



PROPHECY IN ZAMBIA

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Prophets can be found in most cultures and times. The gift of prophecy was important and crucial in Biblical times; in the early church it was held in high regard, so much so that St. Paul mentioned prophets next to the apostles when he discussed the diverse gifts of the Spirit and functions within the church.¹ Prophecy remained important during most periods of church history, and was crucial especially in critical times. Yet prophecy, by its very nature, is difficult to control. Since it often challenges the status quo, it has always stood in tension with hierarchical institutions. In the Catholic developments after the Reformation, the prophetic role of the laity — once vital for the church — became increasingly marginalised, or pushed even beyond the margin. Prophecy became not only unnecessary, but even dangerous. But a church without prophecy could become a church without a soul. The Second Vatican Council emphasised again the prophetic role of the laity — as an essential part of the life of the church and of baptism itself. So is prophecy back on the agenda in the Catholic Church? In Zambia it certainly is, but not without its problems.

This document offers a presentation of the way prophecy is understood and practised in urban Zambia. We hope to contribute to a discussion on Christian prophecy in Zambia that may lead to a more Biblical and holistic practice that is at the same time attuned to people's quests and hopes.

How is prophecy understood in Zambia?

The "Fingers of Thomas" (a research group working with FENZA) have undertaken research about popular understandings of prophecy in Zambia. With the help of questionnaires and open interviews they approached a number of different pastors/church ministers as well as Catholic church groups. Questions focused on the nature and needs of prophecy, on Biblical examples, on examples of modern prophets, on Christian literature or TV programmes that have inspired them on prophecy, and on personal experiences with prophets and prophecies. Most people across denominations answered along the following lines:

- Most people understood "prophecy" spontaneously in terms of foretelling the

¹ 1 Cor. 12:29.



future. A prophet is a person who can — by the help of God — predict future events. When the events turn out as predicted, then we have a proof of true prophecy.

- A prophet, many people answered, also knows the hidden past of a person and the hidden thoughts. A prophet can look into the heart of a person. He/she can reveal what is secret. By leading people to true repentance and to a new life in Jesus Christ, a Christian prophet furthermore can make people confess their hidden sins. When people come face to face with a true prophet, many feel an urge to confess to the prophet and the public, and thus be purged of their sins and healed for the future.
- A prophet also has the ability to connect significant events and to draw out the hidden and underlying causes of a sickness or a situation. A prophet can make a spiritual diagnosis: looking for the underlying spiritual causes that have led to a physical illness, to misfortune, misunderstanding or the breaking up of a marriage. For the purpose of diagnosis a prophet can also interpret dreams.
- A prophet receives his/her message directly from God. One person put it this way: “God has no mouth. God has no hands. He uses the mouth of the prophet to deliver his message. As long as the prophet remains in communion with God, God will find a way to speak his message.” Some prophets receive their messages in dreams. Others have visions during prayer — while praying alone or in a group, especially when people pray in tongues. Others speak spontaneously within a given situation, and the words come directly from the Holy Spirit. In some cases the prophet may not even be aware of what he/she says. God speaks directly and clearly to the prophet or through the prophet.
- However, basically all respondents also stated that there is a lot of cheating going on in Zambia and that there are plenty of fake prophets around. “Some prophecies go back to demons and not to God.” The discernment regarding which words come “directly from God” is not an easy one, but the Bible gives guidelines for discernment.

Thus the main tenets that came out in the research — based on about 40 interviews, which we don’t claim are representative, with both individuals and church groups, including active church members, leaders and pastors. There were of course some variations among churches. Two student pastors of the SDA looked at prophecy in the context of an elaborate “theology of dispensations”, where different times in history (for example of paradise, of the law, of the apostles, of the great tribulations or of the millennium) come also with different and distinctive types of prophecy (for example: temporal ecstasy and trance for the Old Testament prophets), and where a hierarchy of prophecies is acknowledged. The



Bible itself, they said, when read intelligently, contains the true prophetic foretelling of world history, inclusive the major events of our present times.

Some members of one Evangelical church could enlist Biblical criteria for telling a true prophet from a false one. Signs of a false prophet are an immoral lifestyle, prophesying what people want to hear, prophesying for money, or when it turns out that events are not happening as predicted. The Bible for them is the main criterion for evaluating modern prophecy, since no genuine prophecy can contradict the Bible.

A quite unique definition of prophecy came from a prophet of a Mutumwa church. Here the basis of prophecy is seen to rest in the prophet's personal relationship with a God-given *mzimu* spirit, who afflicts the prophet, but who also makes him uniquely sensitive to other forms of reality that remain hidden for ordinary people. The prophet (the *kalola*) basically has two functions: to "point out" and to "measure out". "Pointing out", explained our prophet, refers to the diagnosis of a problem (individual, or of the whole congregation), taking into consideration also the possibilities of witchcraft, possession, curses, and the spiritual and physical effects of immoral actions. "Measuring out" refers to clearly setting out before the patient different courses of action that need to be taken or that should be avoided. The prophet may stress for example the negative actions that must be avoided so that a cure can take place. Prophecy here has much to do with the concepts of healing. It includes also the knowledge of medicines that can effect a physical cure, as well as the giving of mystical powers to substances (for example by praying over water or oil), as well as making the patient pass through significant rituals so as to bring order into his/her relationship with the spiritual world. Unlike in the Evangelical churches or the SDA, prophecy in this Mutumwa church is rooted not so much in Biblical examples, but in the concrete praxis as handled in their church and confirmed by the outcome. Prophets of the Mutumwa and Mizimu churches often practise also as traditional healers (*ng'anga*).

Prophecy shaped by popular Christian mass media

Christian TV broadcasts are popular in middle-class and upper-class urban Zambia. In many homes Christian channels are on for most of the day — being watched by adults and children alike. The church denomination or theological background of a TV preacher does not really matter. The most admired icon of a modern Christian prophet — according to the Fingers of Thomas — is T.B. Joshua in Nigeria (Lagos). According to his own website, he prophesied the death of President Levy Mwanawasa, the NY Buffalo plane crash, the resignation of Pakistani president Musharraf, the cyclone in Myanmar, and the death of pop star Michael Jackson — sending a warning beforehand through Michael Jackson's brother.



His broadcasts on Emmanuel TV are watched in Zambia across all denominations, and his prophecies are talked about widely. In one small Zambian town a newly built factory faced near bankruptcy when people identified it with a prophecy of T.B. Joshua about Satanism — people across denominations boycotted to buy its products, and the company had to re-design its labels. While many lay persons gave T.B. Joshua as an example of a true modern prophet, pastors tended to be more reserved, looking at T.B. Joshua as very controversial. Former Zambian President Frederick Chiluba is among the prophet's loyal followers (it is said that he sponsors some Zambians to go to Nigeria to be prayed over), and Ghanaian President Atta Mills described him as his mentor, saying that his victory was foretold by the prophet: specifying that there were to be three elections and the results would come out in January. T.B. Joshua also prophesied the results of the opening and closing matches of the 2010 FIFA world-cup — though some of our respondents mentioned critically that he (wrongly) prophesied: “the winning team will start with the letter G”.

