the missionaries started to thrive the local people started seeing them in a different light, often seeing their practices as more powerful than those of the locals. When people who were otherwise ostracized by the locals for whatever maladies went to the missionaries in the place of diviners (Kaaga) they thrived. Slowly the other local people started to question their own beliefs. Today Kaaga is home to some of the most prosperous individuals in the county including some of the best high schools (Kaaga Girls High School and Meru High School). I was born in Kaaga and know about the history of that place and its significance in the community’s Christian heritage. It is these kinds of alternative narratives which challenge local beliefs that Kinshasa pastors are providing through

the EPED project. These pastors are playing a key role in caring for the ostracized children accused of witchcraft but they are also in a very good position to reconstruct belief systems from traditional to modern, as in the case of Sylvain Mbaki who talks about the mom and son not believing what they were being told about evil. If the church would reaffirm their doubts then the church can successfully challenge received wisdom about maladies that would eventually change cultural assumptions and practices. But the pastors have to be willing to give up their own strategies for manipulating desperate parents or accusers. A good example is the case of pastor Jean who clearly knew that he was playing to the fears and beliefs of the parents when he says, "Others I would put through the process of deliverance, and after the third day, I would make them drink vegetable oil. Of course, if you fast and then drink vegetable oil, you will throw up. When they threw up, I would say, 'See, he just threw up what we were looking for'" (11).

These pastors have to be careful, however, not to send the wrong signals to their communities. They have to straddle between affirming the existence of the world of witchcraft while at the same time believing in the power of Christ to provide deliverance from such a world. Further, given that many of the accusations are driven by material conditions—parents inability to provide for the children they take in due to tough economic conditions—there is a tendency for the church to want to provide material resources to the affected families. In the absence of such support flowing what will happen to the children? Do the churches and pastors or even EPED have enough resources to set families up materially so that they are independent and don't find themselves in another situation of material want and revert to reducing the number of dependents through witchcraft accusations?

Given that 63% of DRC interviewees answered yes to a question on belief in witchcraft how does such affirmation shape people's religious behavior? One of the driving forces behind the growth of the whole deliverance phenomenon in African church communities is tied to the existence of evil in the form that is akin to witchcraft and these churches scratch where it itches. It is what anthropologist Paul Hiebert called the problem of the excluded middle when he carried out studies of Christianity in India. Hiebert asks of Christians who converted to Christianity but never gave up their traditional beliefs,

What happened to villagers who became Christians? Most of them took problems they formerly took to the saints to the Christian minister or missionary. Christ replaced Krishna or Siva as the healer of their spiritual diseases. Many of them in time turned to Western allopathic medicines for many of the

illnesses they took to the doctor and quack. But what of the plagues that the magician cured? What about spirit possession, or curses, or witchcraft or black magic? What was the Christian answer to these? (1982, 39).

This scenario described by Hiebert can be found in many other contexts especially in communities where Christianity is introduced to a people who have an existing religious tradition. The people use their already existing religious interpretations to understand life through the new religious framework producing what we can call a religious "accent."

Priest, Ngolo and Stabell show that even when communities are faced with social and spiritual complexities that call for traditional explanations including witchcraft, Christian churches and pastors intervene to offer alternative narratives because they are able to straddle the two worlds. But they have to be careful not to give each side equal weight and end up splitting into two like the hyena in the story given above. One can only hope that those who "convert" to a reality that abandons witchcraft do not revert to their traditional beliefs when faced with new socioeconomic and spiritual challenges. Further, these Christians have to guard against another development that Hiebert warns against, to "guard against Christianity itself becoming a new form of magic" (Hiebert 1982, 46). This paper has provided a good platform for scholars to see how society changes and the role that can be played by a few committed Christian leaders. It is also an example of how theological training that pays attention to social contexts and the need for pastors to have a holistic approach to social practices can be useful in times of need such as those presented by cases of witchcraft accusations of children. It is an opportunity for theology to adopt some of the approaches employed by anthropologists to study and understand culture—holistic, contextual, and comparative approaches.

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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Accusation and Church Discipline in Malawi

Timothy Kabulunga Nyasulu

My area of concern in commenting on the work that has been done by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Kinshasa is on church discipline practice that deals with witchcraft issues in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Synod of Livingstonia). This is mainly in connection with my PhD research that I conducted in 2010 at Trinity International University.

Many surveys and researches have been conducted in many African countries on child witchcraft accusations and have shown that thousands of people including children are accused of practicing witchcraft. Studies in child-witch accusations have shown that some children have been physically abused and thrown out of their homes and killed over the last years. Scholars like Erwin Van Der Merr¹ have written that many such accused children are vulnerable; some are orphans whose parents died of HIV and Aids, some are disabled, while others are from very poor families. Unfortunately in most of these African countries the archaic Witchcraft Act does not protect the vulnerable in society and is often misapplied to secure convictions.

Hate, cruelty and abuse against children are rampant in these countries including Malawi (Chilimampungu 2012, 61). When assessing child witchcraft accusations, Erwin Van Der Merr noted that the findings of their research in Southern Malawi are similar to those found in Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, but with less hatred being expressed towards children who are believed to be witches. In these countries socio-economic problems, rapid urbanization, the impact of HIV/AIDS pandemic and the influence of some Nigerian religious movies are some of the factors that

cause children to be accused of witchcraft. In Malawi while many see the children at least partly as victims who have been misled by elderly people who are believed to have taught them witchcraft, some still think the children are really evil and need to be punished even by execution. In most Pentecostal evangelical churches they employ prayers to exorcise the witchcraft spirit from them (Munyenembe 2012, 37).

Commenting on the situation in DRC where Robert Priest et al. did their survey, child witchcraft accusation is usually by parents or guardians who are accusing their children or dependents (4). According to Priest's analysis such accusations are emanating from interpersonal causal ontologies in which, instead of asking the question why and what, they ask "who". The fact that parents, guardians and even neighbors are perpetrators of witchcraft accusations against children makes it hard to campaign against it. It is difficult even in the church.

In northern Malawi in the days of early Scottish missionaries when church discipline was being introduced, parents of children who were being accused of practicing witchcraft also faced moral disciplinary charges because they were considered to have failed to bring up their children well as Christian parents.² Reports would come to church that parents whose children were accused of witchcraft went to consult witchdoctors to find out if indeed their children were witches, and they would be summoned to appear before the discipline committee of the church, and later to the Kirk Session for suspension from Holy Communion and other leadership roles in the church. If the DRC case were happening in Malawi, and if the child's father was in the same Protestant church where

¹ Revelations presented by Erwin Van Der Merr's survey which was conducted in 2013 on Child Witchcraft Accusations in Southern Malawi are very helpful. His work has revealed that accusations do not only accuse and affect children who are vulnerable but also the poor and illiterate elders who spend time accusing others in that family.

² The late Very Rev Dr Silas Nyirenda, former lecturer used to inform us in Synodical Instructions at Zomba Theological College that in the early days of missionaries Church discipline was a very serious issue. It was making sure that all parents grow their children in all forms of good morals. Those that failed to do so they were summoned by the church to reprimand and discipline them.

the child was a choir member the father would be summoned to appear before the church court facing disciplinary charges. Ironically and contradictorily if parents did not go to consult diviners yet their children were being accused, they would be considered by the community to be supporting their children and even suspected of having taught their children witchcraft.

Like in many African countries, witchcraft accusations in Malawi are associated with economic struggles people have in their homes and families. In my doctoral research conducted in 2010, it was found that on average four percent (4% percent) of the discipline cases in congregations have to do with divinations.³ At every monthly Kirk Session, reports on how people are implicated in witchcraft related stories whether as accusers or accused are submitted (Nyasulu 2010, 46). Among these cases are those to do with child witchcraft accusations. Although I am unable to say the exact percentage, child witchcraft accusation are very minimal compared to those against the elderly. However discouraging the perpetration of witchcraft accusations in church among church members can be regarded as the main active role the church is playing to deal with witchcraft. The church even disciplines those that have been involved or are implicated in the scene especially by consulting diviners or those involved in a dance related to spirit possession which is believed to have some witchcraft elements.⁴ In its attempts to discourage the belief in witchcraft the church disciplines those that either have gone for divination or accuse others of witchcraft by suspending them from taking Holy Communion for a period of time. Sometimes if there is evidence that one is indeed a witch depending on the accepted evidence, such people are also exempted from taking Holy Communion for some time until they repent that they will no longer be involved in such acts.

It was interesting to find that the highest rate of divination and witchcraft accusations are in the rural congregations; about six percent (6%) compared to the urban congregations where it is about two to three percent (2-3%). Some of the interviewees ascribed this scenario to the fact that in the rural areas or countryside most people are illiterate and uncivilized so they are more into witchcraft beliefs than those in the urban areas where people might have a better education. Also in the rural areas there are more economic challenges compared to the urban areas because most people are not employed. Some analysts have argued that witchcraft accusation is a form of denial that families have chosen rather than accepting that they are responsible for their own socio-economic hardship.

It was also found that many old women and men were staying with their grandchildren who were orphans and whose parents died of HIV/AIDS, and it was found that the elderly in their poor state were accused more than the young ones. Also the number of old women exceeded the number of old men.⁵ Unfortunately it was found out that very little pastoral care is given to the people to understand them well and to find a better solution to the problem in the church.⁶ In the table below readers will find witchcraft accusations dynamics. The word used is divination where people are reported to have consulted diviners on witchcraft accusations. It should be known that the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) church does not want to encourage people to believe in witchcraft. Its approach to deal with witchcraft is that it discourages the belief in witchcraft; therefore church members should not try to find out whether someone is bewitched. It is those who claim to know if someone has been bewitched or not that are encouraging the belief in witchcraft among people. So whether the accused is a child or an elderly person the church approach is the same. This is said to have originated during the time of the early

³ Read PhD Dissertation by Timothy Nyasulu. 2010. *Bringing the Sheep back to the Carroll: A Moral Discipline in the Church on Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod of Livingstonia 1995-2005*, 163.

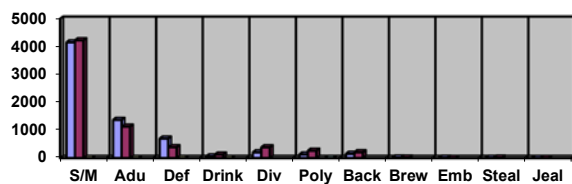
⁴ What was common among Livingstonia missionaries and those elsewhere on this issue was that converts involved in spirit possession ceremonies were excluded from church membership. In Malawi converts found guilty of spirit possession were suspended for a period of nine months. The reason behind this was that spirit possession is much related to divination. Dancing and spirit possession was to harness powers from the spirits. Read Silas Ncozana, 2002, *The Spirit Dimension in African Christianity: A Pastoral study among the Tumbuka of the Northern Malawi*, pp.188-189.

⁵ A story was shared at an Annual General Meeting of the Public Affairs Committee on 19th December 2019 by the Catholic Bishop of Karonga Diocese that in a certain district in the northern region grandchildren accused their grandmother of having bewitched one of her grandsons. Youths and the grandsons got angry and they killed the old women through mob justice. Interestingly he associated this to ignorance and poverty among people including the youths. He lamented that most of such people that are accusing others for practicing witchcraft are in a poor state. He advised in his lament that the only way to deal with witchcraft accusations is to send the young people to school. He believes that education will end witchcraft beliefs and accusations little by little.

⁶ Read PhD dissertation by Timothy Nyasulu. 2010. *Bringing the Sheep back to the Carroll: Moral Discipline in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod of Livingstonia 1995-2005*, p. 167.

missionaries. When they found that Africans had strong beliefs in witchcraft and would spend time inquiring about it from diviners, they discouraged and banned the consultation of diviners. Walter Trobisch who worked in Africa many years observed that the punishment that is given to offenders in the African church is not because the punishment was introduced by the missionaries. It was because missionaries already saw in African leadership that heavy punishment was already part and parcel of tradition. Therefore introducing a system of punishing those that have offended or broken the moral laws was already normal and would not make a great change. Any person found to be involved in witchcraft would be summoned for discipline and suspension would follow. Table One below provides the discipline cases that are handled by the CCAP church. In it readers will find the percentage of divination cases, for which people face disciplinary charges for consulting diviners who are believed to promote witchcraft beliefs.

Table 1: Reasons for Church Discipline



Key

- S/M stands for self marriage. People who have married outside the church.
- Adu stands for adultery.
- Def stands for defection. Those who have abandoned the CCAP church for whatever reason. They are regarded as having defected, or changed their faith.
- Drink stands for beer drinking.
- Div stands for divination. This is the subject of witchcraft accusation and church discipline that is discussed in this paper.
- Poly stands for polygamy.
- Back stands for backsliding, those that have left off going to church.

- Brew stands for brewing beer. Those that brew beer are also suspected because they are believed to be promoting the sin of beer drinking.
- Emb stands for embezzlement of church funds.
- Jeal stands for jealousy.

NB: The numbers to the left (0-5000) represent the number of church members in the congregations in which I conducted research. The red colour represent urban congregation and the blue colour represent the rural congregations

Table 2: Rural vs. Urban Comparison of Reasons for Church Discipline

FOUR RURAL SESSIONS			FOUR URBAN SESSIONS		
Offense	Number	Percent of Total	Offense	Number	Percent of Total
S-Marriage	4,223	62 %	S-Marriage	4,147	61 %
Adultery	1,135	17 %	Adultery	1,376	20 %
Defection	391	6 %	Defection	702	10 %
Drinking	125	2 %	Drinking	61	0.9 %
Divination/witchcraft accusation	388	6 %	Divination	207	4 %
Polygamy	265	4 %	Polygamy	129	2 %
Backsliding	210	3 %	Backsliding	154	2.3 %
Brewery	17	0.3 %	Brewery	19	0.3 %
Embezzle	2	0.03 %	Embezzle	11	0.2 %
Stealing	15	0.2 %	Stealing	9	0.1 %
Jealous	4	0.05 %	Jealous	2	0.03 %
Total	6,775	100 %	Total	6,817	100 %

In the table, 4% of divination cases are in the urban and 6% divination cases are in the rural areas. According to respondents,⁷ people in the rural areas are less civilized, poor and illiterate. In the urban areas the majority is employed or does some business. They are civilized, literate and better able to find something to support themselves. Some respondents during interviews expressed their observations and opinion that what causes such accusations is that people in the rural places are envious and jealous about what other prosperous people are doing.

Although on a very small scale, CCAP pastors also conduct deliverance sessions for children accused of witchcraft during what is called “contemporary services”.⁸ Pentecostal churches are more open and conduct their deliverance sessions in a very open and transparent manner.⁹ They are different from the

⁷ The research that I conducted in 2009 on church discipline in the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia included participants from both rural and urban areas. It was interesting that they pretty well knew that there is a difference between those staying in town and those in the country side. Those staying in town are more literate and well to do people. However the difference is very minimal indicating that even those that are found in town still live a village life because of their strong belief in witchcraft. It was also shared that some people in town can invite diviners to assist them, or bring witchcraft missiles to town so that they protect themselves from witches.

⁸ The mainline churches including the CCAP have for the past two decades faced the challenge of losing young generations from church services. There has been a huge exodus of many youths, leaving the mainline churches in pursuit of the deliverance prayers and lively worship services in the Pentecostal churches. To keep the young people in church, the CCAP Synod of Livingstonia has introduced what is known as “contemporary services” which address issues of freedom of expressions of people’s faith, attending to prayer needs that have are submitted during worship services such as those who would like to be prayed for because of diseases, witchcraft, prosperity matters, etc.

⁹ There are still some CCAP pastors that hold their deliverance prayers in secret.

mainline churches like CCAP and the Anglican Church. The Pentecostals openly preach and teach that indeed witchcraft exists and can be dealt with through deliverance by prayers as witchcraft powers are believed to be demons.¹⁰ People accused of witchcraft including children are brought before those known as prayers warriors.¹¹

A point of interest in the Priest et al. article is the link of witchcraft to the Christian concept of sin. The employment of prayers of exorcism over the accused by church people is meant to remove evil spirits or demons in child witches. Like in many other countries in Malawi, the accused children are demonized (Hackett 2003, 23). However like in Kinshasa it is noted that such children are coming from illiterate and poor families, are orphans, vulnerable, street kids etc. One wonders the accuracy or the truth of whether sin is associated with poverty or illiteracy. The prosperity gospel preachers take it as spiritual warfare from which an individual and family must be liberated. They will cast out demons from the children to cleanse the family of witchcraft and even force them to accept that they are witches. However in the context of the socio-political and socio-economic statuses, does this behavior not mean that the sin is not really in the accused but rather in the weak, powerless and vulnerable situation of the accused? To that effect there have generally been two responses to witchcraft so far noted: the modernist response and the Pentecostal response. The CCAP response is that of western missionaries which discourages the belief in witchcraft. Whoever is found perpetrating ideas that will make people believe in or promote witchcraft beliefs is taken to task. This is where church discipline is coming in. Such an approach is not pleasing to many Malawians. This approach also brings in what Clark might call “syncretism” (Clark 2001, 7) among church members because while the CCAP Church discourages its members to believe in witchcraft yet they know that witchcraft exists, they have a double standard form of exercising their belief. Kok has described this situation as living two realities of different kinds which does not give a clear picture of what Christianity really is (Kok 2005, 22). However still, in discouraging people to go for divination one can see

some reduction of witchcraft accusations because people fear they might be suspended from Holy Communion if they are found to be perpetrating witchcraft matters.

Those that have chosen the Pentecostal response do attract many people’s attention. However the challenge is to believe their approach to dealing with witchcraft. One can find African pastors, bishops, prophets, or apostles who do exactly what the diviners did before Christianity came. By means of supernatural revelation, they allegedly diagnose illnesses including spiritual afflictions and curses and reveal hidden sins.¹² Some scholars have referred to this as “Christian” witch hunting, including torture (Bourdillon 2002, 11). If people prayed for have been known they are given names in their respective homes.¹³ They are isolated and treated as demonic. Some “prophets” have publicly accused people of witchcraft without any evidence (Hoskins 2004, 59). This is a powerful means of social control which instills fear in church members and keeps them behaving well, but often degenerates into psychological or other forms of abuse (Hoskins 2004, 5). Such an approach has taken supernatural evil very seriously without being careful to follow what scripture says. Paul Hiebert clearly cautions against this. He states that while taking supernatural evil seriously, we must also guard against Christianity itself being adapted into a new form of magic (Hiebert and Meneses 1995, 172ff). He also cautions that ironically both the modernist and magical (Pentecostal) approaches reflect a mechanistic worldview—a formula approach to reality that allows humans to control their own destiny—the modernist based upon scientific formulas of cause-and-effect in accordance with natural laws, and the magical based upon a spiritual formula in accordance with presumed spirits’ activities.

Another interesting point raised by Priest that might be of interest in these witchcraft accusations is the confusion and different understandings of the use of language. How a term is used can be different from one place to another. For instance, how Americans use the word football is different from the rest of the world. Priest writes on pages 5 and 6 that while English speakers will sometimes assume that there is a single

¹⁰ Rhodian Munyenembe in his book explains how people believed to be witches are taken to Pentecostal pastors for deliverance. Some Pentecostal churches have evening sessions where they do nothing else but to pray for people that have come for different reasons. One pastor who left the CCAP church some four years ago, has a big following in his church because he has made every Thursday the day to receive prayer requests and family complaints.

¹¹ Prayer warriors refer to those people that are gifted to pray prayers that heal the sick, to conduct deliverance prayers etc.

¹² For more information please read Ulf Strohehn 2005. Pentecostalism in Malawi: A History of Apostolic Faith Mission in Malawi. Zomba Kachere, pp. 55-56.

¹³ These names are for mockery. For instance, someone can be nicknamed “chimalawanthu”, a person who has finished all people in the village because of his/her witchcraft.

clear meaning to the term “witch” or “witchcraft,” in fact the word “witch” can confuse people in conversation when the partners have completely different referents in mind.

In Malawi the term “witch” (*mfiti* in Chichewa and *Fwiti* in Chitumbuka) is most commonly used as a generic term for all those that inflict pain, tragedy, suffering, and even kill. The word “Ng’anga” which is similar to Baganga in Swahili can be interpreted differently. When one says he is ng’anga or mganga it simply means someone who helps to remove the evil powers in a witch by evoking what is the cause of the sickness of a person. Such a person can provide medicine for healing or can just tell what the cause of the problem is. The word sing’anga has also brought some confusion and misunderstanding. While it can be interchangeably used with ng’anga, the specific meaning of each is slightly different. Si-ng’anga is the opposite of ng’anga. In Chichewa language when one uses “si”, it means “not”. Therefore the use of the prefix “si” gives a connotation that he/she is not doing the work of “ng’anga”. So if a person is a sing’anga then he or she is close to a witch. He is a diviner. Some would refer to such a person as witchdoctor. He or she deals with those who are witches. While there is some positive connotation, the question that is regularly asked is how is she/he able to deal with the witch/witchcraft? Therefore that person should know about witchcraft. Unless you are a witch, you cannot know witchcraft. However when people converse they understand each other whether they use the word positively or negatively.

This might possibly be the reason why those going for witchcraft consultation, whether positively or negatively, are put under discipline. In such communities consulting ng’anga or sing’anga on witchcraft issues is considered to create a situation and perception that indeed witchcraft exists which is believed to be evil.

Way Forward: Redefining the Role of the Church on Witchcraft Accusations

The church needs to look back and see how it has served its people especially those involved and implicated in witchcraft accusations. The church should be concerned with the vulnerable in its community. The accused are victimized. They have no voice. Innocent children can suffer accusations and even lose their lives. Elderly people who are sources of wisdom in society are forced to die for no good reason. What should the church do?

1. God is more powerful than all the powers in the world.

From the outset we should mention that lack of a well-developed biblical approach towards reaching

those Malawians who practice and believe in witchcraft and magic has crippled the growth of the church. Understanding some of the reasons why people practice magic and witchcraft will unearth issues not known by many church leaders and offer solutions to the problems. People should know the word of God as regards to the power that He has over the universe. Yes, people’s beliefs must be taken seriously even if they can be wrong. It is a fact and clear in most African contexts that if there is anything that people live with it is the fear of witchcraft attacks (Ashforth 2005, 88). As such, witchcraft beliefs cannot be taken lightly.

The church today should take a different approach than that of the missionaries who just condemned the beliefs without careful study. The fact that God ruthlessly condemns the belief and practice of magic (Exod.9:11); witchcraft (1 Sam.15:23); divination (Deut. 18:10); fetishes (Exod. 20:3-6); and shamanism (Lev. 20:6) practiced by the tribes surrounding Israel (Hiebert and Meneses 1995, 173), does not mean that we can let it go without proper teaching to church members. We need to go beyond the mere condemning of the belief. God is above all that is happening in the world. The church should proclaim that God is more powerful than all spirits, real and imagined, and that he delivers his people from fear of them. The church should pray for those who are sick, possessed, fearful, and insecure and help them find refuge in the God of the Bible. God himself made it clear that all other gods are no gods (Exod. 32:19-20; Isa. 44:6-20).

