

JESUS HOUSE

...for all the nations

PRESENTS

CHRISTIANITY OR THE OCCULT?

Emerging trends in the African Diaspora

Day conference
22 May 2006
Central Hall
Westminster

REPORT OF A SYMPOSIUM

The mix of Christianity and traditional practices within some parts of the African diaspora in Britain is becoming an increasingly confusing and controversial subject. Stories of ritualistic practices including the abuse of children have come to light in the British media recently.

On the other hand, churches that represent the African diaspora in Britain are spearheading growth and social transformation against the national trend of religious decline.

So what is really going on?

supported by:



CTE/MECA

Working together for a safer London

JESUS HOUSE FOR ALL NATIONS

February 2008

Dear Friend

I am pleased to welcome you to this important collection of papers given at a symposium in 2006 to explore some of the phenomena of African religion in Britain.

Our aim at this symposium was to create an environment which would stimulate discussion on the emerging spiritual trends in the African diaspora. We felt that this was much needed particularly in light of recent publicity about the abuse of children in some African “churches”. At the same time, we felt it was important that the beneficial social impact of African-led churches in the UK should also not be overlooked.

We hoped this conference would contribute in a positive way to providing some solutions to the questions on our minds, while shedding light on areas that might hitherto have been misunderstood.

The contributions from leading African and English scholars contextualise the phenomenon of the so-called ‘witch child’ from an African perspective, as well as providing some of the latest and – as yet – unpublished research. Some of the semantics in a very complex field are untangled, and information is provided on relevant developments in child protection in Britain.

We were grateful for the participation and sponsorship of a number of agencies and organizations including the Metropolitan Police, the Church Mission Society and the African Caribbean Evangelical Alliance. The day’s programme is appended.

We were delighted to have the opportunity to host this pioneering and important investigation – and are grateful to Lapido Media, who managed the event, for arranging to make the papers available to a wider audience. Not all the contributions given are included here, as some were unscripted. A DVD of the event, which includes all the presentations, is available price £10 from Sola Kujore www.jesushouse.org.uk. For more information on child safeguarding issues, contact enquiries@ccpas.co.uk.

Agu Irukwu

Jesus House for all the Nations

www.jesushouse.org.uk

CONTENTS

Introduction

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1 | Witchcraft: twenty talking points | p1 |
| | <i>Prof. Anthony Gittins</i> | |
| 2 | Cultural versus biblical practices in the Congolese community | p6 |
| | <i>The Revd Jean-Bosco Kanyemesha</i> | |
| 3 | Africa's new 'Pentecostal-like' churches | p9 |
| | <i>Prof. Paul Gifford</i> | |
| 4 | Is witchcraft compatible with biblical Christianity? | p16 |
| | <i>Dennis Tongoi</i> | |

Appendix 1 Symposium Programme

Witchcraft: Twenty Talking Points

Anthony J Gittins

Professor of Missiology at the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

There may be people here who do not presume to understand what is referred to as ‘witchcraft’ – either because they think it is superstitious, irrational and incomprehensible or because they simply have not had the opportunity to study it formally. Therefore, I will present, in summary form, 20 points that focus first on the epidemiology, or occurrence, of witchcraft, and then on some possible responses. This should allow some time for conversation and clarification, and set out some of the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus we may need as the day progresses.

I should acknowledge that any or all of the following statements are subject to modification or ‘tweaking’ – anthropologists are notoriously sensitive to careful nuancing. However, our time is short and the field is vast. Some subtlety will be lost; some may be recovered in later conversation.

I speak as an ordained Christian minister trained as an anthropologist and currently teaching graduate theology. I spent a decade in rural West Africa, living very close to the people in an area with a great many accusations of witchcraft and trials and a good deal of fear. Attempting to bring pastoral care and compassion to people, I also came to know personally a witchfinder who was doing largely the same thing. Our methods and motivations were different, but we came to respect each other and to collaborate in bringing some further relief to communities paralysed by fear and festering hostility.

The epidemiology of witchcraft

1. What is referred to as ‘witchcraft’ in an African context is neither irrational nor random – but it is ambiguous, and very frightening to those involved in the drama it generates. It needs to be understood as an explanatory system with identifiable rules and logic. It is comprehensible, which is not to say that it is either totally reasonable or beyond criticism: it is sometimes confused and confusing, inconsistent, vague or fragmentary. But though it is not articulated in a formal, systematic way, it can be understood, as can the strategies and counter-measures it produces. Witchcraft tries to face the problem of evil and resolve critical matters, so that life can continue. It is not adventitious or mindless; and it discloses certain clear lines of structural and social tension. So, determining just who accuses and who does not, who is accused and who is not, is always enlightening. Then we can ask: Why? Then we can attempt to interpret.

2. The logic of witchcraft derives from certain accepted principles about the invisible world (the *really real*), and the agencies (spirits and powers) believed to exist there and to affect the visible world. Since the spirit world is different from the material, different rules, not surprisingly, apply. Characteristics of a world of spirits include the phenomena of bi-location, psychic cannibalism (not physical), the ability to fly, therio-morphism (humans taking animal form and then reverting to human form) and the prevalence of spirit or animal familiars with extraordinary powers. We will need to identify a variety of phenomena and applicable rules.

3. Reality is, very largely, what a community agrees to be real. In this sense, reality is socially – or religiously – constructed. Witchcraft concerns the *really real*: irreducible social and spiritual reality. But that reality is not *empirically* real, except by its (presumed) effects: crop failure, sickness, unexplained events, even death. Identification of these effects points incontrovertibly to what underpins them: in essence, personal agency and the abuse of (spiritual) power. Things do

not happen randomly or by chance. Someone – human or spiritual – must be responsible for evil in various forms. Witchcraft is a kind of theodicy, an attempt to account for evil in the world by allocating personal responsibility.

4. The putative agents of witchcraft are people (enhanced by the use of illegitimate power or evil spirits), but – significantly and explicitly – they are the very kind of people we should *not* be: selfish, malevolent, destructive, anti-social. In a society where witchcraft dominates, people know that the best way to avoid accusations is to be transparent, sociable, well-thought-of – in other words, a good person. Fear of accusation is a powerful means of social control. Accusations of witchcraft feed on inequalities, hostility, jealousy and social friction.

Nevertheless, in some societies witchcraft is believed to operate involuntarily: people do not know they are considered to be witches until accused. In such cases, punishment is rarely draconian if the accused person is compliant. Scapegoating (which is as old as humanity) may function to restore harmony at minimum cost to the accused. But there are rare occasions when even children are accused. Such is the strength of the circular logic of witchcraft that sometimes children are accused first and *then* people conclude that witchcraft *must* be involved because *ordinary* children would be incapable of the kind of evil that is now evident to all!

5. An important distinction needs to be made at this point. For individuals, witchcraft is usually perceived as unmitigated evil, and witches as an utter abomination – an inversion or perversion of what a human person should be; yet witchcraft itself (according to structural-functionalist understandings) can and does serve a social purpose. However, that purpose needs to be uncovered by close, local studies, since manifestations of witchcraft and their significance are always context-bound. If we distinguish individual and social perspectives, we may be better able to identify both functional and dysfunctional elements in witchcraft. We should, therefore, approach witchcraft with great care and caution.

6. Though witchcraft is believed to bring about sickness and death in others, it is a psychic rather than a physical activity: it is the spirit of a person that is believed to roam around at night and attack the spirit of another person. But once a person's spirit has been compromised, physical sickness or death is inevitable. So, where witchcraft is felt to be 'in the air', people who fall sick may not receive normal attention: fears of witchcraft can cause avoidance or ostracism, social paralysis and fatalism. Some people who would otherwise have recovered may actually die through neglect.