His two websites sum up what many Christians (across denominations) believe: The fulfilment of his prophecies is “a divine sign given to strengthen belief and faith across the world”. They show to the believer that behind the causes and effects of the physical world, behind the daily events that we talk about, there are spiritual realities at work which really determine what is happening. Prophecy is there to help “the earthly way of understanding to give way to spiritual enlightenment”: An earthly way of understanding takes events and situations at face value (sickness, poverty, unemployment, etc.) A spiritual way of understanding sees them as stepping-stones into a future build on faith on the promises of God.

The prophecies of T.B. Joshua deal with concrete and sometimes very intimate situations. He brings out some details of a sickness that show the inner struggles of a person: his/her marital relationships, inner sufferings, rejection, or dreams. He may also reveal concrete details of the doctor's analysis: in at least one instance he prophesied the readings of a sperm-count! Such graphic details — broadcasted on TV across the world — shows the believer that any detail of the physical world has a hidden meaning if one can view it from the spiritual world; it can be addressed and redressed. Prophecy is seen as a proof that God is supreme over all events: over the big world events, but also over the minute details of the daily struggles.

His voice has a calming effect on many people; some people said they like to watch T.B. Joshua because of his voice — which conveys to them confidence and trust. Seeing somebody healed or prophesied about in Nigeria gives to them the confidence that God knows also their own sufferings, including all the details of their situation. “Distance is no barrier for Jesus — the only barrier is a lack of faith.” Long listings of Zambian prayer



requests for T.B. Joshua that have been pasted on various web-sites drive this point home. For believers in the prophetic word distance is no barrier in a globalised world. Through TV and through international telephone prayer-lines, the prophet touches people worldwide, and his faith-healings bridge not only international distances, but also the spiritual boundaries between the different Christian denominations, and even non-Christian faiths. Through the mass media, T.B. Joshua established a worldwide community.

The fact that the church of T.B. Joshua (the Synagogue Church of All Nations) was expelled from the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and is seen by mainstream churches to operate theologically on “the margins” of Christianity, does not disturb the viewers across the different denominations. T.B. Joshua’s way of responding to such criticism is attractive to people in Zambia: he does not answer back but just continues his work — “God will answer through my works.” In his works of charity (sufficiently broadcasted on his TV channel), people see a confirmation of him as a true “man of God”: You know a tree by its fruits. Those who look out for a systematic theology on Emmanuel TV will not find it. Theology consists of a few bold sentences meant to instil faith in the impossible. It is not for his theology that people watch. It is the miracles and prophecies, the revelations of concrete details of a person’s life, that find a way into the viewer’s heart.

The success of T.B. Joshua shows what people expect from prophecy: significant details of life are important and need to be named. By naming them and by connecting them to the spiritual world, people gain hope that they can be addressed and redressed.

Prophecy in the print media

Christian literature has become popular in urban Zambia. Educated people look for books to sustain their faith. Prophecy is a topic that attracts many readers — since it comes with many unanswered questions. Some literature deals with explanation of prophecy, others deal with its practice. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have devoted some “Watchtower” issues to the topic of prophecy, which are circulating widely across the country and across denominations. They are presented in an attractive way, where eye-catching and pleasant pictures guide the reader through the story, enabling even the non-literate person to gain something from “reading”. These issues explain prophecy from a Jehovah Witness point of view. Since the actual practice of prophecy for Jehovah Witnesses was confined to the Biblical period and has basically fulfilled its purpose, prophecy plays no major role in today’s Jehovah Witness worship practice. Explanations of prophecy refer to the past, and past prophecies and their fulfilment act as proof for the correctness of the Jehovah Witness faith.



However, more attractive to people than explanations on prophecy are the practical guides and manuals about how to practise prophecy. Here Pentecostal literature has become a forerunner. Prophecy is not only practised in worship, but also valued as a prime sign of tapping in the supernatural world that is shaping world events as well as personal life-events. Popular in Zambia are the books of David Oyedepo, the founder of Winners Chapel (Living Faith Church World Wide) which has possibly the largest church building in the world (the Faith Tabernacle in Lagos, with seats for 50,000 worshippers). David Oyedepo visits Zambia on a regular basis (nearly yearly); his visits are well advertised on large billboards across the capital, and the Zambian branch of Winners Chapel receives him with a red carpet like a State visitor, or indeed the pope (his followers call him “Papa”).

Oyedepo’s books are popular, and the titles reveal what they are about: “Born to Win”, “Releasing the Supernatural”, “Walking in Dominion” or “Winning Invisible Battles”. Such books don’t just explain things like prophecy. They teach how to practise it, how to “Command the Supernatural” (another title of one of his books), and how to gain access to God’s powers, which rightly belong to us as spiritual sons and daughters of God. To access the divine, one needs to know the spiritual skills. As an electrician has to gain the knowhow of putting lights into homes, so also the believer must master the skills of tapping into supernatural powers. If you don’t have the skills, you remain in the dark. The Bible becomes a manual for daily life. Oyedepo wants to give practical tools for the working of miracles, for connecting the human mind to God’s mind, for reading divine signals, and for maintaining the flow with the Holy Spirit.

Oyedepo’s teaching on prophecy centres on the power of the word:

Get this straight, your mouth is a weapon ordained by God to keep you in perfect dominion. It is your instrument for the exercise of supernatural authority. Jesus said everyone that is born of the Spirit is like the wind. You must make distinct sounds with your mouth concerning what you desire before you can see a sign in that direction. Every sign and wonder is a direct product of a sound. That is why only the confident loud-mouths command the miraculous in the kingdom. Many people in church are too religious to manifest signs and wonders. They keep a closed mouth and a complaining heart...²

Oyedepo explains that there is an inner mouth (of the heart) and an outer mouth (of physical speech). The two must correspond. When the heart believes a Godly desire, and the outer mouth confesses and pronounces this Godly desire, then it is just a question of time that it will come to pass — since the believer has already gained a share in the creative

² David O. Oyedepo. 1993. *Releasing the Supernatural: An Adventure into the Spiritual World*. Dominion Publishing House, Lagos, p.63.



powers of God's word. His mouth becomes "a destiny moulder". The bolder the inner conviction and the bolder the outer voice (spirit-filled Pentecostals don't pray with a quiet voice), the bolder will be the outcome.

To share in the creative powers of God's word demands that one is attuned to God. Prophecy is also seen as a means of interpreting the divine signals by which God wants to put us on our divine path. We have to work within God's own movement, within God's own time, and prophecy makes us sensitive to this flow. God speaks clearly and directly to those who have caught the wave.

For any step you are taking in your life, make sure you get the divine signal to go ahead before stepping out. This was the secret of the miraculous in the ministry of Jesus. This was the secret of the success of the apostles. Make it your secret too.

Prophecy delivers the divine signal, and it comes about when the believer keeps God ever in mind. The true believer is by nature also a true prophet.

Prophecy for Oyedepo is not just a passive listening to the revelations from God of what is to come in the future. The prophetic word creates the future. He points to the prophet Ezekiel as a prime example. In his vision of dry bones he did not just see what was about to come; he had to command the bones to become alive — he had to pronounce the words. The future depends as much on God as it depends on the speaker and pronouncer of his word.

