



# **SATANISM, MODERN LIFE, AND THE GOSPEL OF PROSPERITY**

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Satanism became an issue in Zambia in the 1990s, but especially in the 2000s. It is an issue much more prominent in urban areas than in rural ones. The rise of Satanism coincided with two major changes: the rapid rise of Pentecostal born-again churches in Zambia and the liberalisation of Zambia's economy, opening up much faster to the trends of globalisation.

## **The rise of Pentecostal churches**

In the last two decades the number of different churches present in Zambia has multiplied tremendously. For example, in Bauleni Compound there were 17 churches present by 1990. Today there are 83 churches, which is nearly five times the number in 1990.<sup>1</sup> What has happened in Bauleni is not an exception, but rather the trend of what was and is happening throughout urban Zambia. Most of the new churches are of a Pentecostal type.

The multiplication of churches has led to a certain suspicion (voiced for example by Church of God Bishop John Mambo)<sup>2</sup> that Satanist churches can easily disguise as Christian churches and operate unnoticed by an unsuspecting public. So far, the Fingers of Thomas have visited most of the churches in Lusaka that are suspected in popular rumours of Satanism. They attended prayer services on different days, and interviewed church goers. In none of the churches did they find any evidence of Satanism, though in quite a number of churches the "Fingers" had the impression that there was a lot of emphasis on money and finances, which in the preaching were linked directly to the quality of faith of the individual.

To go to a church of one's own choice is seen as a human right for every citizen. In many families, different members go to different churches and often change churches frequently. "Dad, I am going to church for an overnight prayer" is for many youths the only chance to stay a night away. As people are quite aware that church meetings and overnight prayers can be abused for more worldly activities, suspicions are bred that some people who are "going to pray" may in fact be involved in Satanism. In at least one Christian boarding

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fenza.org/files/documents/Churches\\_in\\_Bauleni.pdf](http://www.fenza.org/files/documents/Churches_in_Bauleni.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, <http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Newsletters/zno20.html>



school, prayers of a number of different churches in the school had to be suspended in the wake of a Satanist panic, to allow for school authorities to regain some sort of control, since it was feared that a number of students instead of going to one of the many church services were having their own Satanist services.

Satan and Satanism play a prominent role in popular preaching. Some people who have a rebellious mind may want to try out what precisely this is all about. One girl in grade 11 in a Lusaka school said she started worshipping the Devil “because God did not give me what I wanted.” The girl was eventually asked to leave the school. She wanted to become a Satanist because she had the hope that Satan would provide a fast-track to the fulfilment of her wishes. However, Satan also seemingly did not give her what she wanted.

The link between Satanism and the popularisation of Pentecostalism has been documented by a number of scholars working in Africa and outside Africa.<sup>3</sup> Some see it as a consequence of the neatly dualistic worldview where good (God) is fighting against evil (Satan); such a world view is in the long run in need of finding concrete expressions of the evil world.<sup>4</sup>

The argument runs as follows: (a) Pentecostal theology resonates with people’s experiences, since it acknowledges the spiritual realities that people struggle with: witchcraft, ambivalent spirits, curses, transgression of taboos, the power of the dead. These realities have often been downplayed by many mainstream churches, but they are important in people’s lives. (b) At the same time, these spiritual realities are viewed in a totally negative (Satanic) framework. As people continue struggling with these realities (which do not disappear), they find themselves struggling now with Satanic forces. (c) Pastors establish themselves in reference to these Satanic forces: their faith overcomes Satan and delivers the Satanist. Some pastors need the delivered Satanists in order to be recommended to the community.

(a) Popular theology recognises the presence of demons and witchcraft, and therefore it shares in the immediacies of people’s lives and worldview. It is simple, and it offers with its

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Jorgensen, “Third Wave Evangelism and the Politics of the Global in Papua New Guinea: Spiritual Warfare and the Recreation of Place in Telefolmin”; Birgit Meyer (1995), “‘Delivered from the Powers of Darkness’: Confessions about Satanic Riches in Christian Ghana”, *Africa* 65(2), 233–255; see also her article “Commodities and the Power of Prayer: Pentecostal Attitudes towards consumption in Contemporary Ghana.”