7. Because witchcraft operates out of sight, and because its power is invisible and direct, the evidence it leaves is circumstantial rather than physical. But circumstantial evidence can be compelling where witchcraft is a social fact. Why would a healthy person fall sick and die? Unexpected sickness is often the first sign of witchcraft. Under certain specified circumstances – varying across societies – a search for the personal, human cause of such sickness will be mounted. This is, in essence, the witch hunt. Since everyone is imperfect, few are absolutely above suspicion. The spotlight will be trained on the accused, and their every jealousy, hard word, threat or malevolence will be brought to light as circumstantial evidence. A witch trial can be nightmarish – truly frightening.

8. Fears of witchcraft breed further panic; once a community is convinced that witchcraft and witches are at work, accusations may proliferate – both through gossip and along certain lines of social structure, particularly those vulnerable categories of people such as widows, co-wives, even children. Sometimes, witches are so feared that only a professional witchfinder is considered capable of responding. Witchfinders are relatively rare. They are dramatic, quite expensive and very famous. Charlatans are not unknown.

9. Witchcraft focuses on the most intractable, local but perennial and ultimately insoluble problems: Why do so many babies die? Why does evil prosper? Why is life not fair? Accusations are levelled at people because the idiom of witchcraft is personalistic: behind every 'What?' is believed to be a 'Who?' Someone – human or spirit – must be the cause. This is not illogical. Yet, to reiterate: to say that it is rational and comprehensible is not to say that witchcraft is always totally consistent or compellingly clear. Many things we do are comprehensible without thereby being 'best-practice' – or even well informed.

10. Witchcraft addresses, contextually, problems that are common to humanity. Responses to witchcraft do not derive from Christian theology or categories. That is not to say that Christian theology has nothing to offer, but it is to caution Christian ministers about their responsibility to understand witchcraft on its own terms, before presuming to address, confront or remedy it.

Responses, human and Christian

11. The worldview in which witchcraft operates embraces spiritual agencies. Because so-called witchcraft existed before, and independently of, Christianity, there is no reason to force it into Christian categories or to identify the spiritual agent as Satan, much less to assume that the best response is to identify it as Satanism, to demonise those accused of it or to impose wanton exorcism. Witchcraft cannot be reduced to or identified with Satanism, any more than it can be to cannibalism or ritual murder. It must be understood in its own contexts, on its own terms and according to its own logic.

12. There are three obvious outsider responses to witchcraft: it could be directly attacked (driving it underground, though not eradicating it), deliberately neglected (but the serious problems it addresses will ensure its continuing relevance) or approached sympathetically and pastorally (in which case two millennia of Christian experience of suffering and evil might provide something to contribute for the benefit of others). If the concerns that witchcraft addresses – human tragedy, natural disasters and evil itself – are also Christian concerns, some degree of convergence rather than confrontation or condemnation should be possible. This demands deep study of the phenomena; correct interpretation requires knowledge of particular contextualised meanings.

13. The phenomena categorised as 'witchcraft' may range from the 'standardised nightmare of the group' to a relatively unremarkable social fact. In some cases the witchcraft may take a virulent form; in others, it is something the community can handle relatively easily. Churches and their agents can do great harm – or great good. Witchcraft is driven by fear and the fragmentation of social relationships. Christianity should be able to address human fear and build human communities in a persuasive and peaceful way. Otherwise, it is largely irrelevant or crudely oppressive. Jesus, as antidote or response to our fear, should be appealing: a powerful image.

14. Witchcraft should not be sensationalised, exoticised or romanticised. It is indeed dramatic and dramatised social behaviour, but it addresses ordinary human problems: it is not the bizarre behaviour of 'them' (people so very different from 'us'), even though the idiom or the medium may be unfamiliar. Therefore, we should not seek 'other' – unusual, complex, esoteric – explanations until the more routine and simple have been exhausted. The principle known as Occam's Razor is critically important here: higher-level explanations should not be invoked until lower-level explanations have been exhausted. As Joseph Conrad observed: 'The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary: men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.' Witchcraft can be explained perfectly adequately without invoking Satan. There are much simpler psychological and sociological explanations. Exorcism – as distinct from community prayer for release from fear, animosity or bitterness – should be a very, very last resort. The employment of

exorcism indicates an assumption of a diabolical presence. Such an assumption is usually as unwarranted as it is unnecessary.

15. To caricature other people's beliefs as irrational, superstitious or ignorant is further to exoticise them and the people who hold them. We need to find common ground rather than polarise 'us' against 'them'. Human beings are, paradoxically, all different and yet all the same. Witchcraft itself is not irrational, though we may need to explore alternative rationalities or varying criteria. Those who claim that there is only one single kind of rationality obviously assume they possess it themselves. Others can then quickly be judged irrational – or superstitious, simple-minded and so on. But if you acknowledge more than one rationality, then – unless you have acquired an 'insider perspective' – either you do not presume to understand others completely or at least you try to respect their integrity. Any form of coercion is quite inappropriate for Christians, however.

16. It is helpful to distinguish two contrasting types of explanation, though they may co-occur. Psychological explanations, focusing on states of mind, may include hysteria, but also fear, envy, malevolence, selfishness and so on, as contributing to accusations of witchcraft. Sociological explanations would identify structural problems in society itself: famine, flood, epidemic, family breakdown, even near-anarchy. Accusations of and punishments for witchcraft will surely expose lines of structural weakness, social tension and so on. Accusations turn the spotlight on fear, jealousy and animosity and the people most readily scapegoated. It is such elements as these that the Christian community can address, but never in a violent manner.

17. Witchcraft is a social reality in many communities. We should not assume that it is pathological. Some components may be less than healthy, but to demonise all manifestations of witchcraft would be ignorant and prejudicial. We must identify functional or healthy elements (the restoration of community relations, a re-emphasis on common values, sanctions against selfish and destructive people) no less than the dysfunctional or unhealthy (scapegoating, vindictiveness, ostracism, sometimes violence and even murder). But not everything is pathological or un-Christian.

And insofar as witchcraft is a form of social control, some of its lessons are evergreen. In every culture there is both sin and grace; humanity is flawed yet touched by the Divine. As a social institution, witchcraft struggles with manifestations of flawed human nature. It addresses some of the very same problems and questions that concern Christianity. It may uncover some human sin, but nevertheless it may help to point people and communities to a new way to live. Anti-witchcraft procedures can regenerate communities and leave people with a sense of relief and wellbeing and a commitment to future harmony. Christianity should be able to discover appropriate anti-witchcraft procedures that would advocate on behalf of victims and champion the falsely accused, but without exploiting people's fears.

18. The epistemological categories and the worldview of those who experience witchcraft in contemporary Africa are not identical to those found in the Bible. Historically, the Church's growth in a Semitic and Mediterranean context of belief in spirits lent itself to an over-zealous identification of African witchcraft and evil spirits. But African witchcraft does not depend on biblical or early Christian categories. Biblical literalism and fundamentalism are very dangerous when applied uncritically to so-called witchcraft. A Christian worldview cannot be superimposed on a witchcraft worldview: the two are not translatable in terms of formal or literal equivalence. And failure to respect other people, and a desire to threaten or browbeat them, is inconsistent with the core principles of Christianity.

19. Christians accept as dogma things that are not amenable to rational demonstration or empirical proof: the Resurrection, the Real Presence, eternal life, heaven and so on. Authority and tradition are powerful formers of belief and commitment. So it is with beliefs about witchcraft

and the practices that attend them. Shifts in ways of thinking, the conversion of mind and heart, may be slow processes. But those who preach Christianity must also learn how and why people believe and act as they do. Ideas and fears about witchcraft have been manipulated by unscrupulous people and have terrorised the credulous. Christianity should be an authentically liberating and humanising force, without a trace of manipulation or intimidation.