Oyedepo wants to give a manual for tapping into the divine powers which we have as children of God. The manual is simple: believe, confess, manifest. He himself has become an icon for the success of his works: He seems blessed with a happy marriage, four loving children, splendid health, enormous influence world-wide (far beyond Africa and USA), and materially speaking he has definitely made it — people say among his possessions are two jets which transport him around the globe. If his manual does not work with you — it's surely not his fault. Is it not your own lack of faith? The worldview that underlines the works of Oyedepo is similar to the one of T.B. Joshua: the material outer world is controlled by the invisible spiritual world. It is by gaining access to the spiritual that you shape your own destiny. The jump into the spiritual is done by an act of faith. But if your life remains behind your expectations, then your leap of faith was just too small; your life remains controlled not by divine providence, but by the demonic powers that continue to feed on your lack of faith.



Becoming a prophet

In Zambia, the gift of prophecy is not uncommon.

The first time I realised that I was given the gift of prophecy, I was shocked myself. The occasion was when my sister-in-law told me she was pregnant, and we were talking with one another. At that time I had been praying a lot. While I was talking with my sister-in-law, I had a vision just there before me: I saw her holding a baby girl in her hands. I did not know what to do with this vision, and I did not say anything at that time. Some weeks passed. I felt I had to talk with my sister-in-law about what I saw — so I approached her and told her. A month later she gave birth. She came to me holding her baby girl in exactly the way I had seen, wrapped in the very clothes I had seen. This was the first time something like this happened to me. And it started to happen more often, especially during prayerful times. Out of nowhere I could see things about people with whom I was talking.

As a child, Andrew was Catholic. At 14 he joined a famous Pentecostal church (the Potters House). Here he received the gift of tongues. It was also here that his first vision took place. His friends had prophetic visions too. He felt that he had been given a gift from God. But he did not know how to handle it. “We were not yet mature. We were prophesying, but it caused a lot of confusion.” Confusion and misunderstandings made him change churches. Finally he found guidance in the Evangelical Church of Zambia, where prophecy is not practised during the main worship times, but in a small group as part of intercession. He received instructions about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and how to work with them in an orderly fashion. “It is not enough for a person to have the gift of prophecy. You must also learn how to use it,” he explained. “I had to learn when to speak and when not to speak. I also had to learn that I cannot work with my gift by myself. You must learn how to submit and how to work with others in an orderly way. Then it will be helpful to everybody.”

Andrew’s experience is unique but not uncommon. During the research of the Fingers of Thomas, many people confessed that they themselves had the “spirit of prophecy” at one time or another during their lives. Some had foreseeing or revealing dreams, for example about a death within their family. Often these were occasional events, that did not repeat themselves, or that came very rarely. Not all visions turned out in the outer world as they were seen in the inner world. Most people were left puzzled by such visions, not knowing why they had such gifts and where they had come from (God? Or some demons? Or accidental dreams?). They did not know whether there was a deeper meaning in what they saw, or whether it was a vision devoid of any meaning. One put it jokingly this way: “Many people have visions. T.B. Joshua made predictions about the football World Cup in the name of the Holy Spirit. But the octopus of Germany made even better predictions about the



football results. Did the octopus also have the Holy Spirit?” Many just ignored what happened to them: the visions were opening a path they did not really want to follow.

Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians tend to have fewer doubts about the nature of such visions: They are surely coming directly from the Holy Spirit, especially if they happen during prayers. If such practices lead to conflicts within their church, some have used their gift as an occasion to start their own church. Our research on new churches in Bauleni had shown that many churches were founded due to experiences with prophecy and healing — which pastors felt obliged to practise.³

People in Zambia tend to understand by prophecy the ability to predict future events or to know the secret past of a person or to have knowledge about the underlying spiritual causes of present situations or events. Such gifts are not essentially Christian in nature. Pre-Christian Zambia was well acquainted with such gifts, and all over the world — Christian or non-Christian — one finds manifestations of some forms of revealing, foretelling and divination. Christian prophets use a Christian theological framework to understand and to interpret such gifts. Most people in Zambia recognise that such prophetic gifts exist. In the past, they were practised by the *ng’anga*, the traditional healer. Today the Christian prophet prophesies no longer in the name of some *mashabe* spirits, but in the name of God himself.

In the Catholic Church it is especially in the Charismatic Renewal that the gift of prophecy is recognised as a gift of the Holy Spirit; in cell meetings prophecy can be practised.

Case 1: The Emmanuel Community⁴

The Emmanuel Community grew out of a charismatic cell group. Up to a hundred people — and often more — gather daily (except Sunday and Monday) in the early afternoon for prayers at the house of Mr M (a calm man in his 50s) on the grounds of a large hospital and a college. Many come from Lusaka, others are from other parts of Zambia. The congregation consists of a regular core group, and of the many occasional visitors who come with specific prayer requests.

The prayers usually start with the welcoming of the guests. People who have come with a specific problem in mind, are given “request papers”. On the left side of the paper, one fills in his/her details, as well as the prayer requests. The right side is for the “medium” to fill in

³ “The changing face of Christianity in Zambia: new churches of Bauleni Compound”.
https://fenza.org/docs/ben/changing_face.pdf.

⁴ The following information is based on visits to the Emmanuel Community by several members of the Fingers of Thomas during the months of September and October 2010, and interviews with the founder, Mr M, and the main media, by Bernhard Udelhoven (14 October 2010).



during the prayer service. At present, the main medium is a girl of around 17 years of age (in grade 11). There are also other mediums, but not all of them come every day. During the prayer services, the medium (or several mediums together) experience a state of calm possession by a heavenly figure: by God the Father, or by an angel (especially the archangel Michael), or by Mary, or a saint. The mediums are inside the house, while the congregation meets outside under a shelter. The opening prayer is followed by the rosary and a “chaplet of St. Michael” — which is a litany centred on the archangel. Then follows a Bible reading (in English, Bemba and Nyanja) and a sermon, given by the founder of the movement. The sermon lasts for around 45 minutes and its main points are backed up by newsprints, which make it easier for the congregation to follow. A number of members described the sermons as edifying; “they explain things that are otherwise difficult to understand.” Brother M often stresses the importance of being rooted in the Catholic Church. Membership in other churches is strongly discouraged. Still, people come from many different churches with their prayer requests.

During the service, the mediums in the house are given the papers with the prayer requests. It may be requests for healing from severe sicknesses, solutions to marriage problems, unemployment, family disunity, better prayer-life, or future prospects. In the state of a calm trance, the mediums answer the prayer requests in writing (quite fast), filling in the right side of the paper. This happens during the time of preaching. Sometimes a person may be permitted to consult the medium by him/herself: to enter the house, and to ask the medium directly the questions of concern. The girl sits up, slowly makes her fingers meet, and falls in a quiet trance. One of the people in the house asks who has come, and the girl mentions the name of the heavenly agent. Now the visitor can ask questions or make prayer requests, to which the medium gives short and spontaneous answers.