2. Protect the people of God.

All people including children are created in the image of God. The church must openly love, embrace and protect people of all kind because redemption of their souls is precious. Jesus Christ did not choose between people. He embraced everybody including sinners. He, for good reason, even identified himself with the poor and the suffering. The church needs people. These are the people that need to be reached with the Gospel. The church is full of children and women. The population of the elderly is declining. If these people are abused and killed something must be wrong with the church which is supposed to be the voice of the voiceless. As such the protection of all these is not a choice but a must. Churches can write a pastoral letter condemning witch accusations in society and emphasize the power of God over witchcraft. This can be openly read in their churches on Sunday. In protecting people the Church must address witchcraft related issues. Secular organizations are more active in dealing with witchcraft issues than the church. This is unfortunate. The secular organizations have no Gospel. The good news is with the Church. The Church must

address witchcraft in the larger non-Christian community of which it is part. It must defend Christians and others falsely accused of practicing witchcraft. It must also demonstrate the power of God to deliver when real witchcraft is involved (Hiebert and Meneses 1995, 175). Indeed witchcraft is a social evil that involves human beings, our church members, and indeed involves people who are part of God's creation; the Kingdom of light. If it is left to secular organizations the whole issue will be secularized. If it is unaddressed it brings chaos and discomfort among civil societies and church members, subsequently the church fails to witness to the Gospel of Christ to people and leaves the weak more vulnerable. When the church is quiet it supports evil. It is not playing its prophetic role. It doesn't have the voice of the voiceless. This is how witchcraft accusations came to an end in Europe and North America. In some countries like Angola efforts are made even to shut down witch hunting operation by Christian churches, citing gross human rights violations operations by Christian churches.

3. Educate the people about their life development.

How do we know that so and so has bewitched so and so? In Proverbs 19:2 it is written it is not good to have zeal without knowledge. Recently in Malawi for several times the Civil Society, the Law Society, and the Society of Secular Humanism have called for civic education against witchcraft accusations and condemned the brutal killings of the elders in many parts of the country. They came out strong when four elderly people were killed by youths in Mwanza because they were suspected of having bewitched a girl who was killed by lightning. It was alleged that the elderly had sent lightning to kill their granddaughter. Education is power it is said. Although some Malawians like to say money is power, money without good education can be useless and meaningless. As such the church should be advocating for good education among its people. In the case study of church discipline conducted by Nyasulu it was noted that belief in witchcraft and witch accusations are more common in rural areas among the less educated people than in urban areas among the more educated people. One would be right to argue that education is essential to most social, economic, and psychological issues in life. It is good that all along the Presbyterian Livingstonia Mission has believed education to be the key to all good things to which one would aspire in life; for them "it was not the wearing of the cross that marked change" (Ncozana 2002, 121). Rather "the school was a symbol of change and an effective means of proselytism. It was also thought to be like an exorcism against spirit beliefs. To some people it was also a means of getting rid of the fears of witchcraft" (Ncozana 2002, 121). It was once

said by one of the believers, "To those of us who believe that education will be at least a factor in reducing this bondage of evil spirits, if only by degrees, progress in educational facilities must be of great interest" (Debenham, 1955, 171). This is not education in other subjects, but in theological studies which prepare people for the holy ministry. Apparently somewhere, somehow, a thread has been cut. There is very little emphasis, if there is any, in theological seminaries on witchcraft and the Church. The Church should encourage the teachers in theological seminaries to have this subject in their schools. The church should also teach people responsibility, stewardship, and hard work in life. People tend to avoid talking about issues like poverty, laziness, ignorance, diseases, failure to take care of the environment, etc., and finding ways of dealing with these problems. Instead, they spend time thinking about others.

4. Render service to both the accuser and the accused.

True religion that God accepts is that one takes care of the vulnerable, orphans, widows and the marginalized (James 1:27). As salt of the earth, the church has to embrace people and serve them. Both the accuser and the accused need help from the church. The accuser is supposed to know that witchcraft accusations do not provide answers to problems the society faces. In the case study above, jealousy and envy played a role in the killing of the four senior citizens. They hated the elderly living on among them because they cultivated a land which the grandchildren envied. People of this kind need serious counseling that will make them understand their evil behavior and accept Christ as their Savior and master of their life. As such they should be told categorically that whether witchcraft exists or not, what is important to know is that the power of God is sovereign and above all powers. The powers of darkness have been conquered by the power of Jesus. A practical holistic action to include service rendered to those caught up in the webs of fear, suspicion, and accusations associated with belief in witches must be taken. The accused people need to be cared for. They need not only to be received but also supported. The accused may be living in fear for their lives. The church must have a listening and examining ear before they believe a person.

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RESPONSE

To End Child Witchcraft Accusations, A Task for the Whole Church

Maïmouna Jessica Obot

“What can we do to end this?” This is the question that has occupied my mind ever since I first heard about children being accused as witches in the Nigerian churches. Together with friends in Germany and in Nigeria I set out to help end child witchcraft accusations in Nigeria under the umbrella of the NGO “Storychangers e.V.”¹. We carry out pastoral seminars where we teach about child development, Jesus’ view of children and about what the Bible has to say about witchcraft—and what not. Our hope is that the pastors attending would disseminate the message and bring about change in their churches, in their villages and in the whole country.

Reactions to this endeavour are mixed. Although many are supportive of this endeavour, there is quite a number of people who say: “Let Africa solve her own problems! Europeans and Americans alike have done enough harm, Africa doesn’t need another ‘White Saviour’!” Others say: “This is a problem which does not affect us at all. Why bother?”

The history of missions in Africa has many sides and there are quite a few dark ones. Many European missionaries entertained thoughts of cultural superiority of “the old world” and deemed everything “native” as evil and inferior. There was no sensitivity towards the culture and mentality of the African peoples which resulted in Western-style problem-solving only creating new problems in and for Africa. It is therefore quite understandable that the thought of a German NGO working on the ground in South-West Nigeria would cause rejection at first. The second uttering, however, always rings as a jangling discord in my ears, especially when it is issued by people associated with the Christian faith. As Christians, we may not avert our gaze and look the other way. The church in Nigeria and in other African countries suffers under the false preaching of those who declare that all evil stems from bewitchment. The church is the body of Christ and Christ is one. When one part suffers, the whole body suffers. We are

to grieve with those who grieve and to consider ourselves fellow prisoners with those incarcerated. There is no way that we could ever rightfully say that this problem does not affect us, because it does.

The worldwide church of Jesus Christ has got to tackle the task of combatting the wrong doctrine of child witches and lock arms with the brothers and sisters in Africa. However, this must be done not with a spirit of superiority but with a spirit of humility. On fundraising events the first most frequently heard comment of our supporters in Germany is the following: “Unbelievable! They’re still living in the Middle Ages! We have long overcome this!” This comment always makes me flinch. Most of the time it is enough to remind my listeners of Germany’s not-so-glorious recent past and ask them if they think that killing a child because someone has called him or her a witch is worse than killing a child just because he or she is Jewish? This question then inevitably makes the other side flinch.

We will always be able to find both good and evil in the history of our nations. Both are there to teach us, and once we have learned our lesson we are to comfort others (2nd Cor 1:4). When I looked at the history of my native south-west Germany, I was shocked to find out that it had once been a hotspot of child witchcraft accusations, starting in the 17th century, long after the Middle Ages had waved goodbye (See for a detailed account of the major trials: Weber 1996). Children had to attend week-long judicial trials, undergo torture, and were at times burned at the stake on the charge of witchcraft. This era is rarely commented on in history textbooks or in TV documentaries because it seems to be an outlandish thing that our ancestors would persecute children, torture them, and sentence them to death on account of witchcraft accusations well up until the 19th century. Thus, although Nigeria and Germany seem to be worlds apart, these two countries have a lot in common.

¹ The letters „e.V.“ stand for “eingetragener Verein” which is a title conferred to associations that were granted the status of membership corporation under German law.

The German witch hunt and the Nigerian witch hunt have a lot in common, but then, are also very different. For example, the German “child witches” in the overwhelming majority of cases accused themselves of the crime of witchcraft, thus issuing their own death sentence. However, I have never heard of a Nigerian “child witch” who has handed in herself or himself. Also, the German witchcraft trials were worldly court hearings; in the case of Nigeria it is informal church gatherings, town hall meetings of the community, or simple family gatherings.

These obvious differences, as well as the epochal and geographical divide tell us that we won’t be able to use any approach to combatting torture and murder in the name of fighting witchcraft as a blueprint for any efforts undertaken in modern-day Africa. But they can still serve as a reservoir of ideas and possible starting points.

The end of German witchcraft accusations was signalled, amongst others, by the writings of Friedrich von Spee (Spee and Ritter 1982), a Jesuit and Christian Thomasius, professor of law at the University of Halle (Thomasius 1701). As early as 1631 von Spee questioned the validity of evidence obtained under torture, which was also a common feature of witchcraft trials. Since witchcraft cannot be proven, he reasoned, no one should be sentenced for it. By doing this, von Spee sowed the seed of doubt.

In our pastoral seminars, we as Storychangers e.V. also intend to cast doubt on the supposed evidence brought forth by the children’s accusers. Oftentimes it is bed-wetting that is thought of as a “clear sign” of child witches in the Nigerian context. We explain all possible physical and psychological causes of bed-wetting and thus shed doubt on the supposed spiritual cause, that is, witchcraft.

Seventy years after von Spee, Thomasius appealed to the adherents of the Enlightenment to please let reason rule. Reason and not conviction should be allowed in the courthouse, which would do away with all religion-based accusations, such as witchcraft. Both sparked a debate in the intellectual and clerical circles of their day that would end up being dinner table conversations. The phenomenon was finally talked about without fear and in an open atmosphere. Priest, Ngolo and Stabell’s report (2020) is doing just the same by bringing this topic to the frontline of theological conversations. Theologians from all denominations and countries should pick up the conversation and break it down for their congregations. What is talked about cannot be ignored.

Regarding Thomasius’ contribution, it should also be observed that he was not part of the church but was a jurist. Involving the worldly powers in the fight to end child witchcraft accusations might be a good idea, depending on the circumstances. In our Nigerian

setting having the authorities support our activities is a guarantee for uninterrupted seminars and safety for the facilitators.

It is important to let oneself be humbled by the weight of one’s own history in order to face the members of the suffering part of the Body as sisters and brothers in the fight, and not as recipients of sound doctrine emanating from the supposedly nobler parts of the world. Local partnership is key to the success of the endeavour. What in one place might be considered witchcraft, might well not be in another place and vice versa. Convictions vary tremendously and one must always make sure to address the problem of that particular people group.

It took about 50 years for the teachings of Thomasius to penetrate the whole of northern Germany and an extra 100 years for them to finally reach and influence minds in Germany’s south-west. However, taking into account the speed in which information travels around the globe in the 21st century as compared to the 18th century, I am hopeful that the combined efforts of the church will bring about a change of mind on the whole continent within a matter of only a handful of years.

The contribution of Priest et al. is an important milestone in the fight against child witchcraft accusations. We have been enabled to look into the why, how and where of the phenomenon and have been equipped with the necessary data. My response to this report is: “Let’s go and end the practice of child witchcraft accusations!” On the “how” of going, I hope to have shed some insightful remarks. It is my prayer that thousands will follow suit.

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RESPONSE

"The Person I Hate Most in Life is My Mother"

Opoku Onyinah

The fear of witchcraft is very prevalent in Ghana and in Africa generally.¹ Traditionally, the traditional priests (otherwise known as witch doctors or diviners) deal with the situation. With the advent of Christianity and the introduction of the devil and demons, most Africans have reformulated their own way of dealing with the situation. In this guise, the situation has become more complex. Robert Sutherland Rattray, British anthropologist who researched religion and arts among the Ashanti people of Ghana reveals that in his time, non-adults could not be witches (Rattray 1927, 28). However, Hans Werner Debrunner, a Basel missionary who conducted a study into witchcraft in Ghana shows that the concept was changing in his time (Debrunner 1961, 56-57). Currently, the belief is completely different, as all categories of people, children and adults, male and female, literate and illiterate are accused of witchcraft (Adinkrah 2017, 76-77, 191, 237; Igwe 2016, 20, 47, 69). The accusations that are usually levelled against stepchildren and house aids are very alarming; these are the victims who have almost no one to defend them. Victims of witchcraft accusations sometimes suffer violence, torture, stigmatization, and negligence by their families. It is against this background that the story of a girl I call Akua's story unfolds. I was shocked when Akua told me, "The person I hate most in life is my mother."

In Ghana, a child may be accused of witchcraft if the child's behaviour is seen to be strange, very destructive or extremely hyper. In some cases, if there is a mysterious death or sudden illness of a close relative which has not been diagnosed, a child may be accused of being responsible through witchcraft. When a child curses another and misfortunes occurs, the child may also be accused of witchcraft. Perhaps, on a positive note, a child may be accused of witchcraft if the child performs very well or excels in many areas at school.

Unfortunately, Akua's torture in life and subsequent accusation of witchcraft as a child of about ten years did not come directly from any of these but from the mother who vented all her frustrations on Akua and

accused her of being responsible for all her failures in life.

When Akua was growing up she realized that her mother's husband was not her father. Both her stepfather and biological mother treated her very badly at home. She was asked to stay with a different family member in a different home. In this home, her auntie sexually abused her and introduced her to lesbianism. She was threatened not to tell anybody about it. Eventually she opted to come back to her mother and pleaded to be enrolled in school, but her mother failed to send her to school even though her mother was a graduate. One day she went to play with the siblings at the riverside. When they returned the stepfather mercilessly beat her up. She thought she would die but managed to run back to the riverside, preferring a peaceful death there to suffering in life. As she sat there, in the form of a trance, she saw someone who revealed herself as the river goddess and gave her food to eat. When she came back to herself, she found peace and thought that at least somebody loved her. When she came back home, she was accused of witchcraft and she was sent to a pastor of an African Initiated Church to exorcize her.

She was happy to be sent to a pastor with the hope that the pastor would assist her and send her to school. The pastor initially spoke tenderly to her and assured her of his assistance. He told her that there was a very powerful spirit following her and wished he could have such a powerful spirit too. The pastor told Akua that he would assist her to go to school if she would agree that she was a witch. Young as Akua was, she agreed. The pastor asked a family member to join them in a prayer meeting in a big gathering. In the prayer meeting, the pastor claimed that the "Spirit" had revealed to him that the girl was a witch. Akua was called to the front to confirm what the pastor had said, and she did so. Her hair was shaved and brought forth to the front of the people in an attempt to exorcize her from witchcraft. The pastor laid hands on Akua and claimed to cast out the spirit of witchcraft in the name of Jesus. This left

¹ This article is in response to the report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell in this issue (2020).

Akua with a greater stigma than before, and the pastor still did not send her to school.

Akua kept on crying and pleaded to be taken from the pastor's house. None of the family members wanted to receive her back. Her mother did not want to see her at home. Eventually one of them received her back only to send her to a traditional priest who claimed to have the power to set her free. Her stay there worsened her condition, as she claimed to have witnessed the traditional priest administering gimmicks to people such as extortion of money. This created division among family members. During her stay with the traditional priest, she was given different concoctions to drink, and, in addition, to add to bath water in the attempt to set her free. Eventually the traditional priest also attempted to rape her. When she told her story, nobody would believe her, so she ran away to find a place to settle by herself. It was during this period that she found herself in a company of people who claimed to be an occultic group.

According to Akua, all sorts of things happened among the occultic group members. In the attempt to get money, some of them would be asked to eat human excrement, have sex with insane people, have sex with dead bodies, and bring along some parts of the human body to the group meeting for ritual purpose. Her roles included encouraging people who had been given difficult assignments to perform, accompanying some of them in their outings, faking miracles for some so-called "pastors," and inviting prostitutes for some of the men. Having gone through all these things and many more, she was tired and fed up, and wanted deliverance. This was the reason that she went to a pastor who approached me to assist the girl in prayer and counselling.

Akua's situation is very alarming. Her mother who was supposed to love, nurture and support her threw her from the house. The pastor who was supposed to represent God, cherish her, show her God's love, and introduce the Lord to her abused her to claim supernatural power. Accusation of witchcraft drove all the family members away from her because they were afraid of her, since it is believed that witches can kill people and destroy their destiny. Thus, a superstitious belief system can be seriously disastrous to society. The traditional priest wanted to prey on her vulnerability. The strong have always preyed on the vulnerable.

Akua's story shows how some children suffer the accusation of witchcraft from their family members. It also highlights the distorted Christian perspective of witchcraft in contemporary Africa, and the vulnerability of children in some African societies. Akua was born out of wedlock and her mother vented all her frustrations and grievances on the innocent child. Though the mother was a graduate, she failed to educate her own biological child. Her maltreatment

caused Akua to have hallucinations, which were considered witchcraft practices. The collective belief system of witchcraft in Ghana could not allow this girl to receive help from people around her, instead she was pushed to join a group of occult practitioners.

The way the pastor claimed to exorcize Akua portrays the way witchcraft accusation and exorcism has been misconstrued in contemporary African Christianity and elsewhere, which I call "Witchdemonology" (Onyinah 2012). Witchdemonology is the synthesis of the beliefs and practices of the African concept of witchcraft and the Western concept of demonology. In Akua's case, instead of the pastor using the simple word of God to counsel Akua, pray with her and then advise the parents, he decided to portray himself as a powerful spirit-filled person. In witchdemonology, a person may be accused of witchcraft through a prophet's prophetic declaration, which can be, through an alleged word of knowledge or wisdom, similar to the old order where a traditional priest or a diviner may accuse a person. He caused the girl to be shaved just as the traditional priests used to do. Yet, he used the name of Jesus in his claim to exorcize her.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Akua's condition worsened from one place to another. It shows that all the systems failed her. This is an indication that the government of Ghana must demand training from all who claim to be ministers of the gospel and traditional religious practitioners. The government needs to supervise and regulate religious activities.

Furthermore, there is the need for increased advocacy and education on childcare and protection; parents need to play their role well. Churches need to educate their pastors on human suffering, temperament, and how to train children. The government institutions such as the police, the judiciary, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection need to do their work effectively and increase penalties for people who abuse children at all levels, including those who do so in the name of religion. For a person to declare that the person she hates most in life is her mother is a sign of the failed system.

This study has shown that there are still atrocities meted out against people who are accused of witchcraft, especially children, in Ghana. Contrary to what early researchers proposed that enlightened religion would reverse the situation, modernity has not changed the belief and occurrence of witchcraft in Ghana. This is a call for the churches and the government to take proper action to help curb the growing menace against people accused of witchcraft.

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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Labeling: Effects on Child Behavior and Self-Concept

Chinyere Felicia Priest

In this response,¹ I wish to use a sociological theory, labeling theory, to increase understanding of why some accused child witches admit and confess to being witches. The narrative of Sylvain and Pastor Jean in the report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020, 3-5, 11-13) are considered.

Labelling theory was developed by Becker Howard (1963). It stipulates that the "behaviour of human beings is influenced significantly by the way other members in society label them" (Crossman 2019, np). This means that individuals act in accordance with the way that the society classifies or categorizes them. For instance, some people are labelled as wise, intelligent, foolish, lazy, or even as witches, and they tend to exhibit such behaviour. Society's positive labelling of an individual influences the exhibition of positive behaviour while negative label influences negative behaviour too. Interestingly, the label used to describe an individual may not necessarily describe the existing situation. However, with time, that label is realized.

Sylvain's and Pastor Jean's Narrative

According to his narrative, Sylvain did not believe that he was a witch but because his stepdad accused him of witchcraft, which was validated by the prophetess/prophet, Sylvain began to gradually accept that label until he received a contrary opinion. "I told people at my church the situation, and they supported me in prayer. They rejected the accusations against me. *If it were only up to me, I would have accepted everything people told me. But when pastors told me, 'They are false prophets!' this gave me the boldness to not believe everything I was told*" (5) [emphasis added]. The society's labelling of him was beginning to influence his self-concept, behaviour and belief about himself.

Pastor Jean confessed to having delivered many child witches. These child witches' confessions were influenced by the society's labeling. Since they were

labelled witches they had to confess to avoid harm caused to them by the deliverance ministers. Some proponents of child witches use the children's confession as evidence of being witches but the content of the confession, in many cases, are simply the children's construction based on pre-knowledge (through stories, signs given by pastors, the experience of someone they know) of the actions of witches.

Pastor Jean declared,

But others were confessing—since I forced them to. Sometimes I would press on their eyes to force them to admit. Sometimes I would have them drink vegetable oil. I would have them fast [up to] seven days. If you don't admit before that time ends, I would force you to tell me, "what was 'your ride' [to the other world]?" And the child would say, "I fly with this stick." Others would bring me their fufu spoon . . . I would burn these tools in daylight. It was making me famous. Others would tell me, "See this cut [on my body]. It's like my pocket. When I go out at night, I fill it with meat." I would tell their mother, "See, I just uncovered him." Others I would put through the process of deliverance, and after the third day, I would make them drink vegetable oil. Of course, if you fast and then drink vegetable oil, you will throw up. When they threw up, I would say, "See, he just threw up what we were looking for." (11)

Using labeling theory, we can see that labeling children witches is very detrimental to their self-concept and behaviour. It results in negative behaviour, poor self-esteem, and engaging in the activities associated with the label. Parents, family members, society, especially pastors, must speak positively about children and label them with a positive category. Research by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968, 40) "showed the effects labels have on people. Students behave well or badly depending on teacher expectations. For example, if a

¹ This article is in response to the report by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell in this issue (2020).

pupil is repeatedly referred to as clever and associated with leadership capabilities, the pupil can rise to a position of leadership. The individual so described may incorporate the label clever or leader as part of his or her self-concept and behave as the labels suggest" (Kibera and Kimotoki 2007, 40).

This is also true of a child who is repeatedly labeled by the society, especially if the label comes from respected figures like family members and pastors. If he/she is labeled a witch, his/her self esteem is damaged and he/she begins to exhibit deviant behavior associated with the label.

This is true of my childhood experience. I was sexually violated as a child which resulted in withdrawal from family members, feeling unloved, rejected, and defenseless. This attitude of mine, coupled with being born a triplet, was used as evidence to label me *Ogbanje*. "*Ogbanje* is believed to be an evil spirit that deliberately plagues a family with misfortune. It was believed that, within a certain amount of time from birth, *Ogbanje* would deliberately die and then come back and repeat the cycle, causing the family grief" (Priest 2017, 70). This label influenced my behaviour and self-perception. I would often stay alone in a dark room, avoid contact with peers, have limited conversation with family and hatred for the opposite sex; I was very fearful, and timid. I thought very lowly of myself, thinking that I am a failure, unwanted, unloved, foolish, and a nobody. I lived this way for about two decades until I found myself in a different environment where I was labelled differently (intelligent, wise, important, etc.) and this changed my whole outlook on life, my self-esteem, and my behaviour.

Our response to child witch accusation should be empathy accompanied by intentional advocacy, research, seminars, awareness, and training. For educators, positive labeling should be adopted in classifying children accused of witchcraft. For the pastors, theological training and specialized training like the one conducted in Congo is highly recommended to ensure that they are properly equipped for responding to child witch accusation. For the scholars, more research should be conducted in this line in other parts of Africa and a curriculum should be developed for the training of pastors in this area.

God commands that we "speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9). Children accused of witchcraft cannot speak for themselves or defend themselves for fear of the untold torture it attracts. The accused child witches are powerless to fight the accusation because they are accused by the majority and the powerful. We (the church, parents, guardians, scholars, educators, activists, government, and others) must protect the

children accused of witchcraft, become their voice, and label them positively. We need to promote the enforcement of the law against child witch accusation.