20. Witchcraft is not to be confused with – much less identified as -- child abuse, satanic practices, ritual murder, cannibalism or even possession cults. Such practices, if and where they exist, are quite different from witchcraft as an attempt to confront evil in the community. They are indeed pathological forms. A scapegoat may be a common feature, but they are radically different phenomena. Witchcraft itself is psychic rather than physical, though the people accused are actual people. Of itself, a dead child – even a dismembered African child – is quite insufficient evidence of Satanism, ritual murder or cannibalism, and not at all consistent with the witchcraft described here.

The rush to judgement, especially the rush to ill-considered judgements about other cultures and practices, is premature, immoral and inexcusable. In the 1930s, the British were utterly convinced of what were called the 'Beef Murders' in West Africa. These were supposedly cannibalistic ritual murders perpetrated by members of the appropriately exoticised Alligator, Leopard and Baboon Societies. The British arrested a large number of suspects, and extracted a number of confessions. Not making any distinctions between psychic and physical cannibalism, and not expecting any empirical evidence since it had presumably been eaten, the British, on the strength of extracted 'confessions', publicly hanged several dozen Africans. Not exactly good forensic practice, nor quite civilised behaviour, but surely a cautionary tale for us all.

Cultural versus Biblical Practices in the Congolese Community

The Rev Jean-Bosco Kanyemesha

*Pastor of the London Fire Church International
and co-leader of the Congolese Pastorship in the UK*

I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country devastated by war over the last years, where the emerging Pentecostal church is influencing the life of both the citizenship and those in government. Revival in DRC first started with the late Apostle Aidine Abala, when he started the first Pentecostal church in the early 1960s. Before him, we had the late Simon Kimbangu, the first Congolese prophet, who was arrested by the Belgian colonial authorities in the 1920s for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and was actually imprisoned for several years until his death. Despite this setback, the first Pentecostal church in the Congo was born, called the Fepaza (or Fepaco) Church: the Federation of Pentecostals in Central Africa in Zaire.

The big revival in DRC that started in the 1970s is still expanding today. It has since given birth to the movement of the revival church, which is now a recognised institution in DRC, on a par with the Catholic church, the Muslims and the Protestant church. The Revival Church of Congo is well represented by an archbishop who is also an MP and an adviser to the President.

The revival church has had a great impact in DRC, and sadly this means that we find several opportunists appointing themselves as ministers of the gospel and starting to attract crowds. This is where the problem started. (Nonetheless, for all the unqualified ministers out there, there are those who are indeed qualified and have actually trained to minister to the people, through good and bad times.) A lack of accountability and qualifications has allowed many people to get into ministry, and these so-called pastors – they are not real pastors – by their misguided practices make it easier for parents and families to abuse children behind closed doors, in the name of so-called demon possession (which is, in fact, witchcraft).

The Bible talks of witchcraft and demon possession, and the Lord Jesus and the apostles dealt with them.¹ The main problem with witchcraft is not really whether or not it exists but how one deals with it. From our experience in working in ministry and deliverance, we can assure you that deliverance is never facilitated by extreme measures – such as putting chilli pepper in people's eyes, cutting children with razors and other violent and immoral procedures that can harm people and even endanger their lives. These make matters not better but worse for the people involved. However, for children there is a right way: the way of prayer, which can be pursued only according to biblical principles² and by complying with safeguarding policies. Here, healing is accomplished through prayer and does not require shouting, pushing or any kind of aggression. It is done in peace, love and care, without harming or abusing anyone or putting their life at any risk.

We have to clarify the difference between biblical practice and 'cultural and sectarian practices' which are common to many cultures and are not exclusive to the Congolese community, or even to African culture as portrayed by some of the mass media. Children are abused in different ways in Britain and all over the world.

In my childhood in the 1980s, between the age of six and 13, I was a victim of this kind of abuse. It took place not at church but at home. My parents were Catholics, and not even revivalists –

¹ See, for example, Luke 8:26-37 and Acts 16:16-18.

² See Mark 16:17-18.

which means that abuse is not exclusively a feature of the revival church. I felt such pain in my heart, to experience such an intensity of cruelty, which continues even today.

The infiltration of impostors and traditional healers into the church has aroused major concern among the pastoral community in both Britain and Congo. The information published by the press is a real concern – and threat – to our community. We still live with the impact of it today in our daily church activities. We have, therefore, sent the tape of the most recent BBC documentary, *Witch Child*, made by Dr Richard Hoskins, to the head office of the Revival Church of Congo, and investigations alongside the police are in process regarding the person involved in it. This issue has been an immense shock to our whole community – a true disappointment, especially as pastors are seen as ‘spiritual fathers’ in the community. And because the church plays a vital role in the everyday life of our community, it is really important.

The Congolese community in Britain is quite new, having become significant only at the end of the '90s. The peculiarity of this community is that the church occupies a major place in its members' everyday lives – in the running of their businesses, for example, and in resolving conflicts within families. The church plays the role of father and helps new members of our community to settle and integrate themselves into British society. Our churches are not just churches but a family in which people help each other to get used to the way of life in their adopted country. Our youth find and develop new friendships to improve their mother tongue, and they also adopt new skills in this environment. Destroying the reputation of our churches also destroys the whole Congolese community

Our churches are not just for a single community. Yes, they began inside our community, but now some of our ministers are working beyond barriers of language, ethnicity, culture and race, to open up our work to the whole of British society. The strength of this country is its multiculturalism and we strongly believe that the Congolese community has a part to play and a contribution to make. There are positive things in our culture and we intend to show them. Our churches have achieved a good record on a wide range of issues, understanding and finding ways to deal with some of the main concerns of our community over the last 10 years, such as problems with immigration, family crisis, early pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse and truancy. As in every culture, there is weakness but also there is strength.

Dealing with our weakness is essential. As leaders in the Congolese community, we have recently taken some major decisions for the improvement of our work and the safety of our children. We have also resolved to speak out, not just for our own sakes but also for the good of the community. To this end, we have recently set up a new corporate body, which we have called the Congolese Pastors of the UK, or Pacoru. We have produced a code of practice for churches that become members of the CPOUK, and today we are tabling here the foundation document of Pacoru and our new child protection policy. We intend to make ourselves accountable to one another and to the wider society, and to raise the standards of all our recognised members, so that we can better distinguish between biblical churches and so-called churches that harm children and damage the reputation of us all.

This will enable us to stand firm and condemn any kind of abuse and the wrong use of the gospel of our Lord, and to challenge all the false accusations that the Christian community may face in Britain, DRC, Congo and Angola.

This new group already has a membership of over 180 pastors operating in Britain. It will have as its mission:

- to promote the Christian faith;
- to foster fellowship and networking among Christian ministers;

- to advise and help churches to comply with the British regulations for churches;
- to offer guidance and advice to both the settled and the newly formed churches and to recognise them in our network;
- to create an environment that empowers leaders, in which both they and the members of their community will be helped and supported to develop safe practices and offer training in theology, pastoral skills and other managerial skills;
- to create new regulations for our churches and put into practice more accountability and effectiveness;
- to seek official recognition by and co-operation with the mainstream churches;
- to promote a forum for all kinds of exchange, consultation and collaboration with statutory organisations for the purpose of expanding the kingdom of God.

In this way, we would like to encourage the mainstream churches, the media and the authorities (the police and the social services) to establish a continuing link with our community. We would like you to attend Congolese events so that you may also gain a better knowledge of our people, understand the cultural differences and therefore become better equipped to respond to our needs and to deal with situations that arise in our community

Finally, I would like to say: Let's help and benefit each other, and together we will make a strong British society with the aim of achieving a greater, multicultural Christian society in the world. Together, everyone achieves more.