After the sermon follows an offering and then the time of deliverance. The written prayer requests, by now completed by the mediums, are brought to Brother M. Some prayer requests are handed over discretely to the specific persons. Others are read aloud: the person comes in front, and Brother M reads out the brief answers of the medium — for example “granted”, “delivered”, or “it’s a battle — pray for nine days a chaplet to St. Michael”, or “come back to Mother Church”. The paper indicates also the authority behind the answer, for example the Archangel Michael, or Saint Anthony. Some people are just handed the papers. Others are silently prayed over by Brother M, while they stand in front, or sprinkled with water that has been prayed over by a medium. Once every person has received his/her answers or has been prayed over, those who want may come in front and give a testimony of how they have been helped by the prayers. At the close of the service, everybody stands up, and is made to look intensely at a holy picture of Jesus on the cross, while Brother M stretches out his hands and prays over them. This silent prayer and blessing



lasts for several minutes. People said that they feel great peace during this silent prayer, and some said that their heart or chest becomes warm or even burning. One member said that she goes to the prayers mainly for that peace which will guide her through the coming days. Upon leaving, many take along water that has been prayed over during the service, or rosaries or other religious items.

Case 1 ... The genesis of the movement and the vocation of Brother M

How does Mr M describe the founding events? He dates the origin of the Emmanuel Community to the year 2000. By then he had been hosting charismatic cell meetings at his home for quite some time. During one of the meetings in the year 2000, a possessed person collapsed, and people started to pray for him, thinking he was possessed by a demon. When they tried to cast out the demon, the person answered: "Why do you want to cast me out? I am your friend." When Mr M asked for his name, he said "John". "Which John?" asked Mr M. "You know me from the Bible. How many John's do you know?" — Mr M started to enumerate the Johns he knew. When he came to John the Baptist, the person said: "That's me. I have come to prepare the way. The one who sent me will be coming after me". After this incident, people went on to pray as before. Nobody knew what to make of this strange event.

Time passed, and Mr M forgot about this incident. One day, however, so he explained, a bedridden woman was brought to him for prayers. The woman looked as if she was taking her last breath and just about to die. A number of times she even stopped breathing. Mr M was afraid she would die during the prayer service, while there was a hospital just in the neighbourhood. He wanted to send the family away, but then decided to pray for her before sending her to hospital. Mr M remembers the moment she opened her eyes during prayers, with a complete alertness — as he describes it — looking at him intensely with very sharp eyes, as if she was seeing right through him and knew all his life. "What is your name?" asked Mr M. She said: "I am". Mr M asked his question a number of times, always to receive the same answer: "I am". He opened his Bible and remembered God's revelation of his name to Moses in Exodus chapter 3. He also remembered the words of Jesus in John's Gospel when he said "Before Abraham was, I am". When he opened the Bible on the specific page, the woman answered: "Yes, I am. What you have been doing here has found favour with me. I sent my messenger to prepare the way. Have you already forgotten?" Mr M remembered now the previous encounter with John the Baptist. The person now got up and looked around in the community, one by one, calling each person by name. She indicated that God would continue to be speaking to Mr M and his community. "He is Emmanuel — God with us." After the medium had spoken, she came back to her natural state. The woman (now she was no longer sick) could not remember anything of what she



had said. But from now on this very woman would experience regularly states of possession and reveal divine messages.

This event gave a new focus to the prayer meetings at the house of Mr M. He had become convinced that God himself was coming, and that his holy angels and saints were coming, to speak directly to the afflicted people through a medium. The above woman was only the first medium to prophesy during the prayer meeting. Others were following, especially girls, and by now Mr M had the ability to recognise when a person was sent to him as a medium. Not all mediums continued to prophesy. Also the first medium stopped after some time.

Mr M saw his and their vocation confirmed through a series of unfolding events. For example, a person brought a crucifix, saying: "I was sent to deliver this crucifix here", and left. Mr M thought that it was left for a patient or one of the people congregating at his house. But nobody ever claimed it. During the prayers, a medium ordered the crucifix to be placed at a certain place. Next, a Catholic priest brought a picture of the Divine Mercy. Next, somebody brought a picture of Mary. During prayer, one medium was visited by Jesus, "showing sincere and great affection for his mother on the picture." The medium would tell Mr M during the prayer meetings what to do with the religious pictures and items, and where to place them. They were divine gifts sent to reveal God's presence during the prayers, and God would speak through them to people.

Mr M started to fast for 21 days, just drinking water. After a week, his family urged him to start eating again, but he refused. During the last day, when he was about to clock the 21 days, he had a very vivid vision. While he was in prayer, a person came to him, to take him to another place. He had to cross a very deep and turbulent river on a very high and narrow bridge. The bridge was very long but so narrow that it was impossible for two persons to cross one another. The person who took him said: "you have to reach the other side: that is where I will show you what you have to do. But you are not allowed to look back or to look down into the river. Fix your eyes to where we are going. If you look down you will perish. If a person comes from the other side, you are not allowed to talk to him. You must not do what he tells you." The person went ahead, and Mr M followed. He did not look down at the bridge, but steadily followed his leader. At a certain point he saw a huge man walking along the bridge coming towards them from the opposite side. The person who had taken him said: "Do not listen to him, but just continue walking. Do what I do: just walk." The huge man now had come near and he was terrible to look at. The guide was still walking in front of Mr M, and he just went on walking — right through the man as if he was made out of air, and continued to walk ahead as if nothing had happened. Mr M now was faced with the huge man in front of him, who had come in between him and his guide. The man commanded him: "Turn round! Go back! Otherwise you will surely die!". Mr M now was



terrified and he started to doubt what to do. The man said: “You are stupid if you don’t do what I command you. You will perish! Walk back!” Mr M took heart and just continued to walk: fixing his eyes in front of him as instructed, he walked straight through the huge man. Thus he arrived at the other side of the river. He was now taken to a big hospital. It was full of sick people, in which he knew many people. There were many doctors around. He was given a tray with medicines and ordered to administer medicine to the sick. Mr M refused: “I do not know anything about medicines. I cannot do this task.” He was told “since you refuse to give medicines, you will heal through laying on of hands.” So Mr M laid his hands on the sick, and they recovered.

Mr M took this vision as a heavenly request to embark in the healing ministry. With time, God — through the mediums — also gave instructions on certain details of the services: the arrangement of the crucifix and religious pictures, an ever-burning candle, the use of “holy water”, etc. The mediums changed with time: some stopped to be possessed, or left, while others joined. The present main medium started to prophesy in 2006 (by then she was 13 years old). Some other people (some of them children) started to get involved as “exits”: they are servants who assist with little tasks during the times of prayer. Some may also stand behind or besides the sick people who are being prayed over, as if to absorb the sicknesses so they are easier cast out.

Heavenly signs continued to appear and to encourage them, Mr M explained. On a day they had a feast, people saw signs in the sun, which was explained to them through the mediums: the angels and saints were celebrating with them. From time to time the community goes for prayer and fasting to the Kafue mountains. One day while they were climbing a mountain, praying the stations of the cross, the medium stopped and said (in the name of Jesus): “People are thinking about all kinds of things, but they are not present to my sufferings.” When they reached close to the top of the mountain (which they named Golgotha), the medium was seen with bleeding stigmata in her hands; she was afraid, and Mr M assured her she should not fear. When he closed her hands and opened them again, they had disappeared.