<sup>4</sup> We find a multitude of different Pentecostal churches active in Zambia with different doctrines and practices, and there is obviously no one single Pentecostal theology. The following reflection is based on a popular theology that is sometimes called “Third Wave Evangelism”. This theology places a strong emphasis on direct supernatural divine intervention, through healing, exorcism, or speaking in tongues. It is associated with evangelists such as C. Peter Wagner, John Wimber, Benny Hinn, George Otis, and John Dawson. Wagner coined the term “Third Wave Evangelisation” to distinguish this movement from earlier Pentecostal forms. See Dan Jorgensen, “Third Wave Evangelism and the Politics of the Global in Papua New Guinea: Spiritual Warfare and the Recreation of Place in Telefolmin”.



participatory prayer, singing, laying on of hands, and exorcisms ways to redress the threats that people experience and that are real to them. It acknowledges and addresses the world of spirits, curses, witchcraft and the effects of adultery. In some houses of pastors, delivered Satanists or other people feeling possessed by demons can stay with the family of the pastor for some days or even for weeks to be prayed over and to experience another environment. Furthermore, Pentecostal churches are found right in the compounds; their light structure does not need the protection of a wall-fence. A pastor is approachable also in the evenings, when the sun goes down and when the world of demons and bad dreams starts to encroach on people.

(b) Popular theology can be very dualistic. There is a struggle of Satan against God, and every person is involved in this struggle. We are either with God or with Satan. There is no neutral world in-between. Such a black-and-white theology is found among many youths. They know well what God wants them to do (and especially not to do), but they are also quite aware that in fact they do not always follow the ways of God. They are aware that Satan somehow has a presence in their hearts. Such popular theology furthermore has absorbed into its framework the complex realities of traditional religion: Any forms of spirit possession, witchcraft, ancestral spirits, curses, initiation rites, marriage customs and any African traditions not found in the Bible must be from the Devil, are Satanic, and involvement in any of them comes close to Devil-worship.

Mainstream churches during the past decades maybe tended to downplay the demonic side of things. Concepts of a Western worldview, such as “chance” or “accident”, were used to explain tragic events. But for many people such concepts are not convincing. “There are no accidents. There is no chance! Everything has a reason. There is no smoke without fire!” Popular Pentecostal theology strongly acknowledges that demons lead people into sickness (also AIDS is a demon that hides itself in the body as a virus), that demons spoil relationships, marriages and family life, and cause poverty, infertility, disaster and accidents. This does not exclude a belief in science, in microbes and in statistics. Such Western concepts are seen as useful in a specific context. But they are not seen as going to the root causes of what is really happening. These have to be sought in the spiritual world.

Jesus came to give us life to the full. Not to be living such a full life is an indicator of the presence of demons in our lives. As Jesus was healing even ordinary sicknesses by casting out demons (e.g. Mk 1:29-31), exorcisms play a major role in worship. Some pastors, however, go further still: Sickness, dizziness, blood pressure, failed exams, impotence, even sneezing during prayer, all such things are signs of (maybe involuntary) involvement with specific demons. Satan can also enter a family when some members remain involved in forms of “paganism” or traditional rites. As one cannot control all family members, one



must continually protect oneself by prayers of exorcism and by breaking of all sorts of covenants with the Devil that one has accidentally acquired. Photocopied exorcism manuals of different churches or prophets (an example is the popular book “Dangerous Prayers”), together with testimonies of people now delivered from the grasp of Satan — with all the consequences clearly spelled out as a warning for others — are popular in Zambia.