Africa's New 'Pentecostal-like' Churches

Professor Paul Gifford

There has been an enormous explosion of churches in Africa in recent years. In discussing them, we immediately run into the problem of labels. I don't think the label 'fundamentalist' is very helpful, it being too closely linked to a particular phenomenon in North America, which began early last century and has a history and dynamic all its own. Nor is the label 'evangelical' much help, for that has been closely identified with four qualities (biblicism, cruciformity, mission and conversion) and I think none of these should be simply presumed here. Labels such as 'Pentecostal' and 'charismatic' are understandable, but 'Pentecostal' is best kept for the classical movement beginning in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, and 'charismatic' for the signs of that phenomenon in the mainline churches in the 1960s. Allan Anderson's bland label 'Pentecostal-like' is probably as good as any – though sometimes I use an even blander one, simply referring to them as Africa's 'new churches'.³

These new churches are not all the same, nor do they all attract the same clientele – and nor have they remained static. However, let me generalise and say that virtually all have two things in common. Their first characteristic is that this Christianity is about success, victory, plenty. A Christian is a success; if not, something is very wrong. Success is to be experienced in every area of life, but primarily it relates to financial or material matters – to prosperity, understood sometimes as sufficiency or adequate wealth, but probably more often as abundance. How it brings this about is understood in different ways. One is through a positive mental attitude, and many of these churches do encourage and motivate. More significant than motivation in bringing about success is a theology that is called 'the faith gospel' (or 'the health-and-wealth gospel' or 'the gospel of prosperity'), according to which a Christian, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, is already healthy and wealthy and all he or she has to do to take possession of that health and wealth is to claim it. This has often come to be linked to the biblical image of sowing and reaping. Giving to God normally means giving to his representative, and this has been particularly important in Africa, for without this doctrine of sowing and reaping none of this enormous expansion – the buildings, cars, sound equipment, salaries for an entire new class of religious professionals – would have been possible.

This first element I will not develop further, given our focus today; but I would make one observation about its enormous appeal in Africa. We can generalise about the orientation and ritual process characteristic of Africa's pre-Christian religion by noting that it was concerned with this-worldly realities: flocks, crops, fertility, animals, wives, children. So, here we have an explanation for the ready reception of a Christianity that likewise bears so decidedly on the here and now. However, the way this is expressed is heavily influenced by North American writers such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland (respectively the founder and the most prominent advocate of the faith gospel), John Avanzini, who seems responsible for the refinement that in these last days God will take all the wealth of the ungodly and give it to true Christians, and Mike Murdock. For example, David Oyedepo, the founder of Nigeria's multinational Winners' Chapel, claims that the Lord has told him that Hagin's 'baton has been passed' to him, and claims also that he received Copeland's anointing by sleeping in a bed that Copeland once slept in.⁴ In Ghana, I once heard Matthew Ashimolowo, the founder of KICC in London, tell a congregation that if they had ever heard a sermon on sowing (and thereby reaping), the ideas in it probably originated from Mike Murdock. The significance of this point will be evident later.

³ Allan Anderson, *Pentecostalism: an Introduction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003)

⁴ David Oyedepo, *Riding on Prophetic Wings* (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 2000), pp 103, 121 and 124

The second characteristic, which is directly relevant to our concern today, is the enchanted worldview, which sees spirits or spiritual forces as pervasive and focuses heavily on spiritual causality. Christianity is still about success, but the success due to a Christian may be blocked by an evil spirit. This spirit used to be identified through a lengthy diagnosis involving a questionnaire, but this seems to have been replaced by the diagnostic gifts of an anointed man of God.⁵

Besides this, there is another form of preoccupation with evil forces, and the classic presentation of this is in Emmanuel Eni's *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*. Eni claimed to have been sucked down into the undersea life of evil spirits by marrying a woman from the spirit world. He became a ranking agent of Satan, performing all kinds of wicked deeds – including several murders – until he met Jesus, when his life was transformed.⁶

As an illustration of how this focus on spiritual causality works out in practice, consider the following. In January 2001, I attended a convention at which one of the main speakers was Abraham Chigbundu of Mark of Christ Ministries in Benin City, Nigeria, a frequent visitor to Britain. Many of these pastors refer incessantly to witches and wizards; Chigbundu, however, took this further and argued that 'behind every bondage, trouble, confusion is witchcraft.' Witchcraft operates through ancestral curses, or even things we say inadvertently. (For example, in an argument a husband may say: 'I should never have married you.' Even if he forgets he ever said it, it is a 'witchcraft deposit' which can ensure that the marriage never succeeds.) Again, anyone who is named after an ancestor who 'didn't perform his destiny' 'is going to lead a life of underachievement'.

Going to *mallams* (Islamic specialists), or even to dubious 'men of God', performing rituals in graveyards, exchanging business cards with dubious people, throwing anything into water (which may serve as an entry point for a river spirit), all could constitute witchcraft deposits. Likewise, giving old coins to 'native doctors' may mean you have 'sold your finances'. Giving money to a beggar may be a point of contact ('not everyone in the street is a human being': they may be 'spirits in disguise'). Sex may also be a point of contact. 'If Aids can be transferred through sex, what about a spirit?' Certainly, 'not everyone in a skirt and blouse [in the street] is a human being.' Chigbundu told the story of a man who picked up a girl in the street, only to wake the next morning and see 'a very big white rat wearing a skirt and blouse'. Such encounters are often the reason for impotence and infertility. Dreams, too, may be points of contact. Dreams of climbing mountains, of riding an old bicycle on sandy ground (which indicates a 'spirit of stagnation'), of climbing stairs or going back to primary school, all indicate spiritual hindrances. Erotic dreams do the same in various ways.

After explaining all this, Chigbundu in the service set about destroying every witchcraft deposit that was causing blockages. 'I destroy you, Witchcraft Spirits, all deposits of witchcraft, by the blood of Jesus' – and he did so through a ritual. Everyone had to breathe deeply ('In, out. In, out,' he intoned). 'By air or liquid – by mouth, ears, every opening of my body, you must go. Move out of my life! Come out! ... It's leaving you, that spirit ruining your finances, marriage... Let it go, through your legs! ... That spiritual husband, I command you: Loose her! That invisible wedding ring on your finger, burn it now!') Women were vomiting on the floor ('Don't worry, we will clean the floors'), and pastors were going round attending to them, and women with toilet paper and rags and buckets. That spirit 'responsible for stagnancy, backwardness, disappointment, non-achievement in my life, I destroy you now... The years which witchcraft has wasted, I command

⁵ For examples of these questionnaires, see Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its public role* (London: Hurst, 1998), pp98-99.

⁶ See Gifford, *African Christianity*, p101, and the similar literature listed there. For a more detailed treatment, see Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a globalising African economy* (London: Hurst, 2004), especially chapter 4.

them to be restored tonight. Whatever they stole from you, be restored sevenfold! The spirit of greatness, I release it. I reclaim the spirit of greatness tonight. Receive it!' In reply, everyone shouted, 'I receive it!' Chigbundu is a powerful speaker, and it was obvious from the congregation's reaction that he had touched a nerve.

Not all are as unequivocal as Chigbundu, but I would submit that virtually all Africa's new churches share that worldview to a greater or lesser extent: that spiritual forces bringing misfortune or holding one back must be driven out. However, this is not necessarily the most obtrusive characteristic of a church. Kenya's Haile Selassie Avenue has two of these mega-churches only a few hundred yards apart. The Jesus is Alive Ministries of Bishop Margaret Wanjiru puts its stress on victory and success, primarily through motivation, to the almost total neglect of deliverance. Just recently, on 2 April 2006, I heard her say: 'I know there are demons from the sea, and I do deliverance, but most of the time I live as if they don't exist. The glory of God in our lives goes to every situation, so stop fearing witchcraft and juju.' By contrast, Neno Evangelistic Ministries, though just as concerned with success, focuses overwhelmingly on deliverance, through the gifts of the 'prophet' James Ng'ang'a.