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RESPONSE

Significance of this Research and a Tanzanian Case Study

Steven D. H. Rasmussen

Significance of this Research

The article by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) breaks significant new ground in understanding the complex, life-and-death realities of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations. It also points the way toward addressing them. Complementary qualitative, quantitative, and theological research paints a nuanced picture of Kinshasa pastors. The selected stories illustrate the situation well. The extensive survey answers questions about the prevalence of beliefs and practices and the extent to which they are influenced by factors such as denomination, theology and education.

These 82 questions are carefully crafted to probe specific local beliefs and practices. In this way, they avoid problems from previous quantitative research such as Pew's survey which asked just one question, "Do you believe in the evil eye—that certain people can cast spells and curses?" This question conflates several cultural practices only sometimes associated with witchcraft, and it does not separate belief in the abstract possibility of witchcraft from fear that my step-child is killing my child. [The Pew findings reveal some prevalence and comparison: 80% in Tanzania and 60% in DRC answered "yes" which put them in the top 3 of the 19 African countries surveyed, while 24% in Kenya was the lowest rate (Pew Research Center n.d.)]. In contrast, Priest et al. developed a specific question on the effectiveness of witches which allows variation with five response categories (6):

Certain people are truly capable of killing other people in a supernatural manner through witchcraft.	Frequency	Percent
Definitely Not	28	3.9%
Probably Not	40	5.6%
I Do Not Know	128	18.0%
Probably Yes	263	36.9%
Definitely Yes	254	35.6%

I have asked this question in shorter surveys with smaller groups and have found significant variability

between African ethnic groups even within the same country. Pew cannot capture this by asking just 1000 to 1500 in each country. However, Priest et al.'s 714 responses allows generalizability to Kinshasa pastors. Most important, I hope that others replicate this survey elsewhere or at least use some of the 82 questions with the same wording to allow real comparison.

Building on the foundation of this work, I believe further research should focus on three areas: First, we need more research about others who are accused, not just children. Across the world, people harm the poor, elderly, outsiders, and women much more than children. Second, the research in this article makes a compelling case that the Bible does not teach that evil people (witches) can cause harm through invisible means, but mistranslation and misunderstanding to the contrary have made a huge negative impact. This impact demands more biblical research contextually grounded in rigorous anthropology, especially about diviners and witches. Finally, we need more and more loving responses to accusations of witchcraft. Therefore, we need research that evaluates the effectiveness of various interventions. I hope that this quantitative data can be used as a baseline to demonstrate accurately the effectiveness of EPED and other approaches.

Change from Critically-Contextualized Research and Response: A Case Study of Response to Accusations of Witchcraft in Northwestern Tanzania

In their report, Priest, Ngolo and Stabell conclude,

Furthermore EPED pastors are also aware that the ministries of Christian pastors sometimes helped put that child on the street. And they recognize that flawed biblical and theological understandings sometimes contribute to the problem. Our research showed that theological education made a positive

difference for pastors. But perhaps not as much as it should have. (45)

The authors suggest a positive, doable intervention. They hope that better contextualized theological education could make a greater difference. They show impact from EPED pastors using seven successful “grassroots strategies of transformative engagement” (34-37).

In Northwestern Tanzania, we have used a critical contextualization approach¹ with very similar transformation strategies. This has made a positive impact for churches and suffering people. I have been involved in ministers training for the past 25 years with the deans of Lake Victoria Christian College (LVCC)—John Mwan-zalima, Raphael Okeyo, Benester Misana and Nestory Lunyilija. Each also pastors churches. Together they oversee over 300 Pentecostal Evangelistic Fellowship of Africa (PEFA) churches in Northwestern Tanzania.

There are many ethnic groups in this area, with the Sukuma being the largest. The majority of Sukuma have not followed Christianity or Islam. People frequently consult *waganga wa kinyeji* (local, neo-traditional diviners/healers) about misfortune who often identify someone causing the problem through witchcraft. People regularly neglect, beat, fine, or chase away people suspected to be witches (whom I will abbreviate as PSWs), especially older, divorced or widowed women. Thousands of PSWs have been hacked to death with machetes.²

We began doing ethnographic research and leading critical contextualization discussions about sickness, death, and witchcraft together in 2005. This led to more biblical research. Since then, we have all changed significantly in our understandings and responses to PSWs. This has produced change in those we have taught as well. These leaders who originally told me endless stories of suffering caused by witches, now argue against blaming a person in almost all specific cases, although (like EPED pastors) they do not deny that witchcraft could be possible.

¹ This article demonstrates important principles for research or transformative education: the power of dialogue between 1) a deep understanding of people in context provided by 2) thorough anthropological research and a response from 3) deep understanding of scripture. Paul Hiebert called this *critical contextualization*. He recommended it be done in a local, but also glocal *community* (Hiebert 1999, 15-29). This article grows from “glocal” networks of trust and relationships in Kinshasa and around the world sharing social, financial, and human capital over a long time. Together, the authors build on their own extensive ministry and research experience/understanding in this area as well as that of a broader international, interdisciplinary, and interfaith community.

² According to Tanzania Human Rights Reports (which are based on police reports) people murdered an average of 517 PSWs in Tanzania from 2005 to 2009. (“Tanzania-Human-Rights-Report-2009.Pdf” n.d., 21) This peaked at 765 murders in 2013 and has since declined to 307 in 2017 (“Tanzania Human Rights Report 2018” n.d., 18).

³ As one example of the influence of seminars training church leaders in this area, 23% more men were circumcised in those villages where a one day seminar for church leaders was given in addition to the government intervention to reduce HIV spread (Downs et al. 2017).

In 2013, Dr Janice Rasmussen and I together with these and other leaders designed and conducted a train-the-trainers workshop, entitled, “Christian Responses to Witchcraft Accusations” (for more see Rasmussen 2017). Since then, those trained have taught over 5000 people in 48 three-day seminars. Though hosted by a local church, the entire village is invited. We have not yet conducted systematic research to evaluate their effectiveness, but stories from these communities are promising.³ I will share two experiences from Rev. Raphael Okeyo in leading these seminars:

This seminar had 171 participants. Initially people did not see the value of such a seminar. As discussion continued, four widows told their stories. A pastor’s widow gave her story. After the pastor died, his brothers and neighbors began to accuse her of killing him. A year later, two of her nephews died the same day. Their parents went to a diviner who told them that she had caused their deaths. The clan beat her and her children, burnt down their house, and covered her with petrol to burn her. Before lighting the match, the police came and rescued her. The clan still decided to send her back to Kenya where she came from.

But after the teaching, the church with the village members were touched and they raised \$286.80 for her. Also after understanding the law through the teaching, she accused those who had attacked her. The court fined them and two are in prison until now.



Participants in the seminar.



Raphael standing by the widow mentioned in the story above.

As the EPED intervention suggests, caring for the vulnerable can also reduce accusations and persecutions of those cared for. The PEFA churches in NW Tanzania now help support over 300 widows and over 500 fatherless children. In 2017, I personally met “Ruth” (name changed) back in her home village, displaying the sleeping mats she had made as part of the church’s small business ministry to widows. This is how Raphael told her story,



Ruth and one of her six children.

Ruth’s husband got sick. His family took him to an *mganga* (local diviner/healer) who told them that his wife was causing his sickness. Eventually they took him to a hospital where they diagnosed typhoid, but it was too late. He died in one day. Then his family attacked his widow. They grabbed everything from her house and burned it down. They beat her and some of her older children. People called me because I had conducted the witchcraft seminar in this village. I called my brother who is a policeman in the capital, but was home on vacation. He quickly went and threatened to jail all of them if they killed her. They stopped beating her, but he called me to come as the mob grew. I borrowed a car and came. They said, “If you love her and say she is not a witch, then take her from this village because she will be

killed here.” So she and her six children came and lived with our family for six months. I went back and did the seminar again in their village. I asked them if they really believed the *mganga* or the hospital’s diagnosis. We taught them that *kashaph* in the Old Testament and *magus* in the New Testament are wrongly translated as *mchawi* (witch). They would be better translated as *mganga* (diviner/healer). We taught them that we must love our neighbors as ourselves and true religion is to care for the widows and orphans in their distress (James 1:27). Then the chairman of the village and others repented after realizing they had understood the scriptures wrongly. The village welcomed Ruth back. Since her husband’s family still did not welcome her, the church built her a small house and helped her with farming and small business.

Raphael also argues that the invisible causes of suffering Tanzanians label “*uchawi*” (witchcraft) are demonic, not people. Scripture teaches that demons cause suffering, accusation and fear. Distinguishing whether a person or a spirit is the ultimate cause has critical social consequences. I sometimes asked why we attack widows instead of fighting spirits when Ephesians 6:11,12 says, “stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (NLT). Sometimes the response was that “*wachawi wanafuga mapepo*” (witches herd spirits) and send them to cause evil. I would question whether it was not rather the spirits herding the people. Most agreed that witches were not free to do as they wanted.



Nestory, Raphael, and Benester presenting about the seminars they have taught in Tanzania along with Janice while I translate at the 2016 Nairobi conference on witchcraft and witchcraft accusations.

For example, when the Tanzanian leaders presented at the Nairobi conference, someone challenged

them that as African pastors, they must know that witches cause harm. Benester responded that the Bible doesn't teach anywhere that witches cause harm. One of my Congolese students responded that sometimes witches confess to hurting others so that is undeniable proof.

Raphael replied with a story about a woman who confessed to him that she had killed a choir member and her husband through her evil eye by turning their food to poison. He responded,

I said, "I don't believe you are a witch. Turn this fish into poison and kill me now." She said, "No, I can't do that. It has to rise up in me." "Well, then it is just a demon," I said. So we cast out the demon. Then I told her to poison the fish. She said, "I can't! It is all gone!" I replied, "You see, I told you that you aren't a witch. It was just a demon."

This story illustrates that although these leaders focus on the damage of accusations and are much more skeptical of specific accusations and confessions of witchcraft, they are no less likely to pray against demons than in the past. They still practice spiritual warfare even as they oppose social warfare.

Change: Possible and Critical

Pastors influence change! But a better contextualized understanding and response is needed in health research and care, development, courts, policing, politics, etc. Each of these will be much more effective if they respond to local understandings of witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft.

Assumptions about causation like witchcraft and related actions do not change easily, but people do change and innovations spread. The witch craze began and ended in Western Europe. Wide-scale murder of PSWs began 50 years ago in Sukumaland. In interviewing more than a hundred Tanzanians in 2005-2008, I never heard of a child accused of being a witch, but by 2013, these accusations had spread to Tanzania. During my research, people with albinism began being killed for *waganga* to use their body parts. A friend showed me pictures of six-year old Mariamu whom he had been supporting, and then her dismembered body. But Christians used those pictures to lead a vigorous local and global response that has resulted in no more murders of people with albinism since 2015 ("Tanzania Human Rights Report 2018" n.d., 18-20).

Every week pastors in Kinshasa and Tanzania decide how to respond to PSWs. Their responses

influence all of the Church and how it is viewed by others. This will increase as African Christianity rapidly grows and spreads. The mistranslation of *keshaphi* in the Vulgate influenced Europe in the witch craze and all of Europe's translations and theology influenced all those influenced by missionaries from Europe. Likewise, the innovation of accusing children as witches did not stay in DRC. What happens in Kinshasa does not stay in Kinshasa. By 2060, six of the countries with the largest Christian populations will be in Africa and none will be in Europe (Pew Research Center n.d.). Persecution of PSWs is a challenge in each of them. How the church responds to it will shape the next 500 years. At the UN conference mentioned in Geneva on the 500th year after the launch of the reformation (39), no one directly mentioned Calvin's witch trials or theology. Many talked about pastors harming PSWs around the world now. At the end of two days, I had opportunity to show that a few Pentecostals are defending PSWs and that the Bible does *not* teach that witches cause harm.⁴ Kinshasa is the next Geneva.

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⁴ The 1560 Geneva Bible (most of which was later adopted in the King James Version) translated Exodus 22:18 as "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Several at the conference quoted this as proof that the Bible teaches witches exist and even deserve to be killed, but I challenged this as a mistranslation as the authors of this paper demonstrate.

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His publications on witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft include:

"Diviners and Witches" article and 19 application notes and touch points for the *Africa Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Oasis. 2016. 662-665.

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RESPONSE

Response to Priest, Ngolo and Stabell

Michael Allen Rynkiewicz

This article by Priest, Ngolo and Stabell (2020) presents a significant piece of research in an area, child witchcraft accusations, only recently addressed by scholars in the church and in academia. For anthropologists and missionaries alike, witchcraft accusations and practices were a troublesome topic in the period before World War II, but the context there was traditional culture versus Christianity and modernity. As children of the Enlightenment, missionaries denounced occult practices without conceding the presence of spiritual power and anthropologists strove to rationalize witchcraft as a product of uncertainty (Malinowski) and/or a rational response given the assumptions of the ideological system (Evans-Pritchard).

That witchcraft, or at least accusations, should surge rather than politely fade away in postcolonial times confounds the wisdom of secular society raised on the principles of modernity. That women are disproportionately accused worldwide attracts attention in the Western gender-sensitive world, and “witch camps” such as those in northern Ghana confirm the concern. Older women who married in from outside the village or suburb who are now widowed and without the protection of sons and brothers are particularly vulnerable targets.

This is still a common story in Papua New Guinea (PNG) where, as in the Congo, though it is against national law, in rural areas widows are commonly accused, beaten, and even killed as a result of witchcraft accusations. The resurgence of accusations prompts several questions for the church. What kind of witchcraft? What is the occasion for accusations? Who is the accuser and who is the accused? What has the church failed to do? What can the church do now?

What are we dealing with? In both the Congo and PNG, we are not dealing with unadulterated traditional beliefs and practices. Traditional customs varied significantly. The question was the same: Who is the cause of this malady? But in PNG the answer ranged from ghosts of the recent dead, to ghosts of the long dead, to spirits of the bush, each in possible partnership with a willing or an unsuspecting subject. In PNG, for the most part, traditional beliefs and practices declined under pressure from missionaries and administrators. The provision of widespread healthcare and law

enforcement in PNG up to the time of independence (1975) as well as the nearly complete conversion to Christianity (96% of the population make the claim) contributed to the decline.

Independence opened up new routes for the circulation of people and ideas. Even in prehistorical times, there is evidence of the spread of successive waves of new cults in PNG, and now people share their beliefs through traditional routes of transmission as well as through new routes centered around mines and towns. A hybrid complex of beliefs called *Sanguma* in *tok pisin* now dominates the field. Some traditional beliefs included paths of redemption and reconciliation. Schram notes for the Auhelawa, for example, that “the evidence for witchcraft belief has traditionally been drawn from confessions given in meetings held among kin to diagnose and cure illness” (2010, 727), but that today both the setting (not kin) and the goal (not curing) have become more dangerous with newly circulated *Sanguma* beliefs. *Sanguma* tends to lead to violence (Bartle 2005, 43; Gibbs 2015, 310, 321). Thus perceived witchcraft and the accusations are layered phenomena operating in a mixed social field with declining traditional leadership as well as inadequate legal resources (Gibbs 2012, 133).

It seems clear both in the Congo and Papua New Guinea etiology that, when disaster strikes, there must be a personal spiritual cause; it is not just happenstance. The way to stop a series of unfortunate events is to find the person who is causing the problem. Once found, the person must be exposed, punished and/or eliminated. Finally, the most likely people to be accused are the marginal, weak, and expendable. Marginal in that they will have little support in the community. Weak so that they are unable to defend themselves or retaliate. Expendable in that they are not critically important to anyone in the community.

In the Congo, the problem with the re-emergence of witchcraft accusations is that it targets children and that some local churches and pastors join in rather than resist the movement. In PNG, the church is not actively part of the problem and children are rarely accused. However, the failure of the churches to address witchcraft accusations, and the unfortunate compatibility of some of the newer churches’ theology of

sickness and death with witchcraft beliefs, are certainly contributing factors.

The Catholic Church along with the Lutheran Church have taken the lead in re-thinking and teaching a theology of sickness and death, as well as of good and evil in the world. The presentation of Jesus as a healer as well as one who casts out demons has been helpful because it is pointed out that Jesus worked with grace and forgiveness leading to reconciliation. Jesus never tortured nor harmed the demon-possessed, nor did he ever blame a living person for the sickness of another. In Scripture, God is the ultimate spiritual power, all others are subordinate. Scripture identifies especially the orphan, the widow, and the alien for special care specifically because of their marginality to the community. Finally, the prophets and Jesus stood up for the weak and marginalized. These teachings go a long way.

The Catholic Church, in particular, has had some success in following a plan of action that responds to sickness, death, and accusations. The prescriptions that the church has adopted combine theological education with quick and measured responses (Gibbs 2015, 311-312). First, through teaching the church must “broaden people’s understanding of the causes of illness and death.” Second, church leaders must make a quick response with “early intervention before or during a funeral.” Third, the church must seek “immediate family members taking ownership” to “make peace, talk it over, and talk it out.” Fourth, the church must be about “promoting respect for law and order.” Finally, the church must engage in “fostering faith to influence attitudes and emotions,” and thereby create an alternative worldview. All this takes work, and Gibbs provides extended examples to show what these mean in practice.

Thus, responses to witchcraft accusations in PNG range from the demand for rationality (Zocca 2009, 46) to the multi-level interventions listed above. However, there can be, and should be, more.

Cox and Phillips (2015) follow the practice of critical biocultural medical anthropology, in particular the work of anthropologist and medical doctor Paul Farmer, to expand the context. They argue that there is an inverse relationship between health care and law enforcement on the one hand and the severity and suddenness of sickness and death on the other. Thus, they place the resurgence of witchcraft accusations in a historical context of colonialism and a failed state. Neocolonial states on the periphery that continue to base their economy on resource extraction (mining, forestry) have inevitably fallen into debt to the World Bank, and suffer from the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund. Structural adjustments begin with cutting funds for medical care and education.

Cox and Phillips argue that:

Sorcery accusations are largely associated with untimely or unanticipated deaths, therefore the contest between these ways of thinking and biomedical understandings of disease and illness is important to examine . . . we argue that the explanatory power of biomedicine in PNG and Solomon Islands is hampered by several factors, not least the poor access to and resourcing of medical services (2015, 37).

In the case of PNG, this means that clinics, hospitals, and medical staff that were coming up to world class standards at independence in 1975 have now fallen into disrepair. In Goroka, where I lived for four years, there is a hospital that used to be the pride of the region that has fallen on hard times, and there is a newly built clinic that polished up a Member of Parliament’s reputation but has never (at least by 2014) opened due to lack of ongoing funds for medical staff. The point is that the very triggers for witchcraft accusations, illness and death, have been on the rise as health care has declined. It does not help, either, that law enforcement is understaffed and underbudgeted. During my time there, the police would routinely ask for petrol when called out for a disturbance because they could not travel without it.

Church plans, such as in the Congo and in PNG are certainly necessary to combat witchcraft accusations, but that is treating the symptoms. The problem is structural: lack of adequate health care and lack of trained and resourced law enforcement. If doctors failed to get at the root causes of disease, there would be lawsuits. Why would the church not want to start with root causes to reduce witchcraft accusations and violence?

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RESPONSE

Witchcraft Accusations: A Challenge for Families, Communities, and Churches in Africa

Boubakar Sanou

Introduction

According to Timothy Stabell, “witchcraft continues to be a topic that stirs passions and fears in many places around the world” (Stabell 2010, 460). This is particularly true of Africa where the belief in witchcraft is so pervasive that it can be viewed as a commonplace feature of many African spiritual beliefs (Ellis and ter Haar 2004, 27). From a traditional African perspective, there is an undeniable connection between the material and spiritual worlds. This worldview supports the idea that there are spiritual reasons for all ordinary everyday occurrences (Mbiti 1990, 151).

Witchcraft is generally defined as the ability of a person or group of people to cause harm to others by use of supernatural powers (Hutton 2006, 211; Nyaga 2007, 247). Generally speaking, witchcraft is any type of evil that negatively affects the fulfillment of human life (Akrong 2007, 59). In many African contexts, there is often a very thin line between the ideas of evil spirits, magic, sorcery, spell casting, and curses and the idea of witches or witchcraft (Quarmyne 2011, 477; Danfulani 2007, 477). Because witchcraft is directed against others, it is generally perceived as “the anti-social crime *par excellence*” (Mencej 2015, 112). Witchcraft is believed to be against the preservation of life which is the most central precept of African life. Therefore, fighting against witchcraft is considered a moral imperative for all those affected by it (Magoola 2012, 99-100). As a result of the perception people hold on witchcraft, they often treat with the greatest cruelty those suspected to be associated with it, even wishing to physically eliminate them from society (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014, 9).

Witchcraft beliefs and accusations negatively impact family relationships as well as other networks of social relations (Akrong 2007, 58; and Harries 2012, 129-139). In connection with Priest, Ngolo and Stabell’s article (2020), this one further explores the issue of

witchcraft accusations and offers some recommendations as a Christian response to the phenomenon.

Witchcraft in African Cosmological Thought

The belief in witchcraft is a strong and widespread phenomenon on the continent of Africa (ter Haar 2007, 1; Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2007, 205). Belief in supernatural powers and witchcraft are such widespread components of the worldview of many Africans across all social lines that it is no longer only a village affair. It is held by people of diverse education and religious affiliation in rural as well as in urban settings (Hinfelaar 2007, 229). It can therefore be argued that in Africa, the belief in witchcraft is a religio-cultural phenomenon. Elom Dovlo notes that “although the belief in witchcraft is part of traditional religious belief, Islam and Christianity in their development have accepted the worldview that supports the belief system by providing preventive and curative measures against witchcraft attacks and by neutralizing supposed witches” (Dovlo 2007, 66). For Asamoah-Gyadu, the emergence and popularity of the prosperity gospel in Africa is reinforcing not only the belief in witchcraft but it is also validating the practice of witch-hunting in many parts of Africa. Because the prosperity-gospel preachers instill in their congregants the view that God has met all human needs of health and wealth through the suffering and death of Christ, believers invoke acts of bewitchment to explain their negative life experiences (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 25).

Since everything experienced as inimical is attributed to witchcraft, some refer to the phenomenon as a “witchcraft mentality,” which is,

a constructed interpretive scheme that attempts to account for misfortune, or anything inimical to a person’s well-being, as traceable to the activities of witches. In this scheme of interpretation all causality

is deemed to have originated primarily from the spiritual realm; the material causes are considered secondary, or seen as the medium through which the primary spiritual causality finds its expression. Such an interpretation tends to discount a material causal explanation of events, focusing attention on external agents, usually witches. This then creates a mindset that attempts to account for misfortunes not in the actions, behaviour or attitude of the victim, but rather in the activities of an enemy or malefactor. It is not uncommon to hear people exclaim in dismay in the face of problems: "Who is doing these things to me?" instead of "What is causing these things?" (Akrong 2007, 59-60).

Witchcraft Accusation and Typical Victims of Such Accusations

Because witchcraft is shrouded in secrecy it is believed that no one ever willingly admits to being a witch, they will only do so under coercion. As such, witchcraft accusations are based on suspicion, rumor, or gossip that circulate within the community whenever its members are faced with a tragedy. In many instances, when misfortunes are experienced, traditional healers and diviners are called upon to determine and explain the source of the misfortunes and also reveal the identity of the offending witch. The belief is that diviners can detect the terrible smell carried by witches (Quarmyne 2011, 480-481; Nyaga 2007, 258). An alarming element of witchcraft accusations is the stigmatization, forced exile, or even the killing of suspected witches (ter Haar 2007, 1; Akrong 2007, 65; Dovlo 2007, 72).