Mr M regards himself as being deeply rooted in the Catholic Church; in his sermons he gives many exhortations about the Catholic Church being the only true church. None of the followers doubts the giftedness of Mr M; they regard the prayer meetings as an extraordinary channel of grace. The Catholics are familiar with the images of Mary, of the angels and the saints. At the same time his followers are also aware that during the past ten years Mr M and the mediums were guided mainly by their own intuitions and visions, not by the official church. Some have questions about the Catholicity of the service, especially concerning the aspect of mediums (children) speaking in the name of God.



Case 2: The charismatic community of Mr K

Mr K (a man in his 40s) is well known in charismatic circles in Lusaka and beyond Lusaka — both for his gift of healing and teaching. What started as a charismatic cell in his home, has developed into a sizable community (mostly women, but also some young men) that gathers every Wednesday in a small grotto at a Catholic church. The grotto takes about 120 people, but people number more than 200 and may reach 300 in some weeks; therefore many people have to remain outside. Some come from the same parish, but many are from all over Lusaka. Not all are Catholic.

The following information is based on participation in one of the prayer services (in October 2010) and on interviews with participants and with Mr K. After morning mass, the community prayed the rosary. “Our group takes its strength from the Eucharist and from the intercession of Mary,” Mr K explained. Then followed a Bible reading and a sermon (in Bemba and Nyanja), interrupted by a few spontaneous songs. Since it is a charismatic prayer group, people participate, which usually means that they give loud affirmations to the prayers and teachings which touch them. Then people were called forward to give testimonies of the ways in which they have been cured or helped in previous prayer services. “We don’t want your money,” Mr K explained, “but when you are healed come back to give a testimony that will be of help to other people.” A number of people gave simple testimonies of the ways they had been healed: from high blood pressure, from fibres, from a lame leg. The blood count of one woman had improved. One HIV positive woman had just given birth to a negative child, and a childless woman had given birth to a healthy baby. There was happiness in the faces of those testifying, and the people present visibly shared in their joy.

Now the healing session started. “The more you believe, the more you receive” was one of the slogans of Mr K which found wide approval. A few people were allowed to stand up and to explain for what they were seeking healing. Mr K gave small comments, like “the reasons are spiritual”, “this is a small thing, you will be healed” or “have faith, you will see.” The message was that nothing is impossible for the person who has faith. Mr K spoke of the “God of Daniel”, who rescued the prophet from the lions’ teeth and the burning furnace. This “God of Daniel” can also rescue the believer who has faith. The teams of intercessors and healers now were also ready and the singing of charismatic songs started, which would last for many hours until the end of the service.

Mr K looked fully in command of what was happening. With the movements of his arms he commanded individuals to stand up and come in front. Since so many people wanted to be prayed over (that day they were close to 200 people), things had to go fast. Each person



whispered the prayer requests into the ear of Mr K. When he touched their heads, most fell down immediately or remained standing in a shivering trance. Helpers, intercessors and healers took care of most of the people on the floor: praying for them or casting out the remaining devils. At times there was also a bit of drama: Mr K made rapid movements as if to control some demons on remote. When he slapped into the air, a person on the other side of the grotto responded as if he was being physically slapped. (This style was similar to the televised healing services of T.B. Joshua, and his rapid hand movements had similarities with the televised movements of Philip Banda). Many people entered a trance experience: most for short moments, but for some people the trance lasted long. The style attracted a madman (who had been brought to be prayed over) to come and join the healing team for a few minutes, stretching his hands over the sick.

Charismatic trances change in style and “fashion”. Many people that day started to shake hands and feet in pain, as if overcome by great heat — a common phenomenon in charismatic circles of recent years. The charismatic trance-projection of burning hands and feet is seen to show the fire of the Holy Spirit as it is experienced by the demons. Some removed their rosaries from their necks, as if they were giving them pain. One young man who remained with his fingers crossed on the floor was diagnosed to be involved in Satanism: “this is the ‘s’ sign of Satanism — he has been initiated”, to which his grandfather shook his head in disbelief. Among the sick to be prayed over were in fact a number of people whom the families said were in touch with demonic forces or had spiritual husbands.

Throughout the session Mr K remained calm and in charge — no “demon” could take him out of his wits, and he maintained a sense of humour. Trying to cope with time, he left the people on the floor to themselves and to his helpers, just slapping them from time to time on their hands and feet, to which the struggling people reacted — in the new charismatic fashion — as if they were touched by fire.

People had to come in four shifts due to the lack of space, and the healing session lasted until 16:00 hours. Many people had now been praying since morning mass at 06:30 hours. Mr K remained relaxed and in control throughout the prayers. At the end, people looked relieved, though some were exhausted.

Case 2 ... The genesis of the group

Mr K had joined the Charismatic Renewal in 1992. At that same time he was very active in the parish: he was a youth leader, active in catechetics, and chairman of the lay council. He received the gift of healing, but was afraid to use it. The first person he prayed over in 1992 died after the prayers. Mr K felt bad: He thought that the person died because of his poor



prayers. “Only later did I realise that prayers can also prepare a person for death, that prayer prepares us for God’s will, rather than fitting God into our own wills.” In 1996 he was called to another dying person. After praying over him, the person became very peaceful, and thanked Mr K: “You have rescued me from the powers that were holding me.” The person then died in peace. This experience strengthened him, though he was still afraid to put his gift of healing into practice. “I was afraid that the church would turn against me.” But people kept responding to his prayers. In 2006 he started with the charismatics to pray in the home-craft centre at the church. Here the loud prayer and healing sessions did not please everybody at church, and in 2008 he was forbidden to work on the church grounds. That is when people started to flock to his home. That year, 2008, was very tough for him: He lost his wife, and was arrested by the police. But in spite of the hardships he went through, the healing sessions were picking up. “God gave me many signs of encouragement, and the gift of healing was increasing.” People started to come to him from all over Lusaka, and he was called to assist in many parts of Zambia, so much so that his ministry developed more or less into a fulltime commitment. The structures of the Charismatic Renewal supported him: a team of intercessors was building up (by now they are more than 15 people) who pray and fast together on Mondays. A team of healers also developed, which meets on Tuesdays to prepare the programme for the following day. The helpers come also from neighbouring parishes.

While the healing sessions were taking place at his home, a lot of talking or rumours also started to circulate: “Mr K wants to start his own church”; “He wants to be a pastor.” Some allegations were made about offerings. This led the parish priest and the parish team to call him back onto parish premises (in July 2010), so the parish could keep an eye on the movement and could also exercise some control. Being part of the Charismatic Renewal, the group is subjected to the charismatic teachings, structures, and controls. At the same time the healing ministry of the group centres strongly on the personality of Mr K, who gives it its style, and who is himself the focal point. At present the movement is in the process of being evaluated; the members are quite aware that they are in a precarious situation and fear they may be forbidden one day by the church to continue practising their gifts. At the same time, they have no doubt that God himself is at work in them, and they feel confirmed by the fact that more and more people are coming for prayers — and week by week the group is growing.