This worldview is even more pervasive than you may think. In 1995, Kenya's President Moi set up a presidential commission of inquiry into 'the cult of devil worship in Kenya'. The commission invited both oral and written submissions from interested parties and travelled round the country holding hearings both in public and in private. It submitted its report later that year and, though it was never officially or publicly released, parts of it quickly found their way into Kenya's newspapers. The commissioners detected recurring motifs: signs and symbols, initiation rites, wealth, nakedness, human sacrifice, the eating of human flesh, the drinking of human blood, astral travel (often to India), the ability to transform oneself into a cat or a snake and to cause disasters such as ferry and train accidents.

The first case-study gives a flavour of the whole. A Nyeri schoolgirl was recruited into devil worship when spirits and ghosts took her to their home. The demons made demands on her: that she sacrifice a member of her family, especially the last-born (when she refused, the child fell sick); that she have sex with demons (she gave in to this demand). They also cut her body before rubbing in some substance that gave her mystical powers that enabled her 'to transform herself into anything' and to cause accidents, in some of which fellow students and staff were injured. She claimed she was able to turn herself into a man and enter Masonic temples, where she took part in activities. She could also 'communicate with other creatures such as birds, travel to distant places in spirit form and appear/disappear mysteriously'. During seven years of devil worship, she ate human flesh, drank human blood and possessed satanic paraphernalia, including 'blood in powder form, bangles, rings and a knife'. The girl was rescued from the cult when she was 'saved' in 1994, whereupon she entered a Bible school.

The importance of this report is that it reveals a widespread need to conceptualise in spiritual terms a range of personal and social ills, including cultural dislocation, economic deprivation, the sense of lives wasted. Although the public reaction to the media disclosures showed that not all Kenyans subscribe to this spiritual conceptualising (the outspoken Presbyterian cleric Timothy Njoya denounced Moi's commission as just a 'diversion to keep Kenyans from pursuing issues that are affecting them, [by] blaming human failure on the devil'⁷), it was equally obvious that a sizeable section does. And just as obvious that recourse to spiritual explanation extends far beyond what might be considered its natural habitat – local shrines, African independent churches and the 'Pentecostal-like' sector – because the commission was headed by the Catholic Archbishop of Nyeri, Nicodemus Kirima, the other commissioners being an Anglican bishop, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, the pastor of a large Nairobi church, a professor of

⁷ *Daily Nation*, 18 August 1999, p22. See also *Sunday Nation*, 29 August 1999, p14.

religious studies at one of Kenya's universities, the chaplain of a national school, a prominent lawyer and a senior police officer.

Again, though, the spiritual explanation developed in this report is not precisely that traditionally associated with African religious sensibilities, formulated in terms of witchcraft, sorcery, curses, spiritual agency, possession and ritual cleansing. This report, too, seems to conflate two worlds: the traditional spirit world of Africa and Western cultism (the report makes much of the Church of Satan set up in California in 1967). Indeed, some key ideas in this report – doorways of satanic entry,⁸ rock music as satanic, intrinsically satanic symbols – seem to come from sections (albeit quite marginal sections) of Western Pentecostalism (an interpretation that the books it cursorily cites would support).

More recently, the Presbyterian flagship church in central Nairobi embarked on a crusade to eliminate all Masonic signs from the church. In 1994, the Kirk Session decided that Freemasonry was incompatible with Christianity. In 2002, the signs were identified, and between 6 and 9 October 2003 the relevant windows and other items were removed. For example, the crucifix (Jesus on the cross, rather than an empty cross) is a device used by Satanists and other cults to teach that Satan defeated Jesus on the cross. 'The curtain rails in the vestry terminate in a snake representation ... which is part of satanic worship. ... The sanctuary and the newly constructed youth hall both have chequered floors. Chequered floors are Masonic symbols of witchcraft for controlling people. Where there is a chequered floor, incantations can be cast against the congregation so that they don't comprehend the gospel and pray.' The early 'missionaries-cum-Freemasons' did this, replicating altars in their Masonic lodges, so that 'the sacrifices which they would perform on the altars in the lodges would result in psychic spiritual energy which the Freemasons could and still do use to control and manipulate legitimate worship in the churches through witchcraft.' Again: 'the incorporated signs and symbols' (in 'practically all the churches') are used 'as contact objects through which the Masonic power of witchcraft is used to control the minds of worshippers and therefore influence the direction of the church.' This explains the churches' 'lack of spiritual growth despite their continued growth in numbers'. What is required is cleansing, so that the Satan worshippers are 'automatically disconnected from their power source once their contact points are destroyed'.⁹

The Presbyterian Moderator explains the state of Kenya in terms of such spiritual forces. As many of you know, *harambee* means something like 'community self-help', and it was idealised to express the spirit of post-Independence Kenya and so is enshrined on the national coat of arms. The Moderator claims that the word is derived from the chants of Indians who the British brought in to build the Uganda railway and is an invocation of a Hindu goddess called Ambe. As a result, this goddess controls the city of Nairobi, the army, the police and even parliament, wherever the coat of arms appears. 'Innocently,' he told the Presbyterian General Assembly last month, 'we have given the complete reign and rule to this Hindu goddess over our beloved land of Kenya. ... No wonder our country's economy is in the hands of the Indians whose god appears on and controls our currency. ... We must now as a nation come together and repent and renounce this goddess and dethrone her from the seat of reign and power over Kenya. Only then shall we be released to move into our wonderful destiny in the areas of economy and education and freed from all the evils that enslave our nation.'

So, although the religious imagination evident in Christian deliverance has close similarities to Africa's pre-Christian religion, the way it is expressed is very influenced by Western writers.

⁸ 'Doorways' through which Satanism can enter society are groups such as the Freemasons and Mormons, Rudolf Steiner Schools, and Transcendental Meditation and the New Age.

⁹ Most of the *Spark* of February 2005 is devoted to this issue; the quotations are from here.

Derek Prince's 1990 book *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*¹⁰ has most of this: curses that run in families, up to four generations; idol worship as satanic; false religion under the guise of Christianity; the power of the word to fulfil itself; the power of a curse uttered by someone in a superior position;¹¹ 'women's problems' as the result of a curse; pervasive witchcraft; curses as the cause of rejection, failure and frustration. Prince indicates that he had been working on this path for three years, so he must have begun working out this theory in about 1987. Witches are everywhere. Natural laws don't necessarily work, as there is 'a world of powerful forces that do not operate according to natural laws.'¹²

Rebecca Brown's *He Came to Set the Captives Free* is the story of Elaine, a Satanist for 17 years before meeting the author, who brought her to Christ. It is a graphic account of life with Satanists, witches and warlocks. It tells of human sacrifice, torture, drinking blood, cannibalism and sex orgies, and also of witches meeting just to play games like changing cats into rabbits and back again.¹³ It tells of Satan appearing, eight foot tall and smelling of sulphur (the illustrations show demons with horns and tails). Other demonic creatures she encountered are werewolves and vampires. Elaine actually became a bride of Satan, and she tells of ceremonies in which she was raped by him and other prominent demons. Satan is behind everything. Vegetarianism, Eastern religions, yoga, rock music, all are part of his strategy. Most scientific research is under his control. Demons handle viruses and bacteria, and can do molecular damage 'without altering the appearance of the cellular structures under our microscopes'.¹⁴ Satanists are everywhere: in the medical profession (where they kill patients), in the police force (which is why the human sacrifices are covered up), among prominent churchmen. Indeed, 'most powerful people serve Satan.'¹⁵ A key idea of Brown's is that Satan has legal rights. A Christian can still be afflicted by demons, for 'doorways' exist everywhere, and often can hardly be blamed on the individual.