For some strange reasons, the face of witchcraft is primarily feminine and juvenile in the majority of African contexts. Although in most cases women, especially older women, constitute the vast majority of those accused of witchcraft (Quarmyne 2011, 476; Nyaga 2007, 257; Akrong 2007, 59), children are increasingly becoming victims of such accusations (Schnoebelen 2009, 14-17). This is in part due to the belief that witchcraft is usually inherited or learned (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014, 12). As such, children of women once accused of being witches become victims of the same type of accusations. It is suggested that "it is usually the most discriminated against and marginalised who are accused of witchcraft because they are least able to defend themselves or because they are considered of little value to society and therefore a burden to it in times of hardship" (Escribano 2011). It is argued that "the great variety in marks of identification [of witches] means that people intent on accusing others of witchcraft can always do so" (Dovlo 2007, 68).

People are often accused of witchcraft based on particular characteristics such as old age, poor health, red or yellow eyes, wrinkled skin, missing teeth, a hunched stance, or great wealth. Children likely to be accused of witchcraft fall into the following categories: orphans who live with step parents or extended family with financial difficulties, children with any physical disability or abnormality (e.g., autism, Down Syndrome, swollen belly, red eyes), twins (associated with the occult or the anger of the gods), children whose birth is considered abnormal (premature children, awkward position during delivery), and children with albinism. Albinos are accused of witchcraft but also sought out because of the magic powers supposedly contained in their organs, hair, skin and limbs (Cimpric 2010, 2; Schnoebelen 2009, 15, 17).

Witchcraft accusations can also be triggered by other factors such as tragedy, economic wellbeing and strained relationships among community members (Mencej 2015, 114; Dovlo 2007, 69). Thus, it is reported that witchcraft accusations increase in times of social instability (Hill 1996, 325). Witch-hunts have been prompted by health crises such as HIV/AIDS, cholera, Ebola, meningitis, tetanus, and many other epidemics (Schnoebelen 2009, 19; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015, 23).

Strained relationships are also known to contribute to witchcraft accusations. It is often common for rivals to accuse each other of witchcraft practices. This is commonplace in many polygamous marital relationships where there are jealous relationships between co-spouses or between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who often maliciously accuse each other of witchcraft as part of their competition for either the husband or the son/husband figure (Quarmyne 2011, 479; Nyaga 2007, 257).

The same level of rivalry is also often observed between professionals, business people, politicians, and even religious leaders. Because economic wellbeing can be attributed to witchcraft, witchcraft accusations are ways of either getting rid of one's rivals or a way of justifying someone's success (Stabell 2010, 460; Dovlo 2007, 69; Nyaga 2007, 259). In other instances, there exists some form of tension between people before accusations of witchcraft occur. In these instances, the main function of the accusations is to provide people with the means of expressing and channeling the tensions as well as outlets for repressed hostility, frustration, and anxiety. In the event of a misfortune, the suspected person is often "first and foremost sought among those neighbours with whom victims had already been in problematic relationships before the misfortune occurred" (Mencej 2015, 114).

Witchcraft Accusation and the Church's Response

In the face of the severe consequences of witchcraft accusations, what should the church do? The contributors to *Mission in the 21st Century* outline five essential marks of effective mission: (1) to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, (2) to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers, (3) to respond to human needs by loving service, (4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society, and (5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Walls and Ross 2008). I suggest this framework be adapted in addressing issues related to witchcraft accusations.

Following are three recommendations that the church can use to start curbing the problem of witchcraft accusations:

1. In the process of teaching and nurturing believers, a special emphasis should be put on worldview change and a well-balanced approach to the truth, allegiance, and power dimensions of Christian discipleship. Worldview is the unconscious frame of reference people operate from. Since most African converts to Christianity are from an African Traditional Religions (ATR) background, when they come to Christ they are likely to interpret the Scriptures through the filter of an ATR worldview. Unless their conversion is followed by a worldview transformation, their Christian life will remain influenced by the values and core assumptions of the ATR worldview especially in times of crises. Africa is a power-oriented mission context. Change of worldview must also be accompanied by demonstrations of God's power in conjunction with coherent biblically-based arguments. Converts need a visible demonstration that the God of the Bible is more powerful than the powers of witchcraft. Unless converts from an ATR background experience at the worldview level both a truth-filled and power-filled Christianity, many of them will "continue to seek out the old power sources to satisfy their fears and needs" (Bauer 2008, 342). There should be a steady and systematic discussion on witchcraft and the power of God to conquer evil powers in training programs both for church leaders, seminarians, and church members across the continent.
2. Because the violence, marginalization, and ill-treatment of people accused of witchcraft is a breach of their human rights, church leaders should be involved in community education on human rights as well as lobbying for justice for the

harm done to victims of witchcraft accusations. This can be a powerful tool for deterring community and church members alike from engaging in witch-hunting.

3. Through a partnership with the Non-Governmental Organizations, church entities should promote and participate in the rehabilitation, integration, and counseling of exiled alleged witches to help return them back to their families and communities. Efforts should be made to work toward the empowerment of those who cannot return to their communities with income-generating activities so they can support themselves.

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RESPONSE

Comment on the Article “Christian Pastors and Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” by Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell

Edwin Zehner

A Tragic Issue—Overview of the Problem

One of the great tragedies in late 20th and early 21st century African Christianity is the abusive treatment of orphans, young children, elderly widows, and other relatively defenseless people in the name of “protection against witchcraft” (e.g., Ashforth 2005 plus the present article). This treatment is often meted out by the very church pastors and lay leaders whom the Bible urges to devote themselves to improving their church members’ social, physical, and material welfare.¹

In the present article, “Christian Pastors and Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” Christian scholars Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020), focus specifically on “witchcraft” accusations lodged by Christian church leaders and lay people against young children in their own Christian communities and families. In doing so they also highlight creative approaches being developed by the Congolese EPED (*Équipe Pastorale Auprès des Enfants en Détresse*, a name whose approximate English equivalent is “Pastoral Team With [or for] Children in Need”) to “protect” these children, to reinsert them into their families and communities, and to reshape the general patterns of behavior surrounding witchcraft accusations, especially the “divination of witchcraft bearers” carried

out by so many Christian leaders in the Kinshasa, DRC, area.

The first half of the article describes background issues and then provides detailed quantitative data and analysis on the prevalence of certain practices and beliefs in the Kinshasa, DRC, churches’ approaches to and understandings/perceptions of children perceived to be “witches” (a term whose *practical* meaning is “people who are perceived to project supernatural threats to those around them simply because of who they are”).²

The second half of the article focuses again on solutions, and then again on larger implications. For me, the most interesting parts of this section are the first two sections of chapter four, which use some creative qualitative ethnographic techniques to highlight and analyze the measures used by EPED and perhaps some other Christian faith-based organizations to redress the problem. Using a combination of interviews, first person oral accounts, and careful analyses conducted in discussion with EPED personnel, this section teases out from the authors’ observations a set of measures keenly calibrated to the local situation in such ways that they might be able to spark continent-wide “protective care” measures, even while side-stepping (deliberately) the question as to whether witches actually exist.

This side-stepping is essential, because, as the paper demonstrates, attempts to deny that child witches exist

¹ Examples of these instructions include Leviticus 18: 21—“Do not pass your children through the fire . . .”; Mt. 18:12-14 & Lk 15:3-7—The Parable of the Lost Sheep; Mt. 19: 14—“Suffer the Little Children to Come Unto Me”; Mt. 20:26 & Mk. 10:48—“He who wishes to be great among you must be as one who serves”; Acts 6—the early church ensuring ethnically equal treatment of widows in the distribution of food; 2 Corinthians 11: 7-9—Paul preaching to the Corinthians free of charge; 2 Corinthians 12:14-15—Paul’s personal example to the Corinthians; Galatians 6:10—Paul: “Let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers”; Ephesians 5:18-20—Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs . . . ; Philippians 2: 1-11—Be humble before each other; and more.

² Note the parallels to the 1937 findings of noted British Christian anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who wrote that the Azande, among whom he did extensive fieldwork, “believe that witchcraft is a *substance in the body* of witches” (1937, 21, emphasis mine). Thus, in his case, as in the case of the DRC churches, there was no magic performed, merely a suspicion that the churches and their communities were in constant danger from supernatural forces channeled in and through these children.

could threaten the ministry's local and continent-wide effectiveness. Therefore, instead of trying to start from a "supposed central world view" and work "out to practice," as some analysts might do, the EPED goes straight to the individual practices and to the specific personal mindsets that sustain them. The accusations posed against specific child witches are almost random and highly idiosyncratic in their approach, and often "circular" in their diagnostic reasoning. Consequently, by encouraging practitioners to back away from the "certainty" of particular diagnoses, EPED practitioners are sometimes able to make substantial progress against the entire child accusation syndrome, reinserting ostracized children ("suspected witches") into their families, churches, and communities, and sometimes also "shifting" the overall "default approach" of key ministers and family members in the course of what Americans might call "the recovery and reconciliation process."³

These activities are tremendously important in pointing ways to better futures for these children and their families. Therefore I was pleased that the quantitative portion of the article included a measure (Table 3.3.c) attempting to assess how widespread these and other "child protective" activities were in DRC churches. The reported incidences were fairly low, and indeed, I am not sure if these are the most useful categories to use (I suspect the survey's creators are equally uncertain), but the fact that there is any faith-based child protective activity at all in this area provides hope for the future.

If there were opportunities for a new round of research, I would personally like to see someone take the results of the 2017 qualitative follow-up study and use those details to construct new study categories, thereby resulting in a more finely-tuned follow-up survey than the original one was. I strongly suspect that if the researchers (or other readers) were to take the more detailed understandings developed in 2017 and apply them to the development of a new "child ministry" survey instrument, I suspect the information gained would be more finely detailed, and the instrument itself could be "instructional" and perhaps mildly influential even among those congregations that fail to return the entire survey.

The reasons why I think this is so is because many of the approaches used by EPED are probably "new" to most Christian practitioners in Africa (locals and

foreigners alike), and an "indirect instructional approach" like theirs, supplemented in the form of a gently worded and often "indirectly worded" survey could achieve long-term results of a type that formal seminars struggle to achieve, because when engaging with surveys, people's defenses are down, they are less influenced by "concerns about how their face and eyes" look in front of others, and, ideally, the survey taker would also have time for individual introspection and study (Note: These suggestions come primarily from my interactions with Southeast Asians; however my recent encounters with the growing communities of African Christians in Thailand suggest that some of these interactional and cognitive issues may be similar in the two regions).

Academic Value and General Analysis

Moving to the article's academic value, I find it very informative and well researched. There is much to learn, even for those of us who had thought we knew the relevant literatures (see Zehner 2013a and 2013b for some of my own explorations). For example, only in the present article did it become clear to me that contemporary accusations of so-called "child witches" are in many ways "entirely new" (my phrase), even if they are built on "cultural building blocks" that suggest a "hybrid origin."⁴ Though there may have been prior local systems of belief in "supernatural forms of danger," the precise belief and practice patterns encountered in this article draw *both* on prior African belief systems (though often with important changes from the past) *and* on recent North American and African "deliverance ministries," "prosperity gospel ministries," and possibly also "faith healing ministries."

Now, on the face of it, in line with both biblical and logical principles, these accused African child witches *should* almost automatically be ruled "innocent" by the churches, and, in practice, it is the pastors and other self-appointed diviners who should be banned from holding power in the churches. Almost all of the divination techniques described in the article are explicitly "banned" in the Bible. They also lack verification from mature third parties as required in scripture (see Deut. 19:15, 1 Cor. 14:29, and 2 Cor. 13:1). Others simply have no Biblical precedent to build on, being built instead on "vernacular every day practices" whose precise sources we do not know.⁵

³ I cannot tell if EPED has a term for this, so I am making one up that I hope will help North American readers relate positively to EPED's processes.

⁴ I thank Robert Priest for drawing my attention to the article's "hybridity" and "cultural building blocks" themes.

⁵ The term "vernacular practice" is derived from Knauf's seminal work (2002; vii-viii) on "vernacular modernities" and related terms and concepts; these are more commonly known as "alternative modernities," but the value of Knauf's phrase is that it emphasizes

According to the present article, in Kinshasa, DRC, and apparently also in other parts of Africa, the present-day practice of accusations, suspicions, divinations, and “punishments” of orphans, stepchildren, biological children, and other families’ children, is a set of institutionalized (yet highly variable) practices in which the assumption of a prior training in witchcraft or sorcery techniques has almost entirely dropped out of the equation (if indeed it had ever existed for the case of potential child witches). This “lack of an appeal to magical technologies” makes the current system of accusations even more pernicious, because instead of an appeal to independently discoverable (and perhaps verifiable) magical techniques and objects, and instead of using the collective prophetic evaluation techniques required in 1 Corinthians 14, everything seems left to a single diviner or two.

Consequently, the “divinatory discovery” of specific child witches involves an almost “circular” and “random” series of free-floating interpretations of the diviners’ (i.e., pastors’, self-appointed prophets’, etc.) own impressions and/or dreams, “signs” visible to some but not to others, and “impressions” that the accuser receives but to which others are impervious (see relevant sections of the present article). These are then used to construct a series of accusations and (usually abusive) “proof-tests” that prove equally circular in their logic but apparently “convincing” in their social and rhetorical impact.

While noting that the above practices are problematic, I believe we must also take into account the sheer terror that must drive the thoughts and hearts of many of the Congolese who become involved in these activities—both for the pastors and for the parents and for the neighbors. One rarely sees this psychological angst fully discussed in the relevant literatures (and the present paper also does not discuss it, though I am not complaining), but an intriguing and important additional aspect of this story could well be just how *scared* people are when they perform exorcisms or divinations or even think of driving out a witch. This is a set of issues that might be explored further by drawing on the examples of the psychological anthropological works of Tanya Luhmann and Julia Cassaniti as they explore such things as American Pentecostal prayer, Thai Buddhist spirit beliefs, and (most recently) perceptions of spirits and mediums.

If I am right in suspecting that there may be serious personal fear and tension in the prosecution of witchcraft accusations, then the opening to receive back a “reinserted child” must truly be an act of faith—either faith in God’s almighty power, or else faith in the

methods and recognitions encouraged by the EPED workers. Possibly both. As I reflected on this, I found myself wondering what the father in chapter four was thinking and feeling when he was on the verge of accepting his son back? What was going through his mind and nervous system as he was on the verge of re-decision? And what reconsiderations led him to be such an adamant and fearless opponent of the next accusation he heard. These may *look* like “a series of small victories,” but I suspect that collectively the stories retold in this article show evidence of much deeper—and much more genuine—reserves of faith in God than Congolese and Liberians and Ghanaians are often given credit for by outsiders. And I suspect that it is because of these reserves of faith that EPED practitioners are able to gain access to their clients at all. I wish them continued success.

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that these processes of recent change have been “low to the ground” and rooted in the same sorts of interactions that might be involved in an “informal set of conversations” (my phrase).



Dr. Edwin Zehner (Ph.D. Anthropology, Cornell University, USA) has been a Thailand specialist since his first visit in 1980. His first reference to 19th century “witch” accusations in northern Thailand came in an article published in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (JSEAS)* in 1996. He has been working comparatively on the issue (Thailand, Java, south and Central Africa, Papua New Guinea, etc.) since at least the early 2010s. He has teaching experience (graduate and undergraduate levels) in both Thai and North American universities. His scholarly writing has appeared in *JSEAS*, *Social Compass*, *Anthropological Quarterly*, *Culture and Religion*, *International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, and more.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Summary of, and Response to, Critiques and Commentaries of Other Scholars on the Subject of Witch Accusations and the Church

Robert J. Priest

On Knowing Humanity Journal exists to foster knowledge informed by both anthropology and Christian theology. Perhaps no topic more clearly invites such an interdisciplinary conversation than the topic of Christian engagements with witchcraft accusations in the contemporary world. This is both because of the gravity of what is at stake in human lives, and because of the complexity of the issues and dynamics involved. Thus this journal publishes here a major research report and analysis (Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell, 2020) intended to foster such an interdisciplinary conversation. In addition, it has extended an invitation to selected Christian scholars understood to have knowledge or expertise on the topic—an invitation to first read the lead essay and then to write their own brief response articles—focusing selectively on whichever issues or dynamics they choose. Rev. Abel Ngolo, as the leader of EPED, has also written an additional brief report in his own words of the ministry of EPED. These additional articles are included in this theme issue, along with this final article intended to summarize and engage some of the issues raised—towards the goal of helping focus an on-going project of conversation, research, analysis, and engagement. In short, this final article is not intended as a final word on the subject, but simply as an additional contribution to help to move the conversation forwards towards greater clarity in focusing questions, identifying what is at stake, carrying out follow-up research, and formulating proposals for the future.

It is a testament to the gravity and importance of our topic that nearly every person invited to write a response to the lead article, not only agreed to do so but actually completed their articles under rather tight time constraints. Contributors include anthropologists (Adeney, Gibbs, Jindra, McKee, McKinney, Ntarangwi, Rynkiewicz, Zehner), a linguist—and theologian (Anguandia-Alo), a sociologist (Mtika), historians (Minkema & Davis), world Christianity scholars

(Gifford, Gitau), missiologists (Lumeya, Chinyere Priest, Rasmussen, Sanou), an Old Testament scholar (Cookey Ekpo), theologians (Banda, Madueme, Mlenga, Mombo, Mpindi, Ngong, Nyasulu, Onyinah), and activists in combatting child-witch accusations (Howe & Stockley, Ngolo, Obot). Over half of the authors are African (from Cameroon, the DRC, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Zimbabwe), with most of the rest having studied or served in Africa for years, or in other regions of the world where witch accusations are currently an issue (such as New Guinea). We should all be grateful to these many contributors who took their time to help us think through the issues and move the conversation forward.

It will not be possible to fully do justice to the rich and complex insights and arguments articulated in the above articles—which of course need to be read first-hand to fully appreciate. But in hopes of keeping the conversation moving forward, I will provide in this final review a summary of, and response to, some of the core critiques, suggestions, and elaborations found in the preceding responses.

Theoretical Frames from Anthropology and the Human Sciences

Any contribution to knowledge on a given topic will be stronger if the writer has a good grasp of prior scholarly conversations and theories on a given topic. And indeed there is a large prior scholarly literature on witchcraft by anthropologists and historians. Many of the respondents here make use of this larger literature and theory either to suggest further elaborations on how to understand the relevant social, cultural, or psychological dynamics in the Kinshasa material or in some cases to critique something asserted in the lead research article. We begin here with consideration of theoretical frames from the human sciences and defer

to a later section the discussion of issues raised that are more properly theological in nature.

Functionalism

Several respondents (Adeney, Mlenga, McKinney, Minkema & Davis, Sanou) either allude to “functional” dimensions of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations or reference literature that explores witchcraft from within such a theoretical frame. And indeed the majority of anthropological treatments of witchcraft of an earlier era adopted such a frame, as is perhaps evident in Dr. Miriam Adeney’s helpful review (pp. 52-54) of some of this literature. In my view, there is an enormous amount to learn from this literature, and anyone wishing to engage the topic would do well to become familiar with this earlier literature. Indeed most respondents referenced such theory or writings in delimited ways that are largely compatible with our own analysis.

But since it was out of this functionalist frame that Adeney raised a substantive critique of a core claim made in our original article, her critique merits sustained attention. We had argued (Priest et al., p. 44) that in traditional cultures with interpersonal causal ontologies (witch ontologies), “whenever misfortune strikes, major efforts are exerted to identify the evil witch causing the problem, with special techniques and power . . . [employed] to identify those [individuals] thought to have caused the misfortune of others.” Adeney (p. 53) quotes us here and replies with a caveat that

this may not be the case everywhere. Clyde Kluckhohn asserted that Navaho¹, who value intense interdependence but who can grate on one another when confined together in their winter hogans, find outlets for expressing anger by accusing witches who are unnamed and “far away.” True, occasionally persons known and close at hand are accused. Then killing may result. But most accusations are against vague, distant witches. This allows Navaho an outlet for releasing stress while continuing to live together in harmony in close quarters (1944:89).

If I understand Adeney correctly, she is gently questioning both the sentence quoted and the assumption that traditional witch beliefs necessarily involve the larger complex of cultural patterns we described—and specifically our implied contention that witch ontologies rather consistently have negative social outcomes for actual people suspected and accused of witchcraft.

Anthropology is one of those disciplines where it is dangerous to make broad generalizations of the sort we provided since another anthropologist will frequently point out a culture where the generalization does not apply. But in this instance, I do not believe Navaho culture represents such a discrediting exception to what we claim, even based on a careful review of Kluckhohn’s own landmark book. Adeney’s summary of Kluckhohn is a plausible summary of Kluckhohn’s argument² and indeed is consistent with how other anthropologists have understood Kluckhohn (e.g. Douglas 1970 xxvi)—with witch accusations functional because primarily accusing vague distant witches, and thus not adversely affecting the accused.

But this seeming pattern appears to be partially a by-product of Kluckhohn’s interview method. Because of the Navaho’s “extreme reluctance” (p. 13) to discuss witchcraft with him,³ Kluckhohn would elicit stories by saying: “I am sure you must have heard some good stories about witches. I wish you would tell me things you have heard” (p. 14). He says “most of the anecdotes” obtained related to “witches not in the immediate community but ‘over the mountain,’ ‘across the reservation’—generally, the further away the better, it would seem” (p. 58). After years of research on the topic among the Ramah Navaho (a community of 500 members), he only heard whispers of three individuals *within the community* suspected of witchcraft. However, after additional years of research, he learned of twenty-six more individuals in this community accused of being witches (p. 58). This comes to a minimum of 4% of community members who were believed by other community members to have harmed someone in the community through witchcraft. Furthermore, when Navahos faced afflictions they suspected were caused by witches, they invited a diviner (either a “star gazer” or a “hand trembler”) to help

¹ The Navaho are a Native American group located in the American southwest.

² Kluckhohn (1944: 96) writes, “the fact that a high proportion of witchcraft gossip refers to distant witches makes Navaho witchcraft much more adaptive than most patterns which center witch activity within the group.”

³ Such reluctance was at least partly based on the historical moment in which Kluckhohn carried out his research (1922-1959). In an earlier past, Navaho witch trials and executions were often public events, as when in 1884 the Navaho leader Manuelito supervised the trials and execution of more than forty witches, including his own brother (104, 112, 208). By the time Kluckhohn first began visiting the Navaho 38 years later, the Navaho were under the legal and penal system of the US government which banned such trials and executions, treating them as criminal events, thus making their continued presence less frequent and more surreptitious—part of the conditions that made research on the topic so difficult.

identify the witch (p. 214)—which is what our quote above said was part of the pattern. Alternatively, the afflicted persons themselves took the hallucinogen *peyote*—with the most common reported *peyote* vision involving the identification of some specific person (“usually a relative or in-law”) as the witch who has caused the dreamer’s affliction (p. 232). I cannot find any stories in Kluckhohn’s book where an individual suffering affliction blamed some distant unknown party in another settlement, providing a harmless functional “outlet” or “displacement” onto distant unnamed others. Rather, Kluckhohn acknowledges that the most common person suspected and accused when a person is actually suffering mysterious affliction is the sufferer’s own brother or sister (pp. 26, 28, 102, 104, 112, 208), a maternal uncle (p. 59), or an affinal relative (i.e. a relative by marriage), with the “most frequent . . . involving a son-in-law accusing the father-in-law” (p. 59). That is, if one begins by asking for public anecdotes about witchcraft, one gets stories disconnected from the teller’s own affliction and located far away. Such stories can be told publicly precisely because they are not disruptively implicating nearby listeners or anyone in their family of being a secret murderer. But if one comes alongside afflicted individuals struggling to identify the persons understood to have caused their afflictions, then one learns it is close relatives that are suspected, with forms of divination used to help confirm suspects.