The movement is based on healing, of which prophecy is an integral part. Mr K is himself a prophet. Yet it is difficult for him to put into words what happens to him during the healing sessions:

When people come to me, I know what they have come for. Sometimes the Holy



Spirit speaks to me in dreams. Sometimes a situation corresponds to a Bible reading. Sometimes it just happens during the prayers when the people come. I know why they have come. I know it in a clear voice and a clear vision. But how I know it, I cannot put into words.

The groups of Mr M and Mr K are very different from one another — and yet have also many similarities. On one hand they understand themselves as fully Catholic. At the same time, the personal revelations, spiritual gifts and the theological concepts of an individual person (which can be idiosyncratic) constitute the driving forces of the movements. The above movements are not unique; similar movements can be found all over urban Zambia. Both groups derived from cells in the Charismatic Renewal, which is by now one of the largest Catholic lay movements. The movement has its own checks and controls. At the same time many charismatic cell groups in Zambia have developed along their own inner dynamics, and spurred on by their successes have in fact moved quite far from the official guidelines of the movement.

Why go to a Christian prophet?

Christians are not supposed to visit a traditional healer (*ng'anga*) for spiritual problems. While the traditional healer has been marginalised by the Christian discourse, the prophet has come to fill the gap. “We are Christians and we cannot go to a *ng'anga*. The *ng'anga* prophesies with the help of demons. But here we receive a message from a man of God.” This was a common answer given by people who went to consult a Christian prophet. Since the *ng'anga* is at most a marginalised option for the urban middle-class Christian, many have felt the need at the one or other point in life to consult a Christian prophet to make sense out of a series of strange and alarming events.

The case of the Mulenga family

The Mulengas (name changed) are a Catholic family living in Lusaka in a middle-class residential area. Mr and Mrs Mulenga are active in different lay groups, and are well known in their parish. Their oldest children are at university, while the younger ones are still at school. The following events took place at the end of August and beginning of September 2010.

The trigger that started off a family crisis was the visit of the father of Mrs Mulenga, known in the family as a “difficult man”, who lives on the Copperbelt. He arrived at the house of the Mulengas, but refused to enter. Instead he asked Mr Mulenga to escort him to consult a *ng'anga* — immediately. Otherwise he would not enter their house. Mr Mulenga asked his



father-in-law the reason for this request. Three years ago the National Registration Card of his father-in-law had been stolen. Now suddenly the card had re-appeared. The father-in-law suspected that some relatives had been using his card and his name for some hidden plans and transactions, and he needed to find out from the *ng'anga* the nature of these transactions. Listening to his father-in-law, Mr Mulenga suspected that much more was involved in this story than just the matter of a lost registration card. There had been some deaths in his wife's family, and witchcraft accusations had been aired. His father-in-law was not an easy character, and he was feared by his children and grandchildren. Out of respect for his father-in-law, he felt he had no option but to comply with his request.

His father-in-law led him to Dr Lukwesa Mutipula along Mumbwa Rd. After going back a number of times on consecutive days to the "doctor", receiving different instructions and paying their fees (250,000 Kwacha) and waiting for long hours, Mr Mulenga and his father-in-law were finally given a brown liquid ("tea") to drink. Then they were made to sit in the sun, and some black ointment was given to them to anoint their faces "so you can see for yourselves". They were led into a room where they were made to sit on two chairs and asked to look intensely at a big mirror that was covered with a bed-sheet. The *ng'anga* then left them alone in the room.

Mulenga family ... Shaken to the bones: Moments of confusion and doubts

By now the "tea" had started to take effect. Mr Mulenga first developed a pain in the stomach as if he was dying. Staring intensely at the lightly covered mirror, he saw two leopards who were mating. He remembered that he was having intercourse with his wife the previous night, even though the *ng'anga* had forbidden him. Did the vision show that the *ng'anga* knew? He thought to himself: "Why should this *ng'anga* forbid me to meet with my wife?" Such thoughts caused his "good-will" towards the *ng'anga* to drop drastically. Ill feelings were rising concerning the whole affair he found himself in. From the mirror various shadows of family members started to pop up and walk out of the mirror into the foggy room. He now started to see visions wherever he was looking: along the walls, and on the ceiling. He saw in the mirror the funeral of his late brother-in-law who had died a few months earlier: Mr Mulenga relived in his vision the body viewing and the journey to the graveyard. Then he saw his small popcorn machine at home, one of his failed business projects. Next he saw his age printed in large letters on the mirror, and then some letters that read in English: "we remove four years from you". Then he saw one of his daughters and his little son popping up.

Why this vision? he asked himself. Were his children shown to him so they could be sacrificed? "No, I refuse, in the name of Jesus!" he tried to shout. By now he was fully



convinced that he had landed in the hands of Satanists. “They surely wanted me to sacrifice my family or to sell my years. Why did I see the number of my years?” What made things worse for him was the fact that his father-in-law, who was sitting next to him, did not seem to be disturbed in the slightest sense. Actually he seemed to be enjoying seeing all these things. (Later he found out that his father-in-law was seeing different things than him.) The conviction dawned on him that his father-in-law was a Satanist himself: He had brought him here. He had surely initiated this visit to the “witchdoctor” to make him join Satanism and sacrifice his family. Mr Mulenga started now to pray and to shout as loud as he could (he had difficulties opening his mouth) — “in the name of Jesus, I rebuke you Satan, I will never follow you!” The visions seemed to be moving away from him when he prayed. He shouted again when he saw his last-born son coming out of the mirror. His father-in-law remained quiet and seemed not disturbed in any sense.

Mr Mulenga left the house very disturbed. He told the *ng’anga* that his magic had no effect on him since he was a Christian. But the visions or hallucinations did not stop. At home he continued to see visions for another two days. Also his family described him as being in a very confused state during this time. He called a priest, and he also called his daughters to come to him for prayers. After two days the visions stopped. But there was another thing which terrified him: going to the toilet he discovered that his penis had shrunk to about a quarter of its normal size. He saw this as a visible mark or manifestation of Satanic forces which had been enshrined now in his body.

Mulenga family ... Looking for a solution: A Christian prophet

The family also became concerned. His charismatic daughter who studies at university came for prayers, and she calmed his heart. She told him that he should pray with confidence, and that the devil had already been defeated. Other people also came to pray with him. But by now there were too many things hanging in the air. Was the grandfather of the family a Satanist? What about the deaths in the family? Who would be next? They needed to know more about the hidden things going on in their family. And also the father-in-law himself was not satisfied yet: he still wanted to know what had happened to his National Registration Card!

After a family meeting, a solution was found: Somebody knew a Christian prophet on the Copperbelt. Going to another *ng’anga* was out of question. Therefore a Christian prophet seemed the ideal solution. Mr Mulenga was so disturbed by his visions that he needed tangible spiritual affirmation. The family raised the transport money for the prophet and his assistant to come to Lusaka from the Copperbelt. It had to be now — the family could not afford to lose more time. The prophet agreed to come immediately. The father-in-law was



still present, and also some family members of his had come. The prophesying was to take place in the home of the Mulengas, just after supper.