(c) A successful pastor is the one who can cast out such demons; exorcism is seen as the sign of true prayer and of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some pastors need the evil spirits in order to prove they have the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is not rare that a new pastor who has moved into a new area starts his ministry by exorcising spirits in his neighbourhood. People in turn also place their hopes for deliverance in the new pastor; the casting out of demons becomes a common focus for both the pastor and his neighbourhood. In that sense it is maybe not surprising that the first accounts of Satanism came from Pentecostal churches. Ex-Satanists, who had been delivered by their pastors, were testifying about the Satanic world in which they had been trapped. They testified before the congregation that they were sent by Satan to destroy the Spirit-filled churches, and they gave very concrete examples. The congregation is fascinated by such accounts. The testimonies give them eyes for a reality they always knew was there. It is like a guided tour into the “underworld”.

This does not mean that people take such testimonies, sermons and manuals as Gospel truth. They constitute a special genre, to be taken with a pinch of salt. One does not need to believe everything. They are also very entertaining; sometimes people laugh when listening, as if watching a good piece of theatre. The question is not always about “true” or “not true”. In some way the stories give an explanation for the many things that remain unexplained in the traumas of life; it is also an affirmation of people’s beliefs. The Satanists themselves are always acquitted after their confessions, even if they claim to have killed 200 people in order to drink their blood. They themselves were victims, they entered Satanism involuntarily, and what happened to them can happen to anybody who is not protected by special prayers. A dualist worldview in the long run requires concrete expressions of Satanism.

## **Globalisation and the Gospel of Prosperity**

A number of newer churches in Zambia preach what is sometimes called the “Prosperity Gospel”. If you follow Christ, then you will succeed in life. Jesus is the “winner”. Testimonies are given in church of people who were once poor and miserable, but God made them rich when they repented and had faith. The Prosperity Gospel promises success. Here a part of a report of the “Ministry and Jubilee Crusade” that was held in Ndola:



We saw about 5,000 in attendance on the first day, to about 25,000 on the last day. ... There were about 5,000 who surrendered their lives to the Lord. ... 4,000 responded to the prayer of healing and deliverance [some of them sick with TB and AIDS], and many were healed and delivered from demons and witchcraft. ... There were many people who were under the spell of Satanism who had been delivered. ... One brother came forward for prayer in regards to finances. The following day God blessed him with 10,000,000 Kwacha.

Getting money from Satan is wrong. But getting the same money from God is right. Having a faithful husband by means of love-charms (*vikondi*) is wrong. But having a faithful husband by means of prayer is right. The motivation for using witchcraft, for joining a Satanist group, or for prayer to God may not be so different after all.

But what if the desired prosperity does not come after deliverance? On one hand it is a sign of failure and lack of faith. But on the other hand there is also the suspicion that some people gain access to prosperity by Satanic means! Most people are somehow involved in business in order to make a living, but business in the Zambian context has always been seen to have some relations with the occult. In the Ghanaian context, Birgit Meyer has analysed the connection between fears of Satanism and the dangers of the market.<sup>5</sup> Who knows where the goods are coming from that we buy and sell. God gives riches, but Satan gives riches too! Consumer goods become ambivalent. Fashion articles, perfumes, flashy cars, big TV screens and cameras, they may also have come to us from the Satanic underworld. To believe in Satanic factories under the ocean is the consequence of a strictly dualistic belief in two separate worlds, both of which are striving to gain control over our lives.

If the items come from Satan, then the power of Satan is residing in such articles and will gain control over us. Prayer, however, neutralises the power of Satan in the consumer goods and transforms them into ordinary, harmless commodities. In consequence anything that someone buys, anything that someone eats, must be prayed over. Prayer has become part and parcel of the “currency of the market”. According to Meyer, Satanism stands for a certain experience of globalisation. People want new consumer goods. At the same time, globalisation also contributes to new forms of insecurity and uncertainties. The belief in the Satanic underworld together with the sure solution of prayer provide “its followers fixed orientation points and a well-delimited moral universe within the globalization’s unsettling flows.”

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<sup>5</sup> The following argument is taken from Birgit Meyer (1995), “‘Delivered from the Powers of Darkness’: Confessions about Satanic Riches in Christian Ghana”, *Africa* 65(2), 233–255, and from her article “Commodities and the Power of Prayer: Pentecostal Attitudes towards consumption in Contemporary Ghana.”