In the same way, it is a common characteristic of Africa's new Christianity that spirits are forever being found responsible for every manner of evil. Nevertheless, it is not precisely the enchanted imagination of traditional Africa. Also, this worldview is found more widely than just in the newer churches, and is quite common in the historic mission churches, too.

In 20 years attending these churches all over Africa, I doubt that I have ever witnessed anything that would cause the police to intervene. One might even argue that it is better to have one's evil spirit cast out in church and be immediately accepted back into the community than to be exiled to a camp for witches, or lynched. Nevertheless, I have often felt uneasy about three aspects of this. First, there is the practice of 'reversing the curse', which involves 'returning to sender' the fate intended for their victim, even to the extent of killing whoever is deemed responsible. This is very dysfunctional. Here is an example from a pastor writing in one of Ghana's tabloids: 'A certain unbeliever used spells, curses and fetish powers to snatch a husband from the legal wife. The terms in the spell from the fetish priest were that the man should divorce permanently the legal wife, which should terminate in the death of the legal wife. ... When [the wife] reported the case [to me], we stood on the biblical basis in marriage and intercession and deliverance. The spell and curses on the legal wife were broken and reversed back to the rival, which killed the

¹⁰ *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1990)

¹¹ His wife's introduction tells how as a girl she had said, 'I hate my legs,' which was the reason for her thrombosis in both legs 39 years later (p9). A husband told his wife: 'I hate your guts'; the wife later required surgery for three different abdominal conditions (p98).

¹² *Ibid*, p19

¹³ *He Came to Set the Captives Free* (Springdale PA: Whitaker House, 1989), pp54-55

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p247

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p63

rival under pregnancy and revitalised the marriage with the legal wife, to the amazement of all concerned. They are now enjoying a flourishing marriage.’¹⁶

I have heard nearly all the important pastors in Ghana boast of their ability to reverse curses. Indeed, I have heard only one pastor deplore this tendency: ‘Any prophecy that brings discomfort to a person or chaos in a person’s family is of the devil.’¹⁷

The second aspect is that some of these pastors can cause real disruption within families. I remember a service in Ghana in 2001 at which the ‘prophet’ noticed a girl from a group of three or four backing singers trying to leave the auditorium. He called her back because he had seen a coffin following her with ‘Nadi’ written on it. (‘Do you know Nadi?’ ‘Yes, that is my name.’) The ‘prophet’ then told her she was going to die before 25 December, and explained that her family was trying to kill her because they were jealous of her because she had a big future with a happy marriage. He then reversed the curse. Then, he called up to the platform another woman who he said was going to have a car accident, and was also going to be retrenched from her job working in a bar. He told her that her mother was responsible for all her problems. The mother would die before 5 November, but they were not to mourn her because she was responsible.¹⁸

The third element that has caused me disquiet is that it not infrequently involves children. The Kenyan ‘apostle’ James Ng’ang’a writes that children are particularly open to possession, and I have seen him deliver young girls, often in floods of tears.¹⁹ Just how terrified they were I was not able to judge, for the huge crowd obviously saw little to be alarmed about and the girls themselves seemed to have volunteered for the ritual.

If the overwhelming majority of these pastors attach great importance to spiritual forces, there is also a different approach to this issue. The pastor with the highest profile in Ghana is Mensa Otabil. His Christianity, too, is about success and wealth. But he is clear that one’s success is not thwarted by demons or witches, nor are they responsible for poverty. His position is well caught here: ‘You want to be a success, with families, houses, jobs, education, finances, wealth. ... You don’t become a failure through witches, wizards or juju. You become a failure because of choices made by you or on your behalf. We must take full responsibility for how our lives turn out’ (6 August 2001). He does not directly attack the worldview that sees spirits as pervasive. I have heard him a few times say: ‘Maybe there *are* witches. Maybe there are even some here today to hear me preach. In that case, welcome! You are most welcome.’ But then he just moves to a level of explanation in which witches simply have no place. The spiritual forces that are so often invoked in these churches he effectively discounts.

¹⁶ *Love and Joy*, vol 17, p7; also vol 2, no 19, p6

¹⁷ Kwamena Ahinful, ‘Controversy’, *Mirror*, 4 November 2000, p16

¹⁸ As another example, in Ghana in March 2001 a pastor, visiting from London, spoke on spiritual warfare. He insisted that it was the spiritual forces behind people that must be fought. ‘Your real enemy is not your [future] in-laws refusing to accept you but the spirit who doesn’t want you to get married.’ Dealing with the spirit may involve hurting the person through whom the demon is working. The pastor gave an example from his own life. When he was in a village doing his year’s national service after university, a young girl worked for him as a maid. He used to fall ill regularly and had to go to Accra for treatment, which used up much of his money. One day, lying ill in bed, he saw the shadow of the girl coming towards him and realised that the girl was a demonic agent.

He decided to attack not the girl herself but ‘the spirit of infirmity’ possessing her. Two days after he prayed, children came running to tell him that the girl had collapsed at school. Experiencing what felt like an arrow in her stomach, she had rolled from her desk, down the stairs and right out into the compound. The pastor ran to her and, ‘in my foolishness’, prayed for her. It was too soon, for when she recovered she continued her attacks on him. The lesson was that if members of your family, even your mother, are responsible for your ills, and are hurt by your counter-attack, don’t pray for them! ‘Let them die, let them die, let them die! Sometimes God chooses to throw both the horse and the rider into the sea.’

¹⁹ His magazine *Neno Herald* (April 2006?, p2) has accounts of children aged 6 and 10 needing deliverance.

One of the conclusions of the historian Philip Jenkins's *The Next Christendom* is that the Christianity emerging in the Third World will strike the Christians of the old world with its strangeness, to such an extent that the North may well come to define itself over against Christianity.²⁰ I cannot deny that these characteristics, of prosperity and deliverance, are both somewhat strange to the refined Anglicanism of Jane Austen or Anthony Trollope. The faith gospel, so pervasive in many immigrant churches, has become such a concern that in March 2003 Britain's Evangelical Alliance published an analysis, entitled *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, which (despite its irenic tone) could not disguise its misgivings.²¹ What it revealed was obviously so new in Britain's Christian circles that the *Times* carried a discussion of the report entitled 'Poor Christians are Deluded by "Grab It" Gospel'. The tone of this article was one of incredulity at such a distortion of 'true Christianity'.²² The worldview underlying deliverance, and the practices flowing from it, can be just as unsettling.

²⁰ *The Next Christendom: The coming of global Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp161-62

²¹ Andrew Perriman (ed), *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A report on 'word of faith' and 'positive confession' theologies by the Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals* (London: Paternoster Press, 2003)

²² Ruth Gledhill, the *Times*, 17 March 2003

Is Witchcraft Compatible with Biblical Christianity?

Dennis Tongoi

Africa Region Programme Manager for Social Transformation

Church Mission Society

The taproot of the church in Africa goes deep into her history. This heritage extends back to the formation of the Hebrew people in Egypt as recorded in the Book of Genesis. Centuries later, Africa served as a place of refuge for the infant Lord Jesus, whose parents fled Herod's bloody infanticide. Following Christ's death and resurrection, the gospel spread quickly to Ethiopia and other north African nations. Many well-known Church Fathers, including Augustine, were African. The Christian faith goes deep into the soil of the African continent.

More recent times have witnessed a dramatic growth of Christianity on the continent. In 1900, there were eight million Christians in Africa (approximately 10 per cent of the population); today, that number is over 350 million, or approximately 48 per cent of the entire African population. Every day, some 23,000 people are added to the church by birth or conversion. That's an annual growth-rate of nearly 3 per cent. Philip Jenkins, professor of history and religious studies at Penn State University, describes the impact of this massive church growth:

We are currently living through one of the transforming moments in the history of religion worldwide ... Over the past century ... the centre of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America ... Very soon, the two main centres of Christianity will be [on these two continents].