The prophet, a Zimbabwean living on the Copperbelt, was fluent in Bemba, yet he had brought an interpreter from his church, since he would be speaking only Shona when the Holy Spirit arrived. Both were dressed in neat suits, and each had a Bible. After the evening meal, all sat in the sitting room, and prayers started. Both the prophet and his interpreter prayed in a loud voice — partly in English, partly in Bemba, thanking God for this occasion of strengthening faith, and calling upon the Holy Spirit. After some prayers, the prophet asked Mr Mulenga whether he was ready: he could not work, unless the owner of the house gave his permission. Mr Mulenga gave permission and asked him to start. Next the prophet asked whether he should prophesy about all the hidden issues in his family, or whether he should prophesy only about the recent issues. Mr Mulenga asked him to prophesy only about issues of the present year 2010, not about the past. The prophet replied that he would try to do so, but “you have given a bad answer. You may find that your present issues have roots deep in your past.” Now the prophet switched into the Shona language. His interpreter translated into Bemba, and he also added from time to time his own comments and explanations. The two were well attuned to one another.

The prophet started to narrate what the Holy Spirit was now telling him. He was telling him about the visit to the *ng’anga*. It was a great mistake, because the *ng’anga* was in fact putting demonic powers into the family that needed a lot of prayers to be neutralised. The prophet said he was seeing much fog in a room. Both Mr Mulenga and his father-in-law agreed: there had been a lot of fog in the house of the *ng’anga*. The prophet said that the *ng’anga* was making the work of God more difficult, but that God always succeeds when we trust in him. Then he hinted at some of the things they had seen at the *ng’anga*’s place. “If I don’t speak the truth, tell me. Only say ‘yes’ if I tell the truth.” — “No, what you say is correct”, the two men confirmed. The prophet explained that the visions were a sign of demonic presence, which the *ng’anga* had called upon the family. Then he said that the Holy Spirit was leading him deep into the family history. Next he hinted at a family conflict between the father-in-law and his cousin back in their home village, 900 km away from Lusaka. The father-in-law agreed: he was not in good terms with his cousin, and he gave some of the reasons. In fact the father-in-law was suspecting the very cousin to be misusing his Registration Card to secure property or land for himself.

The prophet now went on a spiritual journey: He asked the father-in-law about his home village 900 km away, saying that he was entering it now “in the spirit”. He was walking along the main street, and could see new houses on the right-hand side. The father-in-law agreed: indeed some people have built new houses there. Continuing to walk “in the Spirit”, the



man of God passed a big ant-hill along the road. Then he described the house opposite: as if he could physically see it. The father-in-law agreed to his description: he knew the place. The prophet continued that somebody had hidden a lot of medicines in this anthill, and many secrets would be uncovered if they started to dig on this anthill. Next he spoke of the graveyard, and that they should also dig near a certain grave, if they wanted to find proofs of witchcraft. The prophet then rebuked the father-in-law for consulting yet another *ng'anga*. The father-in-law agreed: he had consulted also another *ng'anga* without the rest of the family knowing, but defended his decision. The prophet revealed that there was a plot going on against the father-in-law, but that prayers were stronger than any plot. "Those who are digging a hole will fall in it themselves", the Bible says.

The prophesying continued for two hours. Some family members remained completely silent, but all in all the family seemed satisfied with the explanations of the prophet, at least giving them consideration. At the end he asked each one in the room about his/her opinion. Different opinions were aired. Nobody disputed the prophet's visions. One person asked if they had to go back to the village to neutralise the medicines. Somebody else commented that one could not just go in the village and start digging along the road or in the graveyard. Mr Mulenga thought that it was enough to pray together as a family and God would take care of them. The prophet agreed that the medicines could be neutralised by prayers. He was to sprinkle each member of the household with holy water over which he had prayed.

The prophet continued to stay at the Mulengas home for another day. He also had a remedy for Mr Mulenga's body part which had shrunk: Mr Mulenga had to wash it with vinegar and salt, and then anoint it with holy oil which the prophet had blessed. It worked: only two days later his manhood was restored to its original size. This cleared Mr Mulenga of his remaining doubts that he was dealing with a true prophet and man of God.

Mulenga family ... The outcome

Mr Mulenga felt that the prophet understood many things that had been going on in his life. This does not mean that Mr Mulenga considered the prophet to be right in all he said. Though he had verbally agreed to everything the prophet was saying, he thought that some of the details were too vague, and that some of the points about his family were not absolutely correct, while others were clearly wrong. However he was perplexed that the prophet did know a number of precise details of his family life, including some details about the village 900 km away. He had hoped that the prophet would reveal the Satanism of his father-in-law, but the prophet had failed to do this. At least he had hinted at the fact that the father-in-law had secretly consulted also another *ng'anga*. The prophet probably knew



more than he said, but — so thought Mr Mulenga — he was afraid of the presence of the father-in-law and could not tell him to his face that he was a Satanist.

Mr Mulenga was convinced that they had done the best possible thing. Did the prophet bring God closer to the family? Yes, he did, according to Mr Mulenga. He addressed clearly some of the issues of conflict and gave also concrete resolutions. The prophet showed that God is more powerful than a *ng'anga* and also the forces of witchcraft and Satanism.

The prophet could deal with a very personal and intimate life-situation. The Mulengas were left in shock after that ill-fated visit to the *ng'anga*. Mr Mulenga's daughter at university (a Finger of Thomas) could explain to him the hallucinating effects of drugs that he may have been given to drink at the *ng'anga's* place (it is known that many *ng'anga* make use of the hallucinating effects of the lunteunteu plant, and administer it under sunlight to enhance the effects). The same drug may also have caused the temporal side-effects on his manhood.

But the effects on Mr Mulenga cannot be reduced to the biological impact of the hallucinating drugs. What disturbed him was not the fact that he had visions and hallucinations, but the kind of visions he had. His visions brought doubts about his family; he felt attacked at the roots of his family life. They provoked a life-crisis. What kept him going through it was his faith in the power of Jesus Christ. The prophet could build on his faith, that the powers of Jesus are greater than the powers of witchcraft or Satanism. The prophet tried to go into the details of the story (though he did not completely succeed): taking them at face-value and engaging with them, revealing for all the details some hidden causes and meanings. And he gave concrete remedies, even for a shrinking manhood: the use of anointing oil and holy water, and salt and vinegar. Taking the fears and visions of the Mulengas at face value, he helped the Mulengas to be assured that Jesus was dealing with them.

However — surely without intention — the prophet increased the enmity between Mr Mulenga and his father-in-law. As of now, the father-in-law is old, and Mr Mulenga expects him to die soon. He would not like him to die in his house, and he said he would not even allow him back into his house. The suspicions of Satanism remain. "Let him die on the Copperbelt. I will not visit him again. I will go to his funeral but I will not allow him to enter my house." Since the prophet confirmed that the forces of witchcraft were at work, Mr Mulenga's suspicions against his father-in-law increased: the roots of witchcraft were hidden in the family of his wife. After the prophet's visit, he was even more certain that he needed to stay away from his father-in-law. Mr Mulenga has found remedies and protection



for his immediate family, but only at the cost of isolating his nuclear family from the wider family of his wife.