What happens to the accused among the Navaho? “If someone is sick,” perhaps after a “star gazer” or “hand trembler” or *peyote* vision has identified a suspect, the “suspected witch” is summoned to a meeting, frequently after being tied with a rope and led to the meeting. There he⁴ is questioned. If he refuses to confess, “he is tied down and not allowed to eat, drink or relieve himself until he confesses” (p. 48). “Hot coals” may be applied to his feet, to encourage confession (p. 49). Kluckhohn tells us, “if a witch refused to confess within four days, he was most often killed” (p. 49), often “by a group of relatives (and friends) of some supposed victim. The manner of execution varied but was usually violent—by axes or clubs” (p. 49). And again, “The killing of witches is uniformly described as violently sadistic” (p. 98). “In some cases, the accused was allowed to escape if he permanently left the community” (p. 48).

During the functionalist era of anthropology, while historians of European witchcraft viewed witchcraft beliefs as destructive and tending toward violence (and focused on consequences of witch accusations for the accused), anthropologists, as Mary Douglas (1970, xiii)

points out, argued that “the same beliefs in Melanesia or Africa . . . served useful functions.” Kluckhohn’s arguments exemplify such a functionalist logic. But his actual descriptive data (much of it buried in notes) fully supports the generalizations we provide on cultural patterns that accompany witch ontologies, patterns with decidedly negative consequences for significant numbers of accused people.

Indeed, unlike the majority of earlier functionalist anthropologists, our Kinshasa research, as well as many of our respondents (Chinyere Priest⁵, Cookey Ekpo, Gibbs, Howe and Stockley, Minkema and Davis, Ngolo, Obot, Rasmussen), placed the accused, and negative outcomes for the accused, at the center of research, analysis, and concern.

Thus, in his response, Reverend Abel Ngolo clearly does not view child-witch accusations as functional. He reports (p. 111) that “today, accusations of witchcraft are a veritable tsunami, a tidal wave that is sweeping across all of Congolese society,” with “so-called child witches—or more accurately, children baselessly accused of witchcraft” being identified as the primary “scapegoats” for the problems families experience. He writes, “it is unquestionably the case that the main actors in the validation of child-witch accusations come from the ranks of pastors, shepherds, apostles, prophets, archbishops and other Christian leaders” (p. 112). The result, Ngolo tells us, is

that there are thousands and thousands of children who are tortured and at times burned to death, who die of hunger, who are driven from their family home and who are then forced to live on the streets. All this happens because, in the name of the church, some of its leaders practice a type of “therapy” that is criminal in nature, wrongly accusing children as witches. (p. 112)

Readers will, of course, wish to read Ngolo’s full article (pp. 111–114).

Dr. Chinyere Priest (pp. 135–136) also places the accused, and negative outcomes for the accused, at the center of her analysis. She first focuses discussion on the case in our report of the accused child Sylvain Mbaki, and then describes and analyzes another single case of an accused Nigerian child: herself. As a result of childhood sexual abuse and related symptoms of trauma, combined with being born a triplet, as a child Chinyere was labeled *Ogbanije*, a witch thought to be the cause of family misfortunes. She writes,

⁴ Among the Navaho, most accused witches are male.

⁵ Despite having the same last name, Dr. Chinyere Priest is not related to Robert Priest.

This label influenced my behavior and self-perception. I would often stay alone in a dark room; I avoided contact with peers, limited my conversation with family, hated the opposite sex, and was fearful and timid. I thought of myself as a failure, as unwanted, unloved, foolish, and a nobody. (p. 136)

After living this way for two decades, she describes entering a different social “environment” where *Ogbanje* was no longer her identity, and where others viewed and labeled her as “intelligent, wise, and important.” She says “this changed my whole outlook to life, self-esteem, and behavior.” Although she does not spell it out, this transformation opened doors to her for ministry and academic success at the highest levels. She argues that the witch label itself was destructive, and its removal liberating. Dr. Chinyere Priest ends her article calling for readers to become sympathetic advocates and defenders of accused children, victimized through witch labels, and grounds her call in biblical mandates.

From New Guinea, with a parallel focus, Dr. Philip Gibbs (pp. 65–68), an anthropologist and Catholic priest, reports on his team’s three-year investigation into 557 people accused of witchcraft/sorcery—with careful research and analysis into who is accused and with what negative consequences. Similarly, Dr. Steve Rasmussen (pp. 137–141) describes how he and his Tanzanian Pentecostal colleagues and pastors went through a paradigm shift together, where they carefully tracked witch accusations, listened to the stories of those accused, examined the suspicious nature of the accusations, identified negative consequences to the accused, reconsidered biblical teaching on the matter—and came to actively resist the witch accusations themselves as negatively problematic.

Several respondents indirectly allude to the possibility that there may be models of church engagement where church leaders both confirm the child-witch diagnosis and intervene in a way that truly contributes to the long-term flourishing of the formerly accused. While I do not think current research encourages us to believe this is likely, clearly more research is needed that explores outcomes for the accused under variable ministry paradigms.

Feminism

Feminism has provided another influential theoretical approach in the study of witch accusations,

as briefly mentioned by various respondents. This is in part because, as Minkema and Davis report “women, and especially elderly and poor ones, were disproportionately accused, and women were among the great majority of those executed, to the extent that the European witch-hunt has been equated with gynocide, or women-hunting” (p. 96). Dr. Michael Rynkiewicz reports that “women are disproportionately accused worldwide” (p. 142), and Dr. Boubakar Sanou reports that in much of Africa, “the face of witchcraft” is often feminine (p. 146).

Feminists, unlike functionalists, have not been inclined to view such a cultural pattern of accusing and prosecuting women as witches as something functional or defensible, but rather as exemplifying victimization of women. But how exactly does this theoretical approach relate to our own research on child-witch accusations? I suggest that feminist assumptions or concerns show up in responses in a couple of ways.

Dr. Esther Mombo (pp. 103–104), a Kenyan theologian and member of the “Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,” richly describes the recent funeral of her mother and compares it to the funeral of her father 30 years earlier. She says the majority of Abagusii⁶ funeral participants were Christian but oscillated “between two world views” and were preoccupied during the funeral with witchcraft in ways that had not changed in thirty years. Only at the end does she briefly consider the Kinshasa material which is where she alludes to feminism. She writes,

in most of the stories about children accused of witchcraft, the child has a sad background of not being wanted. . . . The child . . . is a burden to the family and to get rid of the child, the child is accused of being a witch Until we sort out issues of ‘unwanted children . . . , children will continue to be accused of witchcraft to enable families to get rid of them. Witchcraft is not the real issue; the real issue is how we deal with a patriarchal society where children who do not fit a family setting as a result of a broken marriage or the death of a parent will continue to suffer. So it is not witchcraft that is the problem, but it is a peg on which questions of life are hung. (p. 104)

Dr. Mombo’s reference to patriarchy as Kinshasa’s root problem reflects feminist thought; but in the absence of further clarification from her, I am puzzled to see how she understands the Kinshasa data to fit this diagnosis.⁷ However, it is another aspect of Mombo’s

⁶ The Abagusii are also known as the Kisii or the Gusii.

⁷ In Kinshasa, boys are accused as often as girls. And women are accusers, as well as men. Both male and female pastors, prophets, and intercessors participate in the rituals of deliverance. Indeed, the most famous pastor worldwide whose ministry focuses on child-witch accusations is a woman, the Nigerian Pastor Helen Ukpabio. Even cross-culturally, as Dr. Mombo, and Dr. Adeney both

comments I wish to focus on here. As a feminist, Mombo perceives witch accusations (whether directed at women or children) not as stemming from purely good-faith efforts to act on what belief requires, but as serving instrumental and selfish goals—including centrally the goal of justifying oneself in eliminating an unwanted dependent. I do not think her insight requires the idea that people are necessarily deliberately and self-consciously lying, claiming to believe what they do not believe, for us to understand that instrumental considerations on the part of accusers might well have a contributing impact on the process. Mombo's perception of accused children as probable victims is likely an extension of her earlier feminist recognition of how frequently accused women have likewise been victims of similar accusations.

In short, many people who view accused children as victims, are uninclined to view accused adults within a similar frame. But it has been the prior feminist recognition of accused women as victims also that provides pressure and justification for broadening our concerns to other categories who suffer as a result of witch accusations.

Consider Dr. Rasmussen's response. He reports (p. 138) that in Tanzanian communities people "regularly neglect, beat, fine, or chase away people suspected of being witches, *especially older, divorced or widowed women*" (emphasis added). Houses are burned, property confiscated. Hundreds, he tells us, are hacked to death with machetes each year, according to official police records.⁸ It is in this context, a context where older women are the most common victims of witch accusations and violence, that a group of Tanzanian Pentecostal pastors, not unlike the EPED pastors of Kinshasa, have mobilized in defense of elderly women (and others) increasingly understood as victims of false witch-accusations and associated violence. As Rasmussen stresses (p. 137), when it comes to witch accusations and accompanying consequences, "across the world, people harm the poor, elderly, outsiders, and women much more than children."⁹ In short,

Rasmussen warns us, it would be a mistake for readers of the Kinshasa report to imagine that the only real victims of witch accusations that merit our concern are children. This report has broader potential implications for other categories of accused people, not least, women.

Psychological Analysis

Some scholars of witchcraft have contributed psychological analyses of witchcraft accusations. Kluckhohn, for example, merged functionalist with psychodynamic analysis—using psychoanalytic concepts like the unconscious, projection, compensation, outlet, displacement of aggression, scapegoating, wish fulfillment, etc. There is much to learn from his analysis.

While various respondents make brief allusions to psychological dynamics, only Dr. Wanjiru Gitau (pp. 72–73) makes them central to her analysis. In her response, Dr. Gitau, winner of *Christianity Today's* "2019 Book of the Year Award in Missions & the Global Church," adopts a theoretical frame from the psychologist Erich Fromm, and suggests we shift our focus from the accused to the accusers, and specifically, to the "pathological narcissism of accusers" (p. 72)—those who start and perpetuate the whole spiral of accusations and who ensure everyone becomes an accomplice in the accusations. Her exposition is highly suggestive, although as she recognizes, it would need further work to fully demonstrate. It would be interesting to see her take noted witch hunters from European history (Heinrich Kramer, Matthew Hopkins, Cotton Mather) or from African history (such as Nchimi Chicanga or Simbazako, as alluded to by Mtika, p. 109) and attempt to demonstrate the value of this theoretical frame for making sense of their motivations and dispositions. I am open to further persuasion should such a compelling analysis be provided, especially if the analysis is recognized as, at best, a partial analysis.¹⁰

acknowledge, there are cultures where men are accused more than women. In New Guinea, according to Dr. Gibbs' statistics, there are regions of New Guinea where women are accused most often, and other regions where men are accused most often.

⁸ Formally reported by the Tanzanian Human Rights Reports (with statistics from 2005 to 2018).

⁹ In his article, Gibbs reports that in their examination of over 500 cases of witch accusations in New Guinea, only two involved children under 11, with another 21 cases between ages 11 and 18.

¹⁰ To clarify, in many regions of the world, witch accusations are not driven by professional witch hunters, but by the afflicted in everyday life who, with the assistance of family and friends, take the initiative to invoke the help of diviners in confirming what they already suspect. So the analysis would need to be nuanced in a way that recognizes the diverse categories of people involved in accusations. I suspect Dr. Gitau's suggested explanation of narcissism pertains to, at best, a sub-set of those involved in witch accusations—although perhaps a sub-set with disproportionate impact. Furthermore, the idea that a subset of humans, witch-accusers, are uniquely "hardwired to carry out evil" (Gitau, p. 73) seems to me to err in the same way the original child-witch accusations err, that is by attributing exaggerated evil to a small sub-set of people, rather than recognizing the relevance of shared sinful inclinations in all humans. Finally, ideas, and not just psychological syndromes, have consequences. Part of the reason people attribute their

But whatever the limits of “narcissism” as an explanation, Gitau does provide an important suggestion. While witch accusers invite us to imagine evil in the accused, Gitau suggests we shift our focus rather to the moral agency of the accusers, and their often sinful and self-serving motivations. Gitau could easily have cited René Girard to this effect, the theologian that Dr. Michael Jindra cited in his response. Girard (2001) points out that when we accuse another of evil, we easily imagine ourselves as a righteous person combatting evil, doing the very work of God. But he points out that frequently the Bible names Satan as the great accuser—who through deceptive accusations and evil motivations sows discord, fear, distrust, violence, and death. In short, Girard suggests that witch accusers, rather than exemplifying the character and work of God in opposing evil, may well exemplify the character and work of Satan in furthering evil by means of false accusations. For Girard, such tendencies are primordially human, potentially present in all of us, not merely in the sub-set of those identified here as witch-accusers.

But setting aside biblical interpretation, Gitau’s suggestion that we consider the self-serving and flawed motivations of accusers, merits brief elaboration. This can be as mundane as Dr. Mombo’s observation that a parent in poverty, desperately wishing not to share her own child’s limited food with a step-child she is responsible for, might be motivated to endorse a witch accusation that relieves her of further responsibility for the step-child. Again, when a married man dies, and his brothers show up to accuse the widow of having killed him through witchcraft—the possibility that this serves their purposes of appropriating marital assets without obligations to care for the widow should be considered. Who benefits by the accusation? As historians of early Euro-American contexts, Minkema and Davis (p. 96) likewise find that witch accusations and executions “functioned as a way to remove burdensome weight from the community,” conveniently enabling communities to avoid compliance with actual “laws” requiring them “to care for the poor, the ill, and the handicapped.”

A slightly more complex psychological dynamic relates to envy. In a now classic article, the anthropologist George Foster (1972) demonstrated that around the world one of the most pervasive human dynamics is a fear of envy in one’s relatives, colleagues,

or neighbors. Thus when a woman gives birth in the presence of a barren neighbor, when one person eats food while a hungry relative watches, when one person is healthy and another sick, when one person achieves success and another failure—Foster points out that those who have more (more fertility, food, health, wealth) typically experience discomfort and anxiety in the presence of others who lack what they have, and who are assumed to be envious, maliciously so. People fear those who envy them and are inclined to attribute their misfortune to any nearby person thought of as envious. A woman whose baby dies when a barren woman is nearby easily attributes the death to the barren woman. Her own psychological fear of the barren woman’s envy provides the hypothesis for the accusation.¹¹

The noted historian Alan McFarlane has suggested that guilt, transformed into anger and fear, also sometimes underlies witch accusations. He noted that in European history when destitute widows continually approached their neighbors for food, those neighbors often turned them away—sometimes with an insult to discourage them from asking again. Rather naturally, vulnerable and desperately poor and hungry people whose requests are insultingly denied, are not happy people. McFarlane argues that he finds evidence that the consciences of many British more prosperous neighbors had been influenced by an ethic that told them they should help their poor neighbors. So when they refused to help, they felt guilty. But rather than acknowledge their discomfort as guilt, something to be repented of, they simply resented and felt angry towards those who made them feel this way. Anger, of course, seeks justifications that attribute evil towards the person one is angry at. And when one feels guilty, one implicitly feels afraid and imagines dangers. As the Bible articulates the psychological principle, “the wicked flee [even] when no one pursues” (Prov 28:1). Thus, the people one has sinned against, are often the very people the accusers fear, and later suspect, accuse, and prosecute as witches. And if the hungry person you turned away is really a witch, then there is no need for guilt in having turned them away. One’s anger at them is not misplaced. They deserve what they get when they are named witches and treated as such. The case literature on witchcraft is littered with examples of people accusing as witches the very people they themselves had earlier sinned against.

misfortunes to other people thought of as witches is because they have been inducted into an idea system that cues them to interpret their afflictions in this way. This holds true even for people who are not unusually narcissistic.

¹¹ Gitau also mentions envy (p. 72), drawing from Erich Fromm the idea that narcissists (and thus witch-accusers) might be motivated by their own envy. And while one can certainly find instances of people accusing other people who are better off than they are of harming them through witchcraft, the more frequent pattern as explicated by Foster involves people accusing others who are less well off of having caused their misfortune through witchcraft. Thus, Foster’s argument moves in the opposite direction. On his model, witch accusations are commonly motivated by fear of the envy of those around them who are less well off.

One of the most puzzling patterns we find with witch accusations worldwide is that those most likely to be accused are weak, handicapped, poor, strangers, orphans, widows, women, and the elderly. That is, people who by any normal measure are weak and powerless are imagined to have incredible power and privilege. But of course, if the psychological roots of witch accusations are underpinned by fear of the envy of less fortunate people around us, or by fear grounded in unacknowledged guilt for our failures to care for the weak and helpless among us, or grounded in an impulse to deny guilt by insisting the person we refuse to help is really an evil witch, not a victim, then it makes perfect sense that the targets of witch accusations would be the very people who, by any normal measure, are the weakest and most in need of help.

Of course, it is helpful to consider not only psychological dynamics in the lives of accusers but also in the lives of the accused. While none of the respondents attempts a fully psychological analysis of dynamics in the lives of accused children that might make them exhibit patterns likely to result in witch-accusations, allusions to such dynamics are widely present (see Cooley Ekpo, Howe & Stockley, Chinyere Priest, Ngolo, Onyinah). We've already summarized Dr. Chinyere Priest's analysis above, where she describes the psychological outcomes of being sexually abused and labeled *Ogbanje* (wishing to be alone in the dark, avoiding social contact, being fearful and timid, hating males) as providing the very pieces of evidence that could then be pointed to as proof that she was a witch.

Rev. Abel Ngolo, after detailing the sorts of tragedies and traumas experienced by those most likely to be accused (the death of parents, family breakups, extreme poverty, mistreatments), paraphrases the psychiatrist Marie-France le Heuzey, stating,

children accused of witchcraft feel that they have lost control over their lives. They constantly replay past scenarios of abuse through repetitive games involving all or part of the trauma they have experienced, or through recurring nightmares full of terrifying content. Sometimes traumatic memories reappear in the form of hallucinations. Children who have experienced rejection of this kind sometimes succumb to sleep disorders. They may have trouble falling asleep, or find that they wake up during the night for no reason. This can lead to irritability, anger, difficulty in concentrating, a decline in academic performance, and other behavioral struggles. (p. 112)

Much then of the training by EPED and by Howe and Stockley features a straightforward discussion of normal developmental processes in children. But since

neither our own original article nor responses of others provide much in the way of sustained interaction with relevant theory for analyzing this, we limit our comments here to the observation that clearly this is an area where a great deal more should be considered and explored.

Dynamics Related to Urban, Postcolonial, Neoliberal Contexts

An earlier anthropology of witchcraft was often functionalist, and often assumed the gradual disappearance of witchcraft discourses under modernity. But the more recent resurgence of witchcraft as a focus of study in anthropology, led by such scholars as Peter Geschiere and John and Jean Comaroff, suggest that conditions of modernity in urban, media-saturated, postcolonial, and neoliberal contexts (contexts stressing free market capitalism combined with extremely limited social services) provide an unusually fertile soil for the flourishing of witchcraft discourses. In his response, Dr. David Tonghou Ngong (pp. 115-117) cites from such an anthropological literature, arguing that African modernity exhibited a comparatively "dark side of modernity"—one that contributed to the "marginalization of the many who live in conditions of what has been described as abjection" (p. 117). He suggests that under such a "rapacious" version of metaphorically "cannibalistic" modernity, it should not surprise that witch accusations flourish (p. 117). In addition to Ngong, three anthropologist respondents (Dr. Mwenda Ntarangwi, pp. 118-121; Dr. Michael Jindra, pp. 79-80; and Dr. Michael Rynkiewicz, pp. 142-144) insightfully explore some of the contemporary dynamics which this more recent scholarship of witchcraft considers, dynamics which in Kinshasa become a "perfect storm" (to cite Jindra, p. 79) for the flourishing of witchcraft anxieties. Readers are encouraged to read their response-articles, which provide analyses largely consistent with our own understanding of social realities in Kinshasa.

However, one respondent concludes his otherwise excellent analysis with an argument that implicitly disagrees with a core element of our own analysis, and thus requires more sustained consideration. Rynkiewicz (p. 143) identifies the worsening situation in New Guinea after colonialism with respect to 1) "lack of adequate healthcare" and 2) "lack of trained and resourced law enforcement" as the two primary factors contributing to witchcraft accusations and violence. Church plans to combat witchcraft accusations, such as in the Congo, are "treating the symptoms," he argues, not the causes. He concludes his essay, "why would the church not want to start with root causes to reduce witchcraft accusations and violence?"

At one level this seems straightforward. If there were no suffering or affliction, for example, there would be no allegations that one's suffering and affliction are caused by witches. Any successful attempt to diminish the amount of suffering and affliction which people experience will naturally tend to diminish the frequency with which people attribute witchcraft harm to others.¹²

But it is not true that material conditions involving affliction and suffering automatically *cause* witch accusations. It is possible to have great suffering without attributing it to relatives or neighbors thought of as witches. The Siriono of Bolivia, with whom I grew up as the child of missionaries, experienced extreme poverty, violent predations from non-Siriono, social oppression, epidemics that wiped out large numbers—and never attributed any of their misfortunes to neighbors or relatives thought of as witches. This was not part of their worldview. Similarly, Koreans have had a long history of being invaded and oppressed by neighboring powers, with lower classes (*minjung*) and women often experiencing great suffering and oppression, and with a primary role of the Korean shaman (the *moodang*) being to address the unresolved suffering (*han*) people experience. Indeed, there are whole theological traditions in Korea that emerge from reflections on human suffering (on *han*). But Koreans, whether shamans or pastors, *do not attribute misfortune to witches*. Material conditions do not automatically produce witchcraft ontologies.

Meanings matter, and are not merely “secondary symptoms” or effects “caused” by material conditions. Indeed the need for meaning, and not only for material supports, is central to the human condition, something stressed by anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, theologians like Samuel Kunhiyop (2002), as well as implied by Jesus when he affirmed, “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Mtt 4:4). The word used by a majority of our respondents to name the fact and importance of variable meaning patterns is the term “worldview” (Adeney, Banda, Gibbs, Gifford, Madueme, Mlenga, Ngong, Nyasulu, Rasmussen, Sanou). No materialist underpinnings automatically or necessarily produce a particular worldview, although all worldviews are of course efforts to make sense of human experience. And if one examines religious traditions inductively, it quickly becomes clear that a primordial root of all human religious systems is the effort to make meaning in the face of human experiences of affliction and death (Kunhiyop 2002). And the way cultures make meaning of suffering and affliction varies. In some places, people's explanations of misfortune stress a logic of

karma, that everyone is only getting exactly what they deserve—perhaps based on sins in a prior life. In other places, people explain misfortune by reference to neighbors, relatives, or colleagues thought to have caused the misfortune through witchcraft. Other cultures stress other logics (see Shweder 2003, 74–133).