Lamin Sanneh, the great historian of world Christianity at Yale, has observed:

This rapid growth has caught the church in Africa unprepared, scarcely able to keep up with the elementary issue of absorbing new members, let alone the deeper issue of formation and training.

This growth in numbers does not correspond to a depth of faith. The majority of those swelling the numbers in our churches are young in faith – and the growing numbers have also led to the emergence of leaders who themselves have not received any biblical foundation and rely more on their personal charisma than their theological depth. In many African instituted churches, some leaders do not even *own* a Bible, let alone read one, let alone know its teachings. This lack of training is further exacerbated by the low literacy levels. They are therefore still steeped in their traditional mindset, which informs their leadership of their congregations.

Migration: the growing challenge

Many in Africa have lost hope in their failed states and see migration (legal or illegal) as the only way to a more secure future. According to the International Labour Organization, Europe alone counts approximately nine million economically active foreigners along with 13 million

dependants.²³ Although there is no exact figure, a significant majority of these will be from Africa.

With migration comes a quest for identity. Among Africans in the diaspora, this identity is often sought in replicating the one social structure that has continued to function back home: the church. The church is not a membership club that vets all who come to her doorstep. She welcomes all, from diverse countries and backgrounds. African churches planted in the diaspora therefore inherit an even more complex social network representative of the diverse nations and traditions that the migrants call 'home'.

Unfortunately, many of our African nations, despite a growth in Christianity, are still influenced significantly by witchcraft. An extreme example is the 'witchcraft factor' in the ongoing wars in Africa (which is a common factor in Sierra Leone, northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo). Richard Petraitis, in his 2003 report 'From Simbas to Ninjas: Congo's Magic Warriors'²⁴ talks of how children are recruited to fight based on 'powers' given to them by witchdoctors:

Despite history's long record of defeats for those who embrace magic as martial strategy, young African men still line up as recruits in answer to the witch doctor's siren call for magic wars ... However, the dangers from those believing they can effect violent political change, via paranormal powers, still confront the peoples of the Congo. Even more urgent for the embattled Kinshasha regime, the Congo's eastern provinces are being moved toward a state of complete anarchy by the war waged by a magic militia called the Mai-Mai (translated as 'powerful water' in Swahili). These teenage, antigovernment rebels hail from a primitive society of tribal hunters. The Mai-Mai rebels are a manifestation of an ailing society rooted in animism and witchcraft beliefs.

This war-torn area is fertile in animistic beliefs, giving birth to the now infamous 'Mai-Mai' militia movement. The child soldiers of the Mai-Mai believe they are immune to combat death because of their magical ability to repel bullets – after fighters are anointed with protective water nostrums by their witch doctors! Members of this magic militia also believe other weaponry fired at them, such as rocket-propelled grenades and mortar shells, will fail to cause them harm. Why? Because the Mai-Mai rebels believe, assured by magic men of the village, that such airborne projectiles will turn into water. These tribesmen believe so fervently in the sacred water's supernatural protection that they sport water-related objects, such as shower hoses or drain plugs, while marching into battle! Crowns made from green vines are worn into battle as an added magical aid to achieve invisibility.

Needless to say, many have died, as this belief in magic water has not saved them from modern-day ammunition. Such is the tragedy of this worldview.

The emergence of a world church

The combination of the rapid growth of Christianity in Africa and the growth of migrants has meant that the West has witnessed an unprecedented number of African-majority churches sprouting up which face the same spiritual realities of the challenge of discipleship that are faced by the church in Africa. The church in Africa has not had the capacity to disciple the rapidly

²³ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/about/index.htm>

²⁴ http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_petraitis/simbas-ninjas.shtml

growing number of converts. Its focus has been on preparing people for heaven rather than equipping them to live here on earth by addressing the cultural belief-systems that inform their daily decisions. Many times, people who come to church on Sunday morning will revert to their traditional values on Sunday afternoon as they try to make sense of the challenges facing them in their quest to survive. For the church to mature, she not only must seek people's hearts but must also transform their thinking by addressing their underlying belief-systems – their worldview.

As a third-generation Christian, I am well aware of the challenges that my grandparents spoke of when they turned to Christ from a culture that was steeped in African traditional religion (ATR). I use the term 'African traditional religion' as distinct from 'witchcraft' – ATR was condemned *in toto* by early Western missionaries on the assumption that all traditional religion was evil and associated with witchcraft, but the two are not the same. We must also acknowledge that ATR is not one, uniform belief-system: its diversity reflects that of the continent's cultures. Yet one can say that 'all Africans are united in certain issues: a belief in the supreme being who is creator of all things, the existence of spirits, life after death, a living relationship with the ancestral spirits and the practice of magic, witchcraft and sorcery.'²⁵

Distinguishing the wheat from the tares in this salad of beliefs has been the challenge for the church. These beliefs made the message of the Bible strangely familiar: Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick made him relevant to the realities Africans face every day, yet for those who convert to Christianity the challenge has been where to draw the line between the power of God and the powers they had known and feared before. It is important to note that miracles are not always from the God of the Bible – one recalls that the magicians in Egypt in the days of Moses were able to replicate the miracles he performed.

Although ATR was the dominant worldview in traditional societies, this did not mean that everyone was engaged in witchcraft. Indeed, witchcraft was acknowledged as an underlying force in the community but would be practised secretly.

Those who converted to Christianity in my community turned from their traditional systems of worship (which involved the pouring of libations to ancestors and the sacrifice of animals for blessing or thanksgiving at various events in the life of the community) and accepted the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ as sufficient for their sin and the sin of the whole world.

My grandmother, who died 13 years ago at the age of 86, spoke of her conversion experience and definite renunciation of witchcraft. She was, however, very skilled in the use of herbs for treating both herself and her animals. I remember how in 1968, while she was visiting us in the city, there was an outbreak of bird disease that killed many chickens, but Grandma, by mixing certain common herbs and feeding them to our poultry, was able to save them from death. Yet she refused to turn to witchcraft as many of her neighbours in the village did. She would be urged to bury the heads of ritually slaughtered chickens at her gate for protection against evil, but she refused. She believed in the power of Jesus to protect her.

We see this same attitude in the early church. The Book of Acts records:

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practised sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the

²⁵ Richard Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Kijabe Kenya Kesho Publications, 1989), p31

*value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*²⁶

There is a definite distinction between faith in God and witchcraft. As John Shaw says,

*Witchcraft is an activity aimed at getting certain results that are neither within human and natural power nor expected from God. The witchdoctor should be distinguished from the traditional healer or medicineman – the medicineman intends to heal while the witch is out to destroy.*²⁷

He adds:

The power of witchcraft consists of intimidation, a type of persuasion that instills fear into people. Witchdoctors are psychological terrorists, who know how to play with people's fears.

Conversion to Christ is the first step to overcoming the power of witchcraft – but discipleship must follow. Thus the Lord Jesus, speaking to Paul, describes his mission as 'to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me'.²⁸

A friend of mine called John Jusu told me what happened in his native village of Bumpe in Sierra Leone after he and a friend were converted to Christ. The whole village, including people in his church, were held in great bondage by the fear of the local witchdoctors. He and his friend observed that a large tree hung its branches right across the main road to the village, obstructing access, but no one dared to cut it down because that was where the witches congregated at night. John had learnt that 'you, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world,'²⁹ so he and his friend decided to cut the tree down.

Everyone warned them of dire consequences. The church leaders even asked them to prepare their funeral service. They went ahead and cut the tree down – and, though the whole village was in suspense for the following week, expecting something horrible to befall them, nothing happened. This incident does not deny the power of witchcraft, but rather demonstrates the power of God over witchcraft.