Evaluation

Christians are not supposed to visit a traditional healer (*ng'anga*) for spiritual problems. The Christian prophet in Zambia has come to fill this gap. He comes with the Bible, and divines, reveals and heals, not in the name of some *mashabe* spirits, but in the name of God himself. Yet his concerns and questions have remained the same: Where does the evil come from? Who in our family and neighbourhood is responsible? And how can we be protected? The answers of the prophet come in a Christian outfit, but may remain trapped within the perspective that has been fixed by the unchanging expectations beneath the outfit.

Many small Pentecostal churches in Zambia are centred around the ministry of one individual prophet, who may travel extensively throughout the country and beyond. Prophecy as understood in Zambia addresses specific personal situations of people seeking God's direct intervention in their lives. Prophecy is a gift used predominantly for people in need of healing and deliverance — with few consequences to the society at large. The great Biblical prophetic concerns for the covenant and for justice remain in the background or are absent. While Biblical prophets and the great prophets of the church wanted to change a people, prophecy as practised in Zambia addresses the concerns of an individual, but leaves society largely as it is.

Some people mentioned that they are lacking guidelines from the Catholic Church with regard to the gift of prophecy. Catholic (and other mainstream) theology could bring a wider perspective to the popular understanding of prophecy. It does not differ over God's concern about the individual: prophecy reveals God's constant loving presence and intervention. Yet at the same time it goes beyond our human categories and also beyond immediate needs. Being a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is understood in its role of building up the Christian community. When Christian prophecy deals with the plight of an individual, it does so with consequences for society (and the Church) as a whole. Ultimately the gift of prophecy is seen as part of the great concerns of Divine revelation, which is not really about specific events in the future, or about revelations of a hidden past. Christian prophecy finds its meaning and fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who fully reveals, brings near, and lays bare the heart and mind of God. Christian prophets — out of their lived relationship with Jesus (a vocation to which every baptised Christian is called) — bring His heart and mind to a particular situation, and go beyond the common views and norms of the time. Therefore Christian prophets are by nature also uncompromising, non-conformist



and radical in view of the accepted status-quo. Shaped by Jesus, the cross remains a central part in the life of Christian prophets. They go beyond the Gospel of Prosperity.

At the same time the prophet taps into a symbolic world that can motivate people and that can bring change. People in Zambia believe in and value the gift of prophecy. Christian prophets are tapping into a symbolic world that is vividly marked by Zambia's traditional religions. One is tapping into a symbolic layer that is important when people try make sense out of the events they pass through, or when they construct their own inner identities.

Few people would deny the giftedness of the individuals on whom the prophetic movements rest. The sheer number of people who come to seek (and find) answers to their problems shows that the ministry of Christian prophets developed in response to a felt need. Also healing takes place in prophetic charismatic movements, including at times physical healing. The movements contain elements of lay preaching, teamwork and Bible readings of a different form, which links people's own symbolic world to the Christian faith in very original ways. They take seriously the world of dreams, but also the world of demons and witchcraft and Satanism with which people struggle, and insert them into a Christian worldview in which Jesus' powers are supreme. Few people would seriously doubt the personal commitment and faith of either the prophets or those in need who consult them.

At the same time the prophetic movements through their successes are easily taken over by a dynamic of their own, which isolates them from the official church. Many Catholics lack guidelines with regard to the practice of prophecy. The prophetic movements of the charismatic renewal have often isolated themselves from the official church, or they have been sidelined. In consequence the movements tend to be shaped by their own inner dynamics and visions. Some charismatic cells in Lusaka have already developed into Pentecostal churches or ministries, by gaining "independence" from the Catholic Church.

Zambian prophets call upon the Holy Spirit and feel guided by him. Yet one cannot fail to see the similarities with the prophetic role of the traditional healer (*ng'anga*) in its combination of divining, revealing and healing. This comes with a whole set of questions that pose themselves to the prophetic movements:

- Visions happen in the inner world of the prophet. The inner world of one or few individuals becomes the criterion for the "truth" about another person, his/her sickness and moral state. This is an ethical minefield, from which the traditional diviner could not escape, which was addressed by the Witchcraft Act in Zambian law. In one parish, through the messages of a Catholic prophetess which was confirmed by other prophets, an elderly woman was accused of being involved Satanism. The woman had been active in her parish for many decades. The prophecies have put an



end to her life as a respected person within her own parish. In the face of growing rumours, fed by new revelations to the “prophets”, she laid down her church functions, since she was hurt to the core of her heart. She now considers suing the charismatic prophets in the courts. Where are the limits to abuse?

- People who come for help are in a vulnerable situation (mentally, physically, emotionally, sometimes also morally) but at the same time full of hope and ready to put their faith into whatever is suggested to them, if they see a chance for healing. While genuine religious experiences can take place in these prayers, in which also an altered state of consciousness plays a role, one should be alerted to the fact that the elements of suggestion and auto-suggestion, combined with the special environment that is provided by the group, also stimulates hypnosis — both in individuals and in the group (mass hypnosis), and more so when the movement centres on a charismatic leader.⁵ Such states can have healing effects. But if they are taken as direct manifestations of the Holy Spirit, or of demons, then we have crossed a dangerous boundary. While one cannot reduce such charismatic experiences to the state of hypnosis, one cannot dismiss it fully either. A bundle of ethical questions arises especially in regard to vulnerable people.
- The simplicity of the movements are part of their success: they offer very simple answers (with no place for any doubt that they are divinely inspired) to people with complex and diverse problems. What worldview are these answers propagating? That this worldview is different from the worldview of the “learned priest” should not necessarily disqualify it — but it should not be immune to questions. Catholic charismatic movements which are left to themselves can easily slide into the dualistic worldview of the Prosperity Gospel, where sickness and misfortune are seen as the result of a lack of faith or of direct demonic influence or family curses, and where high hopes are raised (“the more you believe the more you receive” ... “nothing is impossible for God” ... “AIDS is cured only by faith”). Is this worldview helpful in the long run to deal with sickness, self-acceptance, alienation and the pressures of life? Looking for direct interventions of God that bypass our human faculties may blind us to God’s presence in nature and in our ordinary human giftedness.

Such important questions can hardly be sufficiently addressed if the movements are left to themselves. People in the healing ministry may have great faith and also extraordinary gifts,

⁵ For an informed contribution on this point from a charismatic point of view, see Mark J. Cartledge. 1998. “Interpreting Charismatic Experience Hypnosis, Altered States of Consciousness and the Holy Spirit.” In *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. Vol. 13, pp. 117-132.



but they may also lack other skills and forms of training which are important when working towards a holistic way of healing — also in regards to the follow-up.

Prophecy and healing, which can crystallise in new movements, are important gifts for the Church. But they are also difficult gifts. Being God-given does not mean that they don't need guidance and also supervision. A genuine integration of extraordinarily gifted people requires the readiness to be challenged. Maybe it requires also the readiness to accept at times a "grey zone" where a clear answer has not yet been found. Leaving a movement completely to itself, however, means that neither the Church as a whole benefits from the gifts nor does the movement benefit from the experience of the Church.