Our own analysis does not privilege either material conditions or meanings as more basic than the other but rather treats each as central. The reason this research focused heavily on the role of meaning is because we were empirically investigating not business leaders, government officials, medical personnel, or development agency staff—but pastors. And pastors, at the core, are in the meaning-making business. They help people make sense of afflictions and how to resolve them. We argue that in Kinshasa they play a central role in justifying and propagating child-witch accusation discourses. Having said that, as we demonstrated in our report, the pastors associated with EPED engage both with meaning and with modest efforts straightforwardly to help address material conditions related to issues of family illness, poverty, and discord.

Consider Rynkiewicz's emphasis on better training and material support for police. The suggestion that police (and the judiciary) are actors that can truly make a difference to child-witch accusations is endorsed by other respondents also (see Anguandia-Alo, Howe and Stockley, Ngolo, Obot, Onyinah). But again, a strengthening of laws and police presence not accompanied by a shift in understood meanings does not consistently produce desired results. In Malawi, for example, to accuse someone of being a witch was made a prosecutable offense in 1911. And as both Dr. Mlenga (pp. 99–102) and Dr. Nyasulu (pp. 122–128) point out, historic Malawi churches, such as the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), likewise put into place policies prohibiting witch accusations and prohibiting church members from visiting diviners for help in identifying the suspected witch responsible for their affliction. Despite laws and church rules, both Mlenga and Nyasulu indicate that a high proportion of Malawians, including faithful church members, continue to believe that their misfortunes are caused by relatives or neighbors who are secretly witches, and they continue to believe that diviners can correctly identify those harming them through witchcraft. Nyasulu shows from his dissertation research that within a ten-year period, 595 people from eight large CCAP congregations were placed under church discipline for consulting diviners for help in identifying witches (p.

¹² Dr. Mwenda Ntarangwi (p. 120), however, questions whether local churches and pastors “have enough resources to set up families materially so that they are independent and don't find themselves in another situation of material want and revert to reducing the number of dependents through witchcraft accusations?” And even under improving economic conditions, tragedies still occur. That is, I understand Dr. Ntarangwi as affirming that the solution cannot simply be a material solution.

124). Church rules were in place, and enforced, forbidding the practice of consulting diviners to help identify witches. But church members were still convinced their afflictions were due to witches. And so, like King Saul who visited a diviner from Endor under cover of darkness (I Samuel 28), many CCAP Christians continue surreptitiously to seek wisdom from diviners. Belief matters.

Similarly, as Dr. Collum Banda points out in his reply, Zimbabwe has long had laws that forbid “labelling any person a witch.” But witch hunts continue to thrive, in part, because relevant “authorities and ordinary people believe in the genuineness of the witch-hunts” (p. 58). When the police themselves believe community deaths are actually caused by secret witches in their midst and believe witch hunters are truly identifying the murderous persons causing the deaths, they are unmotivated to actively prosecute anyone for identifying such persons as witches. And community members at large, who likewise believe the charges, are unlikely to notify and appeal to the police or other authorities to intervene. The issue here is not merely a matter of having a materially well-supported police force but involves at the core the question of what people believe to be true.

And a significant proportion of contemporary Africans, as many of our respondents point out, do believe that some people cause harm to others through witchcraft. A law telling them not to say what they actually believe to be true is unlikely to have an optimum impact. Consider the noted Congolese theologian, pastor, and author Rev. Dr. Paul Mbunga Mpindi, whose weekly radio broadcast is heard across Francophone Africa. In his response to our Kinshasa report, Dr. Mpindi (pp. 105–107) tells us about a young brother and sister (10 years old and 14 years old) who caused their father’s blindness through witchcraft and affirms that children do harm others through witchcraft. I will address his response further below but wish here merely to suggest that a law forbidding him to say what he believes is of limited value. And what pastors and theologians such as Dr. Mpindi believe and teach is not a secondary matter, but powerfully shapes the meanings people live by and act upon.

In the case of Rev. Abel Ngolo and the EPED network of pastors in Kinshasa that work with street children, it is true that they highly value the Congolese law against labeling any child a witch. And they are networked with both police and the judiciary. On selected occasions with particularly serious cases of abuse, they have reported pastors to police, and have helped secure their prosecution, conviction, and imprisonment. But their primary use of the law is in appealing to it in their training, and in their interventions on behalf of children. But here is the point: It is only because these pastors have gone

through a process where they themselves have come to see child-witch accusations and accompanying practices as invalid that they actively (and selectively) utilize the law and its enforcement agents against what they now see as abusive practices. Indeed, as is also emphasized in Howe and Stockley’s article on various parallel networks of pastors organized to combat child-witch accusations, pastoral training related to child-witch accusations is often broadened to include relevant community partners, including the police. That is, unless police also go through a transformative process intellectually, they will be less than helpful partners in protecting such children. Likewise, the fact that the Tanzanian Pentecostal pastors that Rasmussen reports on make explicit use of police (pp. 138–139) in their activist engagement on behalf of accused elderly women is because they have actually gone through a paradigm shift where they no longer are inclined to agree that these women are truly secret killers in their midst. Only where believed meanings and laws are congruent does one find positive cooperative synergies between Christian leaders and legal enforcement, as evidenced among selected networks of pastors in Kinshasa and Tanzania.

In summary, to address relevant meanings is not to address merely secondary symptoms—but in fact, addresses an essential precondition for adequate engagement. Indeed, I suggest that pastoral and theological engagement has greater potential to make a difference across the continent of Africa than simply adding additional laws and providing more support for police. And indeed, it is not secular human rights activists or secular anthropologists that are in a good position to foster such a constructive reconsideration of meanings. Rather African Christian theologians are in the strongest position to make a difference—because only they have the authority and trust to engage fully at the level of ideas. The very reason that this report was placed in this explicitly Christian journal, and with African theologians invited to engage a conversation with Christian anthropologists, historians, and others on these issues, is out of the conviction that meanings matter, that the meanings which pastors embrace and communicate in their ministries have great potential for affecting human lives, and that African theologians are in a unique position to influentially engage African pastors as well as broader Christian audiences.

Contemporary secular anthropologists who write about witchcraft from the tradition represented by Geschiere and the Comaroffs typically treat witch discourses as symbolic and metaphoric commentary on unjust social power dynamics under postcolonial and neoliberal/capitalist material conditions, a symbolic way of “expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities” (Comaroffs 1999, as quoted by Ntarangwi 2020, p 119). Witch accusations, in this

tradition, seldom are analyzed with a focus on the negative social outcomes which the accusations themselves produce.¹³ The primary evil they focus on is the sociopolitical and economic order, with witch discourses merely secondary symptoms of, and insightful social commentary on, that order. The mode of analysis of many anthropologists in this tradition is to ascribe meanings to the witch discourses other than the conscious meanings in the minds of those generating such discourses.¹⁴ In this anthropological tradition, beliefs are treated “as metaphors” (West 2007), not as truth claims. Stories of cannibalistic witches are really commentary about predatory capitalism—which is metaphorically cannibalistic. So when Harry West heard people in Mozambique report on witches that turn into lions and kill people, he summarized his analysis arguing that these stories of witch-lions involved metaphoric commentary on contemporary “predatory” unjust economic behaviors. But his Mozambican audience simply remained puzzled by the analysis, replying that he had misunderstood. Human witches, and the human witches who turn into lions, are not symbols. They are real. Lions are lions. People are sometimes witches. And the people who turn into lions and kill people are both witches and lions. West acknowledges that the anthropological mode of analysis he had learned failed altogether to engage belief straightforwardly on its own terms, with the result being an almost total inability to carry on a meaningful conversation across cultural divides about the meaning of witch discourses.

While Kenyan anthropologist Mwenda Ntarangwi quotes the Comaroffs, he clearly recognizes and indicates that our Kinshasa report differed in its approach from that of the Comaroffs (pp. 119–120). Specifically, he acknowledges the adverse outcomes of witch accusations on actual accused children and makes this recognition central to his own treatment. Furthermore, he provides a nuanced and compelling discussion of belief and worldview, and of how Christianity itself enables a possible engagement at the level of belief and of belief transformation.

Theological and Philosophical Considerations

This journal theme issue is intended not only to foster engagement with anthropological considerations but to move into a discussion of theological considerations also. And respondents clearly were concerned to address such matters also. Nigerian theologian Dr. Samuel Kunhiyop (2002, 133) identifies two sorts of philosophical/theological considerations that we should attend to when considering witchcraft: epistemology and metaphysics/ontology.

Epistemology

Epistemology poses the question of how one knows something to be true. Kunhiyop reminds us that simply because people believe something is true, does not mean that it is true (2002, 133–134). Dr. Andy Anguandia-Alo emphasizes a similar point in his response (pp. 55–56), as do others (Banda, Cookey-Ekpo, Gibbs, Gifford, Madueme, McKee, Ngolo, Ngong, Obot, Rasmussen). And if the truth claim is unusually consequential—such as the claim, “Nzuzi murdered his mother through witchcraft,” then it becomes extremely important that such a claim about Nzuzi be subjected to careful scrutiny. How do we know Nzuzi actually caused his mother’s death through witchcraft? Such a question requires attention to both epistemology and ontology. And indeed, each is dependent on the other.

A. Diviners, Shamans, Witchdoctors, and Prophets

In traditional societies with witchcraft ontologies, that is, in societies where it is believed that people’s misfortunes are caused by other people with the ability to exercise invisible witch power to harm, such beliefs demand, and are normally accompanied by the presence of matching beliefs about an epistemology that permits such invisible agency to be reliably detected and perceived. And normally this involves the belief that a certain class or classes of persons have the preternatural ability reliably to discern who is exercising invisible witch power to harm. In the Amazon, this knowledge

¹³ Peter Geschiere’s recent book (2013) represents a partial break with this tendency, as Geschiere now recognizes that witch discourses do contribute to pervasive patterns of interpersonal distrust.

¹⁴ There is indeed a long history in anthropology of treating verbal assertions about beliefs involving supernatural realities not as actual claims about ultimate reality (which an “intellectualist tradition” within anthropology affirmed), but by reinterpreting such verbal assertions about belief as actually symbolic or metaphoric of the social order (what Skorupski calls a “symbolist approach”). Claims about supernatural realities were symbolic ways of talking about actual empirically observable social realities among people. For a review and critique of this old tendency (present within functionalism, and later in Marxist inspired approaches), see Skorupski (1976).

specialist is typically referred to as a shaman.¹⁵ In Africa, such traditional categories of persons with assumed expertise are most frequently referred to (in English) as “diviners” or “witchdoctors.” Such magico-religious professionals appeal to their mastery of divinatory rituals and techniques and knowledge of relevant signs, and to their own preternatural capacity to know, to see, or even to “smell” the witch (Sanou, p. 146).

Nyasulu and Mlenga provide a rich description of tensions felt by many fellow Malawian Christians today. In a country that is majority Christian, Christians often retain a witchcraft ontology, with “nearly every sickness, death or misfortune interpreted as caused by witches” (Mlenga, p. 99). And yet mainline churches forbid them to seek help from diviners, and punish them when they do (Nyasulu, p. 124). Their witch ontology, which their churches failed to persuasively discredit, requires an accompanying epistemology that the mainline churches simply do not offer. Thus, many surreptitiously seek help from non-Christian diviners (*ibid*). There is necessarily an inherent tension in having a witchcraft ontology without an accompanying epistemology for tracking and counteracting the exercise of such invisible evil power. But more recently, as both Mlenga and Nyasulu point out, other churches increasingly offer the divination route to knowledge traditionally offered only by diviners. Under the rubric of a Christian vocabulary of prophecy, some churches host prophets said to be “endowed with the gift of uncovering hidden things,” prophets who are able to “smell out who is a witch or not” (Mlenga, p. 100). In a competitive religious market place, as people leave older churches for newer churches that can help them address witchcraft, older churches rethink their ministries, with even some Malawian CCAP pastors conducting “deliverance sessions for children accused of witchcraft” (Nyasulu, p. 124). In our survey of Kinshasa pastors, 77% of respondents report that in their own church certain church leaders are believed to have the ability to identify who is or is not a witch (Priest et al., p. 26), with a high percentage of respondents (69%) indicating that in child accusation cases they were familiar with, people concluded the child was a witch, at least in part, because a pastor, prophet, or intercessor identified them as such (Priest et al., p. 24). A puzzle in all this, as Dr. Nyasulu points out, is that “African pastors, bishops, prophets or apostles” are doing “exactly what the diviners did before Christianity came” (Nyasulu p. 125).

B. Supposed Evidences of Witchcraft

And yet, usually, diviners and prophets alike do not merely appeal to their own raw authority, but also make an appeal to a larger epistemology of supposed evidences to back up their assertions with ostensibly independent evidence that they can appeal to. This evidence related to such things as dream content, confessions, or even visible signs that one is a witch.

Indeed, some respondents (Zehner, pp. 149–152; Ntarangwi, pp. 118–121) expressed appreciation that the EPED pastoral team did not attempt to critique the entire metaphysic of witchcraft causality but rather focused on the more modest epistemological concern with how specific people arrive at the conclusion that a specific child was the cause, through witchcraft, of misfortune in the life of another. By focusing the concern at this level, it remains clear what is at stake. To accuse someone of murder and have others accept the accusation as true is enormously consequential, with the Bible itself repeatedly cautioning against the possibility of people testifying against others to consequential falsehoods. Thus, the issue framed by EPED pastors in the context of real-life accusations of children cannot be understood as purely “theoretical” or “hypothetical.” Justice itself, for actual real children, is at stake. Furthermore, in concrete settings where someone is accused of harming another through witchcraft, it is possible through careful inquiry to actually elucidate the proposed evidence and logic upon which the accusation is based—and to subject such purported evidence and logic to careful scrutiny. Thus, following Kunhiyop’s recognition that the logic of evidences and proofs has direct consequences for the accused, our research explored inductively the claimed evidences of witchcraft that pastors appealed to—ranging from dream content to sleep disturbances. The intent of our research focus on epistemology, and of EPED pastoral focus on epistemology when defending children, was not to mock or laugh at the supposed “absurdity” of cultural ideas,¹⁶ but to help people understand the relevant phenomena being appealed to in straightforward ways that do not imply or require a witch interpretation. In the earlier history of European witchcraft, witch accusers similarly appealed epistemologically to “spectral evidence,” to the presence of moles (“witches teats”) on someone’s body, or to the presence of a spot on the body impervious to pain (tested through “pricking” by specialist prickers) as evidence that someone was a witch. Pivotal to the

¹⁵ Mike Mtika argues in his response to our paper that witchdoctors can “tell who is a witch or not while the shaman can only talk of evil things that a person is experiencing” (p. 109). While it is true that shamans in some cultures that do not stress witch ontologies (such as in Korea) do not use their claimed power to name witches, in cultures that do have witch ontologies, the shaman does claim the power to name witches and to counteract their evil (see R. Priest 2015b; Brown 1989)—and for purposes of this analysis such shamans are not meaningfully different from what Mtika calls “witchdoctors.”

¹⁶ As Dr. Mike Mtika seems to have inferred, p. 108.

European eventual repudiation of witch trials and executions was the growing recognition that these supposed proofs provided epistemologically flawed grounds for convicting anyone of being a witch. The eventual decisive repudiation by Boston ministers of the validity of spectral evidence, for example, played a key role historically in the cessation of witch hunts and executions in New England.

There are children on the streets of Kinshasa today because pastors affirm that their bedwetting, their dreams of flying, their nightmares provide proof that they are witches. This is why EPED pastors subject such supposed proofs to critique. Both EPED pastors and other similar pastoral groups reported on by Howe and Stockley (pp. 74-79) achieve much of their success by their effectiveness in critically engaging the folk epistemology of supposed witch-guilt. Likewise, respondent Maïmouna Jessica Obot (p. 129-131), as a lawyer herself, has a special concern for flawed evidences being appealed to. In her own work training pastors in Nigeria, she explicitly critiques such supposed evidences of child-witchcraft. She indicates that in the earlier history of the region of Germany where she now lives many children were accused and sometimes burned at the stake for witchcraft. And it was a Christian lawyer, like herself, the professor of law Friedrich von Spee, whose writings critiquing the use of flawed evidences in witch trials proved influential in the eventual demise of witch hunts in his region of Europe (Obot, p. 130). Epistemology matters.

C. Confession: The Ultimate Proof

As our Kinshasa research showed, the confession of the alleged witch him or herself is often the most important culminating evidence appealed to (Priest et al., pp. 23-27, 33, 37). Indeed, the sole respondent in this theme issue to explicitly defend the idea that children can indeed harm others through witchcraft was the Congolese theologian Dr. Paul Mpindi. While his own graduate training was in biblical and theological studies, his actual defense of the idea that child witches cause harm through supernatural powers is not based on any exposition of biblical teaching, but on an exposition of witch confessions. Specifically, he appeals to an experience he had (pp. 105-106) where two young children in Kinshasa, a 14-year-old girl and her 10-year-old brother, confessed that they caused their father's blindness through witchcraft. He reports that he "led them to Christ," and had them "renounce the devil and sorcery as well."

Because of the centrality epistemologically of witch confessions to witch ontologies, before reflecting further on the possible implications of witch confessions, consider three additional contrastive confessions, one from Nigeria, one from Kinshasa, and another from New Guinea.

Case #1: Rev. Haruna Tukurah was called to the home of a dying woman in Nigeria, where the woman's six-year-old daughter was said to have bewitched her mother. Rev. Tukurah recounts¹⁷ asking the little girl if it was true that she was a witch and had caused her mother's sickness. "Yes," the little girl replied. "How did you do it?" Tukurah asked? "Like this," she answered, as she revolved her hands in a circular motion. Tukurah told her, "Your mother loves you and takes care of you. She is about to die. Do you want her to die?" Shaking her head violently back and forth, the little girl sobbed, "No! No!" "Do you think you could undo your witchcraft?" Rev. Tukurah asked. "I'll try!" she replied, and reversed the order of her circular motions. Rev. Tukurah recalled the little girl sobbing and convulsively rotating her hands . . . as her mother, a short while later, breathed out her last.

Case #2: While in Kinshasa in May of 2017, I met the French photojournalist Gwen Dubourthoumieu¹⁸ who described photographing and hearing the following public confession of a thirteen-year-old girl in a Kinshasa church that emphasized deliverance of child witches.



I was inducted into witchcraft by my father's older brother when I was six years old. I became the wife of Lucifer and we had two children. I bewitched people using my eyes. When I looked at someone I

¹⁷ Rev. Haruna Tukurah shared this account at a chapel I attended (January 18, 2012) at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya.

¹⁸ Gwen Dubourthoumieu granted permission (May 15, 2017) to include this account and use this picture.

neutralized his thoughts so that I had the opportunity to kill him easily. 'Bénie, 13 years old.

Case #3: In a New Guinea village, split evenly between Anglicans and Nazarenes, a dispute left an old widow feeling wronged, but without social recourse. Weeks later the wife of the village headman died, and the old woman was blamed for the death, accused of being a witch. She denied the charge but was beaten until her ribs were cracked and her arm and hand bones crushed. She eventually confessed that she was a witch, that she had caused the death, and that she had two accomplices. The two women that she named confessed more quickly than she had, and thus were not beaten as severely. Neville Bartle (2001, 320-325; 2005, 314-321), who recounts the incident, arrived a few days after these events, and describes the old woman as "the most pathetic, shriveled up woman I have ever seen." Locked up, she had not been given food or drink for five days. She had a high fever, and pus drained from her hand into a puddle in the ashes. A missionary gave her water and the Nazarene village pastor questioned the three women before the missionaries. Each woman reaffirmed their witch confessions. The old woman was then told that "although she had committed many evil deeds, there was forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ." The pastor "led the women in a sentence-by-sentence prayer of confession and repentance." The old woman died the next day.

It is worth keeping in mind that witch confessions are rather different from the relatively straightforward confession that one has stolen food from the kitchen, or even that one has participated in a forbidden ritual practice. In witch confessions, one is confessing to having harmed another through witchcraft. In Dr. Mpindi's case, the children confess that they caused their father's blindness. In Rev. Tukura's account, a six-year-old girl confesses to causing her mother's illness (and death). In Bénie's account, she confesses to using her eyes to kill people. And in the New Guinea women's case, they confess to murder. In short *witch confessions* are simultaneously *assertions of a witch ontology*. They constitute, in other words, an *assertion of a theodicy*—an explanation of misfortune, suffering, and death.

And *witch confessions* are frequently simultaneously also *witch accusations* against others. Dr. Mpindi's two children named an aunt as a witch also; Bénie identified her father's older brother as also a witch, and; the elderly New Guinea woman named two other women as also being witches. To accept the confession as true requires accepting the metaphysical view that afflictions are supernaturally caused by witches, and it requires accepting the consequential truth that secondary persons named in these accounts are also guilty of being witches who harm and kill

others. And in the case of Bénie, it involves the additional idea that humans can marry and have offspring with demons. If one collected such confessions across the history of witch confessions worldwide, one would find an astonishing range of beliefs about the powers and activities of witches—many of which, by criteria of historic Christian orthodoxy, would seem to be less than fully orthodox.

Dr. Mpindi reports (p. 105) that "these two kids told me so much about the inner workings of the dark world" that they could not possibly "know so much about sorcery without themselves being sorcerers." But in the social world of Kinshasa where witchcraft stories are ever present, in homes, churches, and on TV (Pype 2012), it should not surprise that many children know a great deal about shared cultural ideas of how witchcraft works. Furthermore, those who've studied such confessions report that a high proportion of witch confessions emerge after an earlier history of witch suspicions—with significant social efforts to pressure suspects into confessing and then naming other witches. One goal of witch hunts the world over is to elicit persuasive confirmatory confessions. Such confessions can then be repeated to new audiences. From the famous witch hunt of Salem, Massachusetts to Navaho witch inquiries, to the just mentioned New Guinea witch confessions, those who refused to confess faced torture and even death. Those who confessed, and then named some other person as also a witch, fared far better.

In Kinshasa, as we've seen, it is also believed that a child might not even know they are a witch, and only by examining such things as dream content is one able to know this. Children are coached to understand their dreams as actual memories of what they have actually done. In Kinshasa, children grow up hearing lurid stories of witchcraft. They are warned frequently never to accept food from strangers lest the food be a means to turn them into witches. So when they go to sleep hungry, as many orphans or step-children do, it is hardly surprising that they dream of food, of a stranger offering them tempting food, food which they accept, but where their dream immediately transitions to some of the very witch outcomes their culture has taught them will naturally result. On one model, cultural cuing produces the very dream content that can then be pointed to as evidence of witchcraft. Many confessions, as Onyinah (2012, p. 53) documented, are based purely on dream content—although usually public confessions do not disclose this fact.

And even if confessors truly have encountered a world of Satanic darkness, given that Satan is presented in Scripture as the great deceiver and accuser, why would one trust them to grasp and convey clear and accurate understandings of that dark supernatural

world, of how it is that the evil of affliction occurs, and of which humans truly caused such afflictions?