These two stories illustrate the importance and value of biblical teaching in equipping new converts to replace the negative practices of their culture.

Witchcraft and conversion

Turning to God through repentance of sin and accepting the sacrifice for sin made by Jesus Christ on the cross is the cornerstone of the Christian faith.

Conversion is the turning of ourselves to God, [which] means all of ourselves without leaving anything behind or outside. But that also means not replacing what is there with something else. Conversion is focusing the mental life and its cultural/social underpinnings

²⁶ Acts 19:17-20

²⁷ *Overcoming Our Fears of Witchcraft* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2005), p6

²⁸ Acts 26:18

²⁹ 1 John 4:4

*and [subjecting] our feelings, affections and instincts in the light of what God has done in Jesus.*³⁰

Salvation means renouncing any other power but the power of Jesus. We see this in the early church. If salvation is the cornerstone, then discipleship (or, in other words, obeying all the commandments of Jesus) is the completion of the foundation for the Christian faith. Can one obey the entire Bible – all that Jesus taught? The answer is yes! The whole Bible can be summarised in one word: love. Thus, the apostle Paul says:

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*³¹

Indeed, love is the yardstick for measuring any Christian work or service.³²

One cannot carry out a ministry – of healing or exorcism or anything else – that harms another and call it 'Christian' – the measure of Christianity is not what a person declares but the fruit their life bears: love. Jesus said: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'³³

Witchcraft and biblical discipleship

Thus, as the church, both in the West and in Africa, grapples with the need to disciple her converts, we must be aware of the need to address people's worldviews.

*Centuries ago the Greek philosopher Aristotle concluded that there is no effect without a cause. 'If a new effect appears on a scene, one spontaneously knows that something or someone did it and almost unconsciously looks for the cause.'*³⁴

The way we understand these 'causes' reveals our worldview. A worldview is 'a set of assumptions, held consciously or unconsciously, about the basic make-up of the world and how it works'.³⁵

Let us not think ... that we really have a choice between having a theology [that is, a worldview] and not having one. We all have our theologies, for we all have a way of putting things together in our minds that, if we are Christian, has a shape that arises from our knowledge of God and his Word. We might not be conscious of the process. Indeed, we frequently are not. But at the very least we will organize our perceptions into some sort of pattern that seems to make sense to us. The question at issue, then, is not whether we will have a theology but whether it will be a good or bad one, whether we will become

³⁰ Lamin O Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003), p44

³¹ Romans 13:8-10

³² 'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

³³ John 13:34-35

³⁴ Shaw, *Overcoming Our Fears of Witchcraft*, p6

³⁵ James W Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A basic worldview catalog* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p17

*conscious of our thinking processes or not, and, more particularly, whether we will learn to bring all of our thoughts into obedience to Christ or not. [Jesus himself had a theology.] He explained himself in terms of biblical revelation, understood his life and work in relation to God, and viewed all of life from this perspective. He had a worldview that originated in the purposes and character of his Father and that informed everything he said and did.*³⁶

The African church in the diaspora must address not only the dominant ATR worldview of her migrant community but also the complexity of living in the highly secularised culture of her host society. The ATR worldview is one in which every effect is attributed to spirits or the results of spiritual manipulation – watch the World Cup and you will not fail to see a witchdoctor as part of many African teams. African churches in the diaspora must address this worldview in their discipling of believers and yet must do so in the context of a secularised host society that denies the existence of a spirit world.

To achieve this, I suggest that a more biblical worldview must be advocated – one that

*...assumes the existence of a transcendent, infinite-personal God who created the universe both animate and inanimate, spiritual and physical, separate from himself but not independent of him. God is both transcendent (outside of his creation) and immanent (present within it). He is everywhere present and involved. The universe is open to God's purpose and intervention.*³⁷

This God is able to deliver from evil without the need for physical violence – faith in him alone is enough. One does not need to aid God or manipulate people to achieve his intervention. Indeed, when the lame man is healed just after the very first Pentecost, the apostle Peter says: 'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?'³⁸

Conclusion

The rapid growth of the church in Africa has outpaced the spiritual formation of many of her members and even leaders. This, together with a growing number of migrants to the West, has meant that not all who attend churches, or even lead them, represent mainline Christian thought or practice. It is not their profession of faith but the fruit of someone's life – love – that should inform our assessment of them. Love does no harm to one's neighbour. I would therefore not want to associate with a ministry or a church that harms its neighbour – and, in particular, children – and calls itself 'Christian'.

On the other hand, I do want to affirm that faith in Jesus and in his name alone is power to overcome evil. A 'truth encounter', not a 'power encounter', is the basis of growth and deliverance from evil for the believer, as there is power in the name of Jesus.

The church in Africa and the African church in the West can and must become beacons of hope for many in their communities who are vulnerable and many times exploited by those in power structures over them. Love is the higher way, for Love does no harm to her neighbour but seeks their good: to build up, not to destroy, and to provide hope not only in the hereafter but for a full and abundant life in the here and now.

³⁶ David F Wells, *No Place for Truth: or Whatever happened to evangelical theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1993), pp3-4

³⁷ Darrow Miller and Allen Scott, *Against All Hope: Hope for Africa* (Phoenix, AZ: Disciple Nations Alliance, 2005), p280

³⁸ Acts 3:12

Finally, it is my hope that, as we express revulsion at what has been reported in the British press about violence against children by people who should be shepherding them, I would remind you of another horror: that of child soldiers and 'night commuter' children in northern Uganda. There, the continued violence is perpetrated by Joseph Kony, who has baptised his 17-year-old atrocity 'the Lord's Resistance Army'. This, too, falls short of the Christian yardstick of loving one's neighbour, and I call on the church governments both in Africa and in the international community not only to condemn this but to speak out against it and all forms of violence against children, seeking not only to bring to justice all those who are perpetrating this but also to provide the care and support that these and other vulnerable children need if they are to function as valued members of our communities.

JESUS HOUSE

...for all the nations

PRESENTS

CHRISTIANITY OR THE OCCULT?

Emerging Trends In The African Diaspora

FINAL PROGRAMME

Opening

10:00 am	Coffee and Registration	
10:15 am	Welcome and setting the scene	Pastor Agu Irukwu Chairman, Executive Council Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

Session One

Chair: **Rt. Revd. Peter Broadbent**, Bishop of Willesden

10:30 am	Witchcraft & Christianity in Africa	Prof. Tony Gittins Catholic Theological Union, Chicago
11:15 am	Breaking the Story: Film and Presentation	Angus Stickler BBC Today Programme
11:35 am	Social transformation and the Occult	Dennis Tongoi Africa Region Director, CMS
12:15 am	Child 'B' & the BME response in UK	Pastor Jean Bosco Kanyemesha Congoese Pastorship Constantia Pennie Chair, ACEA Youth and Children's Ministry
12:45 am	Questions and Discussion	

Lunch

1:15 pm	Lunch	
---------	-------	--

Session Two

Chair: **Richard Dowden**, Director, Royal African Society

2:15 pm	Pentecostalism, Traditional Religion & Social Change in Africa	Prof. Paul Gifford School of Oriental & African Studies
3:00 pm	African Trends in Britain	Pastor Agu Irukwu Chairman, Executive Council Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)
3:30 pm	Questions and Discussion	

Tea

3.45 pm	Tea	
---------	-----	--

Session Three

Chair: **Katei Kirby**, CEO, African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliance

4:00 pm	Update on Metropolitan Police 'Project Violet' Child Safeguarding Training Initiatives	DC Jason Morgan Marcia Da Costa , Independent Advisor, Metropolitan Police David Pearson – CEO, Churches Child Protection Advisory Service
4.45pm	Questions and Discussion	
5.15pm	Summing Up	Katei Kirby Richard Dowden Pastor Agu Irukwu