D. The Test of Scripture

Christians have historically believed that our knowledge of God and of supernatural realities is possible only because God desires to disclose such knowledge to us—with Scripture understood as revelation from God that should be trusted as reliable. Thus our initial report (Priest et al., 2020) suggested that the Bible historically has often been mistranslated and misinterpreted in supporting witch ontologies, and we invited a conversation about what Scripture does or does not affirm about the idea that some people cause misfortunes to other people by means of witchcraft. Dr. Paul Gifford (pp. 70-71) contends in his response that witch ontologies reflect the influence of a Pentecostal “enchanted *imaginaire*” in which pastors (such as Nigerian Daniel Olukoya) explicitly appeal to Scripture, but clearly read their convictions into the Bible, rather than deriving them from what the Bible actually affirms. “If, like Olukoya, one is determined to find this worldview in the Bible, one obviously can” (p. 71). While Gifford (p. 70) acknowledges that our article (Priest et al., 2020) raises translational and interpretive issues of “immense sophistication” in how Scripture has been translated and interpreted, and while he seems to agree with our suggestion that people have been wrong to understand Scripture as affirming witch ontologies, he nonetheless contends that engaging such a biblical discussion is destined to fail in a context where the enchanted witchcraft *imaginaire* is so tenaciously affirmed and taken for granted. People will interpret Scripture to say what they wish it will.

It is interesting to consider the many responses to our article in the light of Gifford’s claim. Admittedly, our article focused most attention on the ministry of EPED, a ministry that does not directly challenge the witchcraft ontology—but nonetheless achieved success by challenging particular accusations of particular children based on particular sorts of flawed evidence. And, of course, our article touched on a wide variety of issues and invited responses from people with quite different sorts of disciplinary strengths. The result is that many respondents simply did not directly address one way or other the section of our article related to biblical interpretation. However many did recognize that there is an open issue to be discussed, and a number addressed this directly. Only Dr. Mpindi (p. 105) directly and unambiguously defended a witch ontology, contending that “witchcraft is real,” that witches cause harm, and that “no true African will ever doubt that.” But while he claims to have acquired his understandings through “biblical teaching and practices regarding spiritual warfare” (p. 105), he does not engage any specific text or any of our own article’s discussions

related to biblical interpretation—instead focusing on a witchcraft confession as core to his argument. Naturally, we would like to see him engage relevant biblical texts in light of our article, as well as the writings of others such as Adu-Gyamfi (2016), Kunhiyop (2002), or Onyinah (2001; 2012)—and not least in light of a number of the responses in this very theme issue (Banda, Cookey-Ekpo, Madueme, McKee, Ngong, and Rasmussen). Of course, the fact that he did not engage this discussion here, does not mean he might not do so at a future time.

By contrast, consider the response of Nigerian Old Testament scholar, Dr. Paul Cookey Ekpo, who comes from a region of Nigeria where children are routinely accused of being witches. He has done research on child-witch accusations in his home area and has also focused his Old Testament research on biblical passages historically understood as related to witchcraft. He engages exegetically a number of biblical passages and themes (e.g. “mystical witchcraft seed”) touched on in our data. He writes,

As a biblical theologian, I have not come across any biblical text that teaches the ‘witch’ or ‘witchcraft’ idea where some people, through evil occult power, are secretly the cause of other people’s misfortunes. I agree with Priest, Ngolo and Stabell when they say, “But we wish to illustrate the possibility that Christians have fundamentally misread their Bibles, and thus that a larger conversation is needed that involves the biblical text, later translations, anthropological categories, and theological reflections” (43). This is never more true than now and there is a great need to help most Christians in this direction. (p. 63)

Cookey Ekpo’s article interacts in affirming ways with a variety of core claims made in our article about what Scripture does, or does not, affirm. The article by Dr. Steve Rasmussen is particularly interesting in this respect, as it documents a process whereby a whole group of Tanzanian pastors went through a transformative conversation about what Scripture did or did not teach about the causes of affliction, and in which they embraced a transformed metaphysic and model of spiritual warfare. They retained robust ideas and practices related to the demonic but came to reject the witch ontology.

In short, while Gifford is not wrong to think that some people are likely to be impervious to careful reconsiderations of epistemology (and of Scripture)—an attribute not uncommon around the world—he is wrong if he was intending to make this a blanket generalization about African theologians and pastors. The very nature of this theme issue, and of the range of responses presented, demonstrates the possibilities of new

conversations and emerging understandings of these difficult matters. Scripture, of course, is only one part of various sorts of considerations that must be engaged on behalf of moving us forward into better understandings and ministry practices. The next section will briefly review responses that relate to Kunyihop's concern with metaphysics and ontology—while also continuing the discussion of Scripture.

Metaphysics/Ontology

While Cookey Ekpo engaged metaphysical issues exegetically, the Cameroonian theologian Dr. David Tonghou Ngong, explores witchcraft ontologies in worldview terms. He reports that many foundational issues are “located in the social and cultural *imaginaire* into which people are socialized and from which they draw their interpretations of the world” (p. 115). Furthermore, this *imaginaire* is often “seen as central to the growth of Christianity in Africa, as the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako claimed” (p. 115). The problem, Ngong contends, is that “the notion of witchcraft” is a core part of this “spiritualized imagination.” He writes,

This imagination has been hailed in the study of African Christianity as the fertile soil that has led to the growth of the Christian faith in Africa. Thus, rather than challenging this imagination, it is sometimes presented as an imagination that needs to be nurtured in order to fend off atheism or the westernization of African Christianity. (p. 116)

This poses, in his view, difficult questions (p. 115, 116), including the following. “Does Christianity enjoy the possibility for growth only where the witchcraft imagination is preserved?” “How can one save the church from an unholy alliance with the accusation of children as witches while at the same time ensuring that Christian belief is not adversely affected?” And again, “Is the Christian faith or Christian theology capable of arresting an *imaginaire* that seems to give it life?”

Ngong reminds readers that EPED pastors worked to combat specific accusations of child witchcraft, but were unwilling to consider a critique of the entire witchcraft worldview, instead signaling that any theologian or pastor who advocated this was not to be trusted. By contrast, Ngong calls for a “frontal challenge to the worldview” that gives witchcraft life (p. 116). He writes,

While the individualized pastoral response this project encourages may begin to challenge this worldview, the fact that the pastors who administer the process themselves do not seem to be critical of the belief in witchcraft seems to skirt the

foundational problem for the symptom. It may well be that challenging the symptom may eventually lead to addressing the foundational *imaginaire* that breeds it. However, a direct challenge of this *imaginaire* is still needed. (p. 116)

Again, the report by Rasmussen (2020, pp. 137-141) on Pentecostal pastors would seem to provide one example of a group of pastors at a grass-roots level, where some pastors are actually going through a paradigm shift of a sort envisioned by Ngong, one that calls into question the underlying witchcraft ontology.

As a theologian, Dr. Collum Banda (2020, pp. 57-60) likewise invites us to consider the issues in theological terms. He draws from his expertise on African Traditional Religion (ATR) and develops the argument that churches practicing child-witch deliverance are promoting a flawed soteriology, one which owes its logic (an “impersonalization of God” leading to “superstitious solutions”) to African Traditional Religion rather than to a biblical soteriology. His insightful analysis and biblical exposition merits careful attention.

As an anthropologist and former missionary linguist, Dr. Rob McKee, likewise frames his response in theological and biblical terms, appealing specifically to the doctrine of creation. He argues that Scripture teaches that people and the rest of creation are created entities that exhibit only those powers with which they are endowed by their creator, but that people continually and imaginatively wish to ascribe attributes and powers to created entities or persons that they were never endowed with. We should neither imagine, nor fear, nor ascribe such supposed powers to persons or idols—as various biblical passages teach.

Finally, the systematic theologian (and former medical doctor) Dr. Hans Madueme (2020, pp. 83-86), suggests that against the backdrop of Western naturalism, it is easy to imagine supernaturalism as a single unitary contrasting system. But he invites us to recognize that worldwide there are diverse forms of supernaturalism—none of which should be assumed uncritically to be precisely the same as the supernaturalism found in Scripture. He calls for us to subject our notions of supernaturalism, including those tied to beliefs about witch powers, to Scriptural scrutiny. Indeed, he argues that “adopting the Protestant Scripture principle (*sola scriptura*) rules out indigenous notions of witchcraft” (p. 84). He writes,

In the first place, I do not apologize for privileging *sola scriptura*. Any theological tradition that does not habitually align itself with the teaching of Scripture deserves to die. “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa 40:8). In the second place, taking the Bible

seriously is not a Trojan horse for the compromises of Western Christianity. True allegiance to Scripture is a long way from the “excluded middle” Paul Hiebert warned against in his classic essay (1982). As believers who are united with Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are *de facto* protagonists in a life-and-death spiritual warfare. African Christians can help the global church retrieve an unflinchingly biblical supernaturalism. However, African Christianity will only lead the way if it jealously guards the canonical witness and its rule over the life of the church. (p. 84)

Madueme concludes with a number of suggestions for how to foster “a richer, supernatural, and truly African theology, magnificent in all its glory, yet always in continuity with the catholic tradition and rooted in the whole counsel of God” (pp. 85-86).

Conclusion

I am deeply grateful to the 31 scholars who took the time to read our research report on “Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC,” and who also took time to engage the issues from their own experience and expertise, sharing their insights and reflections with us in 29 articles. I am deeply aware that this final summary of, and response to, critiques and commentaries of these other scholars on this subject fails to do full justice to them. But I hope it gives a sense of the range of insightful treatments which they represent, and that it points readers back into the reading and rereading of each of the preceding contributions, and perhaps even to the assignment of selected of these readings, as well as others,¹⁹ in pastoral and theological training settings.

Many of the authors expressed deep appreciation for the opportunity to engage in this sort of interdisciplinary and global conversation about these important matters and expressed hope that the conversation in this journal theme issue would work its way into African theological educational institutions. One finds here pastoral concern, awareness of anthropological dynamics, theological reflection, and field-based research that should inspire others to ask new questions, to engage in more cross-disciplinary reading on the topic, to carry out additional strategic research, to publish research results, to tell the stories of how Christians are engaging these matters—and with what outcomes. May God grant us wisdom, vision, and motivation to move us forward, as Christian scholars, in

attempting through our scholarship to help the wider body of Christ fulfill its calling in biblical, contextually healthy, and God-blessed ways.

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¹⁹ There are, of course, other excellent treatments by African theologians of this topic, not least the collection of blog postings on the topic written for the *Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding* [henrycenter.tiu.edu/witchcraft-accusations/] by Anguandia-Alo, Asamoah-Gyadu, Gitau, Kuniyihop, Mavinga, Mombo, Mugambi, and Onyiah, as well as by Priest, Rasmussen, and Stabell (see Priest 2015a).

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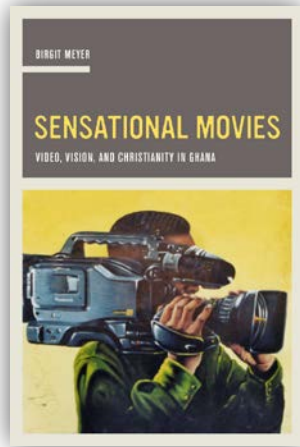
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BOOK REVIEW

SENSATIONAL MOVIES, VIDEO, VISION, AND CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

By Birgit Meyer

Reviewed by Christine Albertini



Oakland, CA: University of California Press
2015

Sensational Movies, Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana traces Birgit Meyer's historical-ethnographic study of movies in Ghana from 1985-2010. This fascinating account places the production, circulation, and reception of movies within the broad spectrum of culture in the public sphere. The period covered is a dynamic era of political and cultural upheaval in which Pentecostalism dominates as a key societal shaping force. Meyer traces the interplay of state, market, industry, visual media, and audiences with special attention to the space where there is convergence of religion and film. Priest, Ngolo and Stabell's piece in this journal (2020) drills down deeply into a disturbing aspect of modern life in some African societies, namely the manipulation of children caught in the still-present vestiges of witchcraft. Meyer's study examines movies as a horizontal thread revealing the interweaving of such darker aspects as covered by Priest et al. with the emergent Christian faith, which rejects witchcraft but incorporates certain symbols of its imagination. Movies are a mirror at this crossroad of the traditional and the modern.

In this work, Meyer places herself firmly in the panoply of leading researchers and theorists in the emerging field of film theory. She ably juxtaposes her ethnography and conclusions in thorough dialogue with seminal works in the field: comparing, contrasting, deepening.

Sensational Movies is a solid and well written work of scholarship. But it is also an accessible, readable, and engaging chronicle of a prominent slice of Ghanaian society. The mastery with which Meyer zooms in to the everyday life of Ghanaian audiences and zooms out to provide context makes for an enjoyable as well as an informative read.

In its initial chapters *Sensational Movies* provides an account of the nexus at which the monopoly of state cinema was supplanted by the democratization of video technology. The camera, taken out of the hands of a state-sponsored film industry and taken up in the marketplace by an emerging and talented visual arts industry, came to dominate public and communal spaces. "The basic characteristic of Ghanaian video movies being that they nourish themselves from and feed back into everyday life" (119).

The urban landscape of Accra is both an epicenter of video industry activity as well as the place where the majority of video stories take place. Accra for centuries has been a key center for both intra-Africa and international trade, even holding the unfortunate distinction of being the primary port of departure for the global slave trade in the colonial era. Post-colonial modernization has only enhanced the centrality of Accra as a crossroad of African cultures. But movies have offered only a partially true depiction of urban space as a developed modern city and have only partially captured the ordinary reality of most city inhabitants. The film industry bias is toward depicting a city life that is modern and progressive, as well as full of moral and spiritual dangers, and demonic entanglements.

Against this backdrop, films provide a description of the make-up and attitude of audiences affording an intimate insight into the changing landscape of social and familial norms. The period studied marks a time of

seismic transition of family life from tribal and extended family to an emphasis on the nuclear family. This combined with the rise of the Christian church places film in the position of morality tale, with a particularly Pentecostal-charismatic character. As noted in Priest et al.'s study, witchcraft and the occult haunt the sub-straight of this transitional time in the tension between more indigenous approaches to the realm of the spirit and Christianity, seen as modern and transcendent. Also noted by Priest et al., many Christian pastors, claiming the power to identify evil spirits and to cleanse are often turned to for reconciliation, just as chieftains and priests might have been turned to in the past (2020, 8). Christian pastors are regularly depicted as such in Ghanaian movies, and in fact are often the very actors of these portrayals.

Meyer does not simply observe the role of film and its audiences. In the spirit of Clifford Geertz's "thick description", which she cites, Meyer attends and hosts video gatherings of all sorts, as well as engages substantively with the artists in the field. This is not an armchair or arm's length study.

Meyer provides the most detailed and insightful analysis in chapters dealing with movies' attempt to "make the invisible visible". She notes the similarity between film and religion in that both conjure imaginary realms in an effort to bring them to life or make them appear real. It is the representational mediation of religion captured within the representational medium of film that makes the video and cinema world in this period a true magnifying glass of the images and ideas which would otherwise remain invisible. "Focusing on the convergence of religion and film, I do not intend to completely blur the two. Watching a movie and attending a church service are different activities, and audiences are, of course, aware of this. My point is that being alert to the interface of religion and film allows us to explore how movies in the framework of entertainment, offer a perspective on the spiritual that accommodates audiences' quest to 'see clearly'"(159).

Meyer devotes considerable space to movies' mirroring the traditional terrain of religion: the struggle between good and evil, demons and God, the powers of darkness and the occult with a Christian vision. "The images of popular Christianity, strongly deployed especially in Pentecostal-charismatic churches, converged considerably with that conjured up in video movies, sustaining a thick, mutually affirming intermedial texture" (153). A key original concept she develops is what she calls trans-figuration. Her "playful" point of reference is to the Transfiguration of Christ. For the purpose of movie analysis " . . . transfiguration in my use places center stage the practices through which an imaginary expressed through sermons and other narratives, including dreams and visions, is pictorialized

in movies and feeds back into narratives and the inner imagination" (155). Movies, it turns out, are an ideal medium for the transfer of symbolism. A corollary of the explication of trans-figuration is Meyer's examination of movies' role in attempting to render spirits visible through the logic of revelation. Again, playfully using another overt religious term, the term revelation in this context refers to movies "as successful harbingers of truthful insights into a dimension that is considered inaccessible via ordinary perception" (157).

The last area of intriguing examination is how videos contribute to an accurate and adequate representation of culture, tradition, and heritage as well as aspirations captured in more recent "epic" genre. At issue are both state policies and social desire to be have Ghanaian society viewed in certain ways. How do movies contribute to external and internal sensibilities of what constitutes culture, tradition, and heritage? This remains a controversial topic, just as the tension between pride in tradition and yearning for modernity exists in Ghanaian society.

One of Meyer's last stories is a profound and humble insight. In 2011 she was invited to give a short presentation about her research at an event in her native Netherlands, featuring Ghanaian and Nigerian films, along with a rousing sermon given by a Ghanaian Pentecostal pastor, and an interview with a film producer. Meyer was surprised that the largely African audience was annoyed by her presentation, feeling it undid the spell cast by the film and the sermon. Her desire to put a 'strange movie' in context for its audience was unnecessary. "These pictures were capable of speaking for themselves" (295). True. Nevertheless, the canon of knowledge of this genre and this period in Ghana is much enriched by Meyer's dutiful work.

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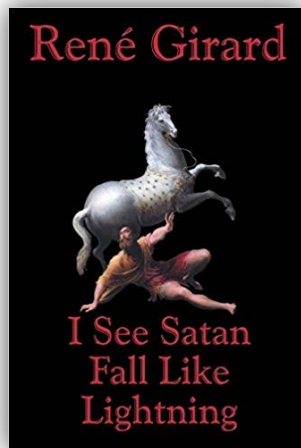
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BOOK REVIEW

I SEE SATAN FALL LIKE LIGHTNING

By René Girard

Reviewed by Sara Cook



New York: Orbis Books
2019

René Girard has authored many books that present and explain his ideas of mimesis, mimetic desire, and the violence of scapegoating. *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, however, delves deeper into the relationship between these cultural phenomena and the Gospels than the other books, and underscores Jesus's influence in the shaping of the human experience. Mimesis is the human predisposition to understand our world and learn of it through mimicking others. Mimetic desire is a deep-seated need to be like others that we see as superior or powerful. It is a cyclical process and revolves around a need for adapting to coveted models of experience, success, and dominance. Girard's foundational theme is that a substantial amount of political and religious violence stems from the mimetic desire cycle which infects our social constructs and produces cultural and social stress. The mimetic cycle coupled with these unattainable models of success produces a sort of seduction of individuals that Girard explains as the wheedling in of Satan himself. When opening this door to coveted desire, we allow Satan to work his way into our lives and influence them by manipulating us into actions that subconsciously we know are unjust. There is also a narcissistic element

present in mimetic desire that requires us to imitate others that have what we want, or live the ways we want to. It is a subliminal "keeping up with the Jones" scenario that persists to the point of sacrifice and/or violence. This in turn also feeds into manipulation by Satan. Girard refers to Satan as a "parasite on God's creatures" and "the father of lies" (42). He becomes a roadblock, not allowing us to progress towards a resolution, but also not allowing us to turn back. Individuals become stressed, sensing no viable options to relieve the stress of mimetic desire from which they suffer, and find solace in one another's increasing rage. They seek out reasons and motivations for such cultural and social stressors and hastily attack those who seem to represent a threat. Girard's notion of scapegoating then manifests in the form of accusations against vulnerable populations of people or individuals perceived as outcasts or misfits in some way.

Enter in the redemptive power of Christ through the *kerygma* as a nonviolent way forward to combat the violent cycle of mimetic desire. Christ, and his subsequent crucifixion for the absolution of our sins, liberates us not through violent means, but through supplication and grace. Jesus becomes the figurative Lamb of God led to the slaughter. Girard points not just to the story of the crucifixion to highlight this point, but also speaks to other stories from the Bible, such as those of Joseph, Job, Cain and Abel, wherein the underlying theme is "overcoming of mimetic desire and violence through nonviolence of love and forgiveness" (xviii). The Gospels reject this violence of scapegoating and the "illusions of myths" that reveal the deceptions of 'satanic accusation'" (173). Here we find one of Girard's strongest points, "Christianity does not yield to ulterior motives of resentment in its concern to rehabilitate victims. It is not seduced by a contaminated charity of resentment" (173). Christianity works above culture to rectify the violence found deep-seated in humankind.

Girard's ideas of mimesis, mimetic desire, and scapegoating violence persist in current cultures worldwide and by example through the accusations of witchcraft in young children found in parts of the Congo in Africa. Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell's work, "Christian Pastors and (Alleged) Child Witches in Kinshasa,

DRC," (2020) examines child witchcraft accusations and the consequent repercussions of such actions. The continuous mimetic desires that begin the cycle of cultural stress exploding into violence resulting in a social desire to alleviate stressors through the accusations attributed to these young marginalized victims plays out in various forms. Most noticeably, these cultural stressors are actualized through a series of events seemingly benign, such as "underemployment, poverty, family conflicts and breakups, medical crises, high levels of violence, and elevated emotional distress", but escalate from individual stress to community stress and then depend on some sort of climax towards a breaking point to alleviate the stress. (Priest et al. 2020, 2-3). We see members of these communities in the Congo working to reason out the mimetic desire and violence which they are subjected to in ways that place blame on some supernatural affliction. They choose victims to scapegoat based on vulnerabilities. As Girard explains, they choose "someone who is weak or in some way marginal enough that the community can eliminate him or her without fear of reprisal" (xii). Children become the mark of such social agitation and stress, as they are the most vulnerable of populations available for such persecution, especially those who have been orphaned and have no others to stand for them against the accusations. Accusations stem from subjective events and actions that are not easily substantiated, but the communities are under such strain as to accuse their victims with little to no verifiable proof. "Children with physical disabilities," "unusual behaviors", and "disapproved characteristics" are often the target of these allegations primarily because of their difference in physical or social disposition (Priest et al. 2020, 3). One of the most disturbing developments in Priest et al.'s work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the substitution of the Church and its leaders for traditional healers and prophets. The church has embraced the violence of scapegoating and continued the mimetic cycle of desire found explained throughout Girard's work. The leaders of the churches in the DRC have found ways to employ methods devised by traditional healers to obtain confessions of witchcraft and to prosecute those they accuse. As Priest suggests, "churches . . . play a central role in influencing people's understandings and ideas about child-witches, and their responses to children perceived to be witches" (2020, 9).

Fortuitously EPED, *l'Équipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse*, stepped in to demonstrate the importance of positive methods in reacting to child witchcraft allegations. Through their efforts, in collaboration with others, EPED has been effective in facilitating change in the region plagued by accusations of child witchcraft by embracing the nonviolent

peaceful practices of Jesus and Christianity. Through the work of EPED, there are cases of significant paradigm shifts in some people's understanding and reaction to child witchcraft accusations along with the trauma associated with these allegations. They have begun to substitute better models of how to discover the real causes of societal stress and unfortunate life events than placing blame on children. Church leaders and community members in these areas of the Congo have begun to adapt to this new shift, and understand and accept their new role of protector as opposed to their old role of accuser. The pastors as well as the members of the EPED underscore the importance of the acknowledgement that this child, once accused of practicing witchcraft, is in fact just that, a child. They are the silenced innocent marginalized ones, previously abused and neglected for adult benefit; but we can see a real tangible change on the horizon, wherein their church leaders through God's love and grace lift up these children.

Girard would immediately recognize the plight of those in Africa tangled in the vicious cycle of mimetic crisis whether they are the victims or the accusers, but would be appreciative of these attempts to rectify the situation and place emphasis back on Christ's nonviolent methods for reconciliation. For as Girard explains in his conclusion, there are two ways to respond to the mimetic cycle:

1. We don't detect the mimetic snowballing because we participate in it without realizing it. In this case we are condemned to a lie we can never rectify, for we believe sincerely in the guilt of our scapegoats. This is what myths do.
2. We detect the mimetic snowballing in which we do not participate, and then we can describe it as it actually is. We restore the scapegoats unjustly condemned. Only the Bible and the Gospels are capable of this. (183)

I am thankful that those working with this situation are taking the second approach and restoring peace not just to those accused, but also to the families who have willingly and sometimes unwillingly cast their children into the streets for fear of witchcraft and for what this second approach can bring to their households.

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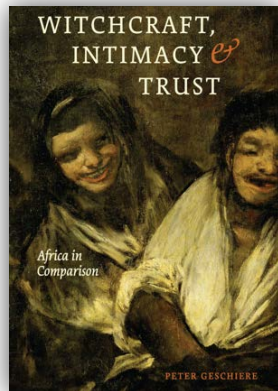
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BOOK REVIEW

WITCHCRAFT, INTIMACY AND TRUST: AFRICA IN COMPARISON

By Peter Geschiere

Reviewed by Adriana Myland



Chicago: University of Chicago Press
2013

Peter Geschiere makes an excellent contribution to the field of anthropology on the topic of witchcraft. He holistically seeks to understand the complex social relations entangled in witchcraft, specifically among the Maka of southeast Cameroon. Also, he surveys the globe to examine witchcraft historically in Europe, Brazil, Melanesia and Java. Geschiere's focus is on trust, including its roots in ontology, however, he later describes ontology as not useful to his study (170-172, 201). I will critique this point about ontology in light of the report by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell (2020) on pastors' responses to child witches in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Priest et al. report demonstrates that ontology is crucial to understand witchcraft in post-colonial Africa and globally. Geschiere exemplifies a humble approach to understanding the complexities of "witchcraft, intimacy and trust" that would be greatly enriched if he considered ontology more closely in his study.

Geschiere provides a new approach to witchcraft that implicitly supports the ontological turn in anthropology. He pleads that witchcraft does not expose Africa's "otherness" but looks at the "link

between intimacy and danger" (xv). Throughout his study there is tremendous evidence of the human condition relating to imminent fear of the other (in the Cameroonian case, witches), while recognizing the elasticity of African kinship that is transcontinental (xix). This exposes humanity's desire for connection and belonging and can even be found among purported witches, as Geschiere excellently observes. Similarly, Priest et al. describe the response of communities facing difficulties that convert the question of "why" to "who," through "interpersonal causal ontologies" (2020, 5). This view of causation is evident in Geschiere's focus on intimacy and danger as he implicitly suggests an "interpersonal causal ontology" in the social response to witchcraft in the context of Cameroon.

I commend Geschiere's approach because it helps redeem anthropology's engagement in the study of witchcraft. He avoids the grievous practice of the past—primitivizing Africans (xxi). Instead he views witchcraft as part of the human struggle (xxii). I believe this is critical to the understanding of witchcraft that Geschiere addresses throughout his book. It is a relief that Priest et al. have actively responded to Geschiere's remark that child witches, who often end up on the street in Kinshasa, are "more than a humanitarian issue" (194). Geschiere's perspective exposes the struggles communities face, and brings justice and honour to those suffering. He looks beyond the horrific stereotypes of witches and instead sees the human person.

Further, Priest et al. identify cultures that practice witch ontologies connected to Western Christendom and the poor translations of Scripture that have impacted the Congolese interpretation of Christianity (2020, 43-45). This connects colonization and missionary influence in Bible translation to the development of witchcraft. It is for this reason that Geschiere's historical account needs greater depth to understand the witch ontologies in Cameroon that have developed in part from Western influence. He mentions the decade of silence from witchcraft following decolonization in the 1960s, but this does not

mean the remnants of colonialism disappeared (7). Moving forward, as Priest et al. have done, it is important that Geschiere considers how Cameroonians have committed to their witch ontologies and who has influenced their beliefs.

Additionally, Geschiere makes a strong point on the triangle of “witchcraft, intimacy and trust” (101): He notes courts in the East condemned witches; however, this paradoxically reinforced ideas in society that courts intended to dismiss witchcraft (85-86). In the case of the Maka, Pentecostalism had played a significant role in the community’s response to witchcraft. For example, in the 1980s, Pentecostalism rooted its trust in God’s work, shaping a new morality, and viewing witchcraft as from the devil (89-90, 92). However, Geschiere does not elaborate on the Maka’s beliefs about the devil nor how Pentecostals came to their belief that witchcraft is from the devil. On the other hand, Priest et al. indicate how evil is imagined to reside in a child accused of witchcraft. The goal then is for Kinshasa pastors to learn to understand that evil is rooted in false accusations rather than the child and then to change their approach to dealing with witchcraft (2020, 37). It would be beneficial if Geschiere explored the history of Pentecostalism, including what Pentecostals believe and teach about the devil and witchcraft. This would help establish an understanding of their epistemology and support the need for greater emphasis on ontology in the anthropological approach to witchcraft.

Next, the comparative perspective Geschiere examines reinforces the false notion that witchcraft is practiced only among the “primitive.” For example, he suggests that intimacy is demonstrated in Europe differently than in the African context. Witches in Europe attack close neighbours and not kin, unlike the African contexts where witches are tied to the house (123-124, 131). This global perspective indicates extensive research is still needed across continents to fully understand how ontology influences the conceptual triangle of “witchcraft, intimacy and trust.” Another comparison includes how witchcraft in Candomblé de Bahia, Brazil provides a unique approach to understanding witch ontology. Instead of intimacy being rooted in the family, temples are sought as a haven of intimacy (159). On the other hand, Kinshasa pastors hold authority that justifies ideas about child witchcraft, and the church plays a central role in the spread of child witch ideologies and deliverance practices (Priest et al. 2020, 37-38). Geschiere’s coverage of near and distant communities involved in witchcraft should dismiss the notion that it is reserved only for the “primitive.”

Finally, Geschiere has done excellent work, but there is still significant information on “witchcraft, intimacy and trust” to explore. Further research on witchcraft among urban elites and how witchcraft is

imported to villages would be beneficial, as Geschiere covers this topic only briefly (41, 44-45). It would be helpful to explore whether patron-client relationships could help explain the changing dynamics between different communities and classes. For instance, Priest et al. explain there is a competitive religious market and great need for understanding witchcraft suspicions (2020, 5). Addressing how beliefs about witchcraft develop could assist in understanding human struggle and how patron-client relationships may be involved in the globalization of witchcraft. Most significantly, a greater emphasis on the study of witch ontology is needed, as there is far more to understand about the radical Pentecostal crusades that sought to eradicate witchcraft, as Geschiere points out (204-205). Geschiere exudes a humble approach that must be adopted to honorably understand *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust*, as well as ideologies and traditions that carry witchcraft throughout generations.

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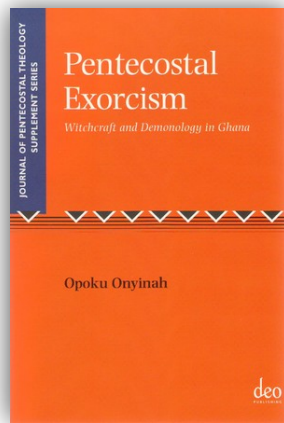
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BOOK REVIEW

PENTECOSTAL EXORCISM: WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONOLOGY IN GHANA

By Opoku Onyinah

Reviewed by Robin Scott



Leiden, Netherlands: Brill
2012

It is possible that if you surveyed people from all over the world Christianity would be considered a universal religion, with a Western personality. And no matter where you are in the world it is likely that if you were to make a reference to Christianity you might automatically include a reference to the American church. It is hard for people to separate the West from Christianity. Yet, the World Economic Forum tells us that more Christians live in Africa than in any other continent in the world (Kazeem 2019). Additionally, The Pew Research Center concludes “By 2060 six of the countries with the top ten largest Christian populations will be in Africa” (McClendon 2017). The world’s eyes have stared far too long at Western Christianity. Opoku Onyinah commands our attention to Ghana and African Christianity in his writing *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*.

The purpose of Onyinah’s work is to evaluate the function of exorcism, as it relates to witchcraft, within the Church of Pentecost (CoP) in Ghana. His study includes the origins and understanding of witchcraft within the context of African cosmology, along with the interworking of Christianity and traditional African religion in Ghana. The problem he sought to investigate

was “why witchcraft and exorcism continue to persist among the Akan people of Ghana in Christianity” (3). The method Onyinah decided to use was the breaking down of the “theological framework for the exorcistic ministry, using the CoP as a case study” (3).

In the first half of Onyinah’s work he lays the foundation with a comprehensive explanation of African cosmology and terminology. One of the things immediately noticeable in his writing is his position on how important the need for contextualization is within the framework of Christian evangelism. He writes “a good way of making the biblical message meaningful to a contemporary culture is to decontextualize the message to arrive at the supracultural element and then express it in the terms and contexts which are meaningful in the local culture” (11). You will find in the latter part of the first half of the text, it is not by accident that he expresses this position in the introduction. As he covers the development of Christianity in Ghana he clearly expresses his concerns with the manner in which missionaries delivered the gospel and Christian theology to the Akan people. There is a level of responsibility that he holds the missionaries to for the “contaminated” (88) version of Christianity that is expressed among the Akan people, or as he calls it “the appropriation of Christianity by the Akan” (88). However, he doesn’t release the Akan people from their part played in this contamination. The first half of the book is closed out with a well defined theory of how Pentecostal exorcism came to be in Ghana:

Ghanaians themselves had come to the realization that everything traditional was pagan. This sort of realization influenced the Akan society as a whole; and finally Christianity became associated with the white man’s religion, everything it contained was godly. Akan culture (and religion) was associated with the black man’s religion, everything it contained was devilish. The Pentecostal type of exorcism arises from this understanding. (107)

The final half of the book covers the practice of exorcism in the CoP, along with some case studies, and its evolution into the contemporary “witchdemonology.” This new practice, held through the deliverance ministry, was “viewed as a synthesis of the practices and beliefs of Akan witchcraft and Western Christian concepts of demonology and exorcism” (172). The major portion of the last half of the book addresses proper contextualization of Christianity into the Akan culture. Onyinah walks the reader through “witchdemonology” in a biblical perspective beginning with the Old Testament, and moving to the synoptic gospels, Johannine literature, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Pauline and other New Testament epistles. It is clear that he not only understood the necessity of proper contextualization but was prepared to do the work and provide the reader with an example of what proper contextualization of Christianity into the Akan culture looks like. After the decontextualizing of the Bible, Onyinah arrives at a solid closing argument:

The biblical writers and the early church believed in the existence of the devil and his allied demonic powers. If Christianity had been replanted in West Africa in this background, there would not have been the tension that goes on between Africans and the Western churches. By the time Christianity was firmly established in West Africa, the Western church had assumed a rationalist worldview and only retained what the Nigerian Evangelical theologian Osadolor Imasogie assesses as “a veneer of the biblical world view.” Consequently, salvation was presented as deliverance from the divine wrath on the final day and reinstatement in the glory of God which was lost through sin, but not as deliverance from all the powers of Satan including sin and demonic influences of controls. (251)

It is clear that Onyinah has a personal connection with Ghanaian culture and does a great job expressing it and navigating the reader through a complete understanding of it. He also clearly articulates his understanding of the Bible and Christian theology. I felt the book provided the reader with a kind of survey of the topic. It walked the reader through African Christianity as it is contextualized in Ghana.

A few portions of the book could have been separated and covered individually in more elaborate works. For example, in the chapter “The Development of Christianity and Exorcism in Ghana”, there is a lot of comparison to the Western church’s exorcism practices, but with little to no explanation of what exactly those practices are. One of the foundational positions Onyinah holds is upholding the missionaries’ influence in Akan Christianity and their responsibility for the way Christianity was shared. He talks about the

missionaries’ cultures and “minimizing the intrusion” of them (11) but only covers the matter briefly. His argument could have been strengthened had he spent a little more time elaborating the section “Home Base: Origins and Ideological Base of Missionaries.”

I think Onyinah’s perspective is an accurate depiction of the errors early missionaries in Africa made. Not only was this an issue in Ghana but in many parts of Africa. As Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo and Timothy Stabell mention in their article, “Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC” (2020), missionaries did not address the holistic needs of the people. They state, “foreign missionaries, often took the position that witch suspicions or accusations were without merit. They were not known to have any regular practices related to engaging witchcraft suspicions or accusations” (2020, 14). This is why churches such as the Revival Churches in the DRC and even Ghana focused not just on theology and salvation but, as Onyinah mentioned, on “deliverance of all powers of Satan” (251). Priest et al. suggest that “Rather than stress Bible knowledge and formal theological education as the foundation of pastoral authority, these churches placed a high value on gifts of the Holy Spirit” (2020, 14). It is only now that we are seeking to evaluate the consequences of those errors (worldwide). I believe the Western church is being responsible with that awareness and seeking to properly train missionaries and ministry workers in cross-cultural studies and contextualized evangelism.

Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana nestles itself right in the middle of the purpose of the *On Knowing Humanity Journal*. It respectfully evaluates the culture and traditions of the Akan people of Ghana with both anthropological and theological lenses. Opoku Onyinah objectively evaluates the Church of Pentecost through universal Christian lenses, and holds loosely his personal experience, understanding the limitations it might possibly bring. The work provides Christian anthropological insight into the Akan people of Ghana.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE DEVIL'S CHILDREN: FROM SPIRIT POSSESSION TO WITCHCRAFT: NEW ALLEGATIONS THAT AFFECT CHILDREN

Edited by Jean La Fontaine

Reviewed by Harold Wanton



New York: Routledge
2009

In *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children*, various authors articulate the issue of child abuse and its association with possession and witchcraft. For centuries there have been a multitude of scientific and religious justifications for such abuse despite the obscurity of possession, witchcraft and/or black magic. *The Devil's Children* contains contributions from academics and practitioners representing numerous fields. Jean La Fontaine's edited collection's purpose is to fill a substantial void in the contemporary literature on spirit possession as it relates to child abuse. Allegations and cases of child abuse are not always correlated to the idea of children being possessed. However, some cases of possession have been linked to children being severely injured or killed and have garnered public attention.

La Fontaine divides the body of work into three sections: the meaning of possession, possession as contact with the divine, and cases where the belief in

possession acted as an indication of children being "witches" which resulted in child abuse. In Part One of the text, "The Meaning of Possession," contributors delineate the history of spirit possession in various religions in order to posit "how beliefs in possession may have different meanings and effects in different religious contexts" (27). Part Two, "Possession as Contact with the Divine," gives positive examples of "voluntary possession", found in Christianity and Wicca as a means of a greater connection to the divine. Part Three, "Children Accused," examines specific cases where accusations of witchcraft have been made against children which resulted in abuse, and in some cases death.

The Devil's Children provides key knowledge of different religious and ethnic communities' outlooks on possession. Interestingly, Children accused of possession or witchcraft are closely linked to familial misfortune. The work of Robert J. Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell (2020), in many ways, mirrors the findings of this book in their dealing with Christian pastors and (alleged) child witches in Kinshasa, DRC. Their work presents the horrendous reality of the stamp of being labeled a "witch" or "possessed" and the eventual repercussions of it. The chapter contributed by La Fontaine in his edited volume describes the belief in possession linked to newly arrived immigrants and the economically marginalized. In Priest et al., these misfortunes are similar but not reduced to just those factors.

One of the strengths of this book is that it contributes to the eclectic study of possession not solely in a religious context nor an anthropological framework. Its contributors articulate a variety of unbiased, participatory approaches that make the text one of a kind. The work offers interreligious justifications of what "spirit possession" is and its influence within communities. La Fontaine's contributors do not only offer the reader a new awareness that cases of child abuse are due to accusations of spirit possession or witchcraft, they also identify the patterns of child abuse

in hopes of prevention. Another strength of this text is its comparative approach which offers readers religious or geographical commonalities. One of the weaknesses of this work is that it is a product of its own uniqueness. In some ways the work is waiting to be expounded upon theoretically due to the lack of research and information previously conducted on the subject.

As Christians, we must understand that children are a gift and we must rejoice in them and preserve them because they are God's gift to the earth. "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father" (Matthew 18:10). Children are in a fertile moment for growth, and any abuse harms them mentally and physically, and affects their growth in the community of the Church. Therefore, the abuse or death of children either inside or outside the safeguards of the Church due to accusations of "possession" has to be investigated to preserve the holiness of Christ's Body.

A Christian anthropological perspective would engage in the realm of spirit possession and witchcraft with heightened knowledge of Christian theological perspectives and the different variations of cultures that deal with the two terms. In this respect, Christian anthropologists would exemplify how spirit possession and witchcraft is inwoven into the cultural fabric of specific groups of people and how this affects converting to Christianity. In this, the understanding of prevention of child abuse will be articulated in such a way that it does not disrespect believers' cultural traditions and beliefs but presents the religious understanding that is needed to effectively change patterns.

The Devil's Children is a substantially important text for scholars, and it explores uncharted areas of study. Professional scholars and practitioners will benefit from this body of work and it provides readers with a greater understanding of what possession means and what its effects are within the contemporary world.

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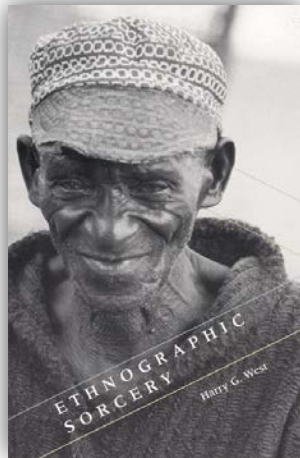
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BOOK REVIEW

ETHNOGRAPHIC SORCERY

By Harry West

Reviewed by Ned Wilson



Chicago: University of Chicago Press
2007

The following book review is written not as a stand-alone review. Instead, the goal is to review Harry West's *Ethnographic Sorcery* in relationship to the journal article in this issue by Robert Priest, Abel Ngolo, and Timothy Stabell, entitled "Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches in Kinshasa, DRC" (2020).

Initially, Harry West's research objective focused on how the Muedans envisioned their future following the breakup of the state agricultural sector (6). His intent, grounded in earlier doctoral research, was to dispel the stereotype of Mozambique's exotic other and 'backward-looking peasant' (7). However, West surmised that the language of sorcery was inseparable from the Muedans' vision of the future (11). As such, sorcery became the focus of his 1999 research project and his subsequent writing of *Ethnographic Sorcery*. West's exploration of "the epistemological paradox arising from the ethnographic study of sorcery" gave rise to his experience being both the observer and the observed (xi). Though the book is short, readers will find his work refreshing and original.

Both "Christian Pastors and Alleged Child Witches" and *Ethnographic Sorcery* investigate the perceived power ascribed to those practicing their

nefarious craft within the supernatural domain. However, the contrast concerning the practitioners' maturity, modality, and intent is acute.

For the Muedans, located on the Mueda plateau of northern Mozambique, sorcery connotes individuals wittingly working their craft within the supernatural lion schema. According to West's interlocutors, sorcery's ontological lions are not symbolic, instead, they are real lions made by people—or people making themselves into lions—and they attack, stalk, and devour humans (5, 20). To fabricate the sorcery lion, the skilled sorcerer must transcend and overcome the constrictions associated with the visible world. Transcendence is achieved by using medicinal substances that make the sorcerer invisible (47). Once the sorcerer resides in the invisible domain they can ruin and reconstruct the world for their benefit (17). Sorcery is so intertwined in the Muedan culture that it is a rare case for a person not to be a sorcerer (17). Regardless of socioeconomic status, most Muedans suspect that just about everyone is a sorcerer. It is within the above framework that West asks, "to what kind of reality do they [sorcerers and lions] belong (47)?"

Counter to the skilled Muedan sorcerer's medicinal transcendence into the supernatural domain stands the indictment from Kinshasa's largest megachurch's apostle against witches. The Reverend Apostle writes in his 2013 brochure that "witches have great power, as evidenced in their ability to transform themselves into 'a mosquito, rat, cockroach, or lion'" (Priest et al. 2020, 22). The problem, however, is those purportedly practicing witchcraft in the DRC are not practitioners at all. Instead, they are thousands of stepchildren—many who suffer from physical disabilities and mental disorders living in homes with unemployed and often absent caregivers—who are wrongly accused of practicing witchcraft. Tragically, the children often fall victim to accusations of practicing witchcraft when their family experiences misfortunes such as infertility, poverty, of illness (2020, 3).

The Kinshasans actively search for pastors who not only agree with the family's witchcraft suspicions, but also for pastors who know how to identify and properly perform child-witch deliverances (Priest et al. 2020, 5). It is not uncommon for pastors to remind their

congregants “that even the children living in their own homes might be witches that are to blame for family tragedies” (2020, 8). In other words, treating witches is a highly competitive, and perhaps lucrative, religious market for the Kinshasa churches (2020 5, 29-30). Whereas the Kinshasans seek deliverance from witches to explain and validate the causal ontology of their misfortunes, the Muedans, on the other hand, seek out the skilled sorcerer’s craft for protective treatments. Such was West’s experience.

West’s thick description skillfully navigates through two conflicting realities that leave the reader mesmerized and rightfully perplexed. For instance, he describes his bout with dysentery as a violent episode “where something broke loose deep inside me, erupting through my chest and out of my mouth . . . [m]y legs dangled numbly . . . I felt another eruption from within, this time flowing beneath me” (27). Rather than interpreting his experience scientifically—blaming unsanitary conditions as the reason for his bout with dysentery—West humbly retells his experience through the Muedan worldview. In the Muedan construct, just “[a] few days before he [West] fell ill, there was an argument with someone” that was not peacefully resolved (31). Additionally, his truck, camera, and tape recorder attract attention and envy which may also be the cause of his affliction (33). After his illness, and through the prodding of his closest interlocutor, West allowed a sorcerer to treat him, thus giving him protection from nefarious sorcerers and future illnesses (33). In other words, West expects his reader to employ a culturally sensitive phenomenology and juxtapose two viable, but seemingly incompatible, realities.

West’s consistently humble posture not only allows his interlocutors’ voice to be heard but also leaves little opportunity to objectify the Muedans as an exotic other. In the end, West makes it explicitly clear that the Muedans’ reality concerning the sorcery lion rests on the notion that “metaphors don’t kill the neighbors, lion-people do!” (25). For the Muedans, there is one domain that contains Imbwambwe, the lion and Imbwambwe, the man (37). Conversely, for the Kinshasans there are two domains. One contains the constructed supernatural witchcraft that victimizes the DRC children and the other holds the physical realm which experiences the human plight.

In sum, both research projects recognized and appreciated the interdependence between the physical and supernatural domains. By acknowledging the whole person Priest, Ngolo, and Stabell demonstrated the positive change that faith-based models had in transforming the thinking and conduct of DRC Christian pastors (9). To ignore the whole person presents the reader with a thin description of the human

experience; such was not the case in either of the reviewed texts.

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