



## **A TEN-STEP PASTORAL APPROACH TO SATANISM IN ZAMBIA: SEE – JUDGE – ACT**

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### **The reality: “SEE”**

#### ***Christian families experience fear that:***

- Their children at school are being initiated into Satanism. Signs include rudeness and disobedience, no longer praying, poor school performance, disappearing, “sacrificing” family members, ...
- Satanism wields a dark power over their families, from which they can hardly escape
- Dreams with symbols associated with Satanism (black clothes, strange people, eating meat, ...), daytime visions or voices, as well as series of strange events in their families, are direct manifestations of Satanism
- The food they consume, cosmetics they use, and even phone-calls they receive, may come “from another world”
- Contacts with strangers (and with strange churches) can be an “entry-point” for Satanism
- The riches of businessmen and -women have a connection with Satanism, with human sacrifices and with road-accidents.

#### ***The fears are sustained by forms of tangible signs:***

- More and more people (including children) “manifest” signs of Satanism during prayer, especially charismatic prayer (trances, experiences such as feeling the “heat” of the rosary, of holy water, of sacred objects, of a charismatic touch, ...)
- Testimonies of “delivered Satanists” (through popular photocopied pamphlets, books, videos, tapes, and testimonies given in churches) provide very graphic details of an unseen Satanic world and their devilish deeds in their former life, and these arouse much interest



- Some suicides have taken place that strongly hinted at membership in a secret society. Also various forms of blackmailing have been reported in Zambia
- Ritual crimes (including murders) are a reality in Zambia
- People go missing for weeks, and come back home confused and with strange stories
- “Evidence” (testimonies, deliverance sessions, ...) on Christian TV channels (e.g., Emmanuel TV, ...).

***People expect from the church and from their priests spiritual help to be protected and liberated from Satanism:***

- They often find this help within the charismatic renewal
- Many Catholics go to Pentecostal churches to be prayed over because they address their fears
- People come with trust that Christ’s power is stronger. High hopes are built up to find a solution through faith and through prayers.

## **“JUDGE”**

### ***Satanism and modernity***

The panic of Satanism coincides with other developments in Zambia: the opening up of Zambia’s economy, globalisation, the lure (amid widespread poverty) of a desired Western lifestyle at the fingertips in cities like Lusaka. Access to power and wealth remain hidden and opaque, and there are new pressures and strains on family life. Riches and power in Zambia have always been suspected to be connected to the occult. Without reducing spiritual realities to social realities, the widespread fascination with the concepts of Satanism show that the new vocabulary for the occult resonate well with people’s new experiences of poverty, family-strains and powerlessness in the midst of plenty.

### ***A Pentecostal worldview***

Modern fears—with roots that touch old Zambian traditions (witchcraft, spirit-possession, “*bakamunyama*”, ...)—have been reshaped by a dualistic worldview (there is only God and Satan). This worldview is tied more and more to a Pentecostal “Prosperity Gospel”: “the more you believe, the more you will get”; “Faith can do the impossible”. But if prayer and God’s blessings do not work, then Satan/demons must have gained an entry-point in your



life (Do you fall asleep during mass? Do you have high BP? Financial disasters? What about your dreams? Does your baby cry during prayers? Do you feel disconnected from prayer? Do you forget things when you are writing exams? ... YOU NEED DELIVERANCE!). Since this dualistic belief-system presupposes Satanism to be there, it also breeds a world of Satanism.

### ***Satanism: A belief system***

The word “Satanism” in Zambia addresses many diverse realities. Some of them are empirical (small occult secret societies, forms of blackmailing or pressing a person into doing something after he/she has accepted money or a favour, strange financial promises and clubs, ritual crime that can be investigated by the police). Mostly, however, Satanism is experienced and feared as a spiritual reality, something that is happening in or linked to the inner world of a person, that evades the categories of the empirical world. People feel initiated largely against their own will (involuntarily). It is for this form of spiritual Satanism that people approach priests for help.

This form of Satanism depends on a belief system. As such it is of a nature that cannot be proven right or wrong. It is just there, and within this belief-system, Satanism will always prove itself to be there. When people are in fear and in need of help, one cannot argue about a belief. Furthermore, we believe that God takes people where they are, that he can speak his liberating message in a way that can be understood by people.

## **“ACT”**

### ***Exorcism?***

Christians in Zambia trust and expect that demons can be cast out by the Catholic Church. The power of exorcism has been recognised throughout the history of the church. The church formally distinguishes “minor” and “solemn” exorcisms. Minor exorcism (conducted by a priest, a deacon, or a commissioned lay-person) is part of a number of rituals (including preparation for baptism). The prayers and petitions for protection from evil powers, from the Devil and from demons are addressed to God. “Solemn exorcism” (done with explicit consent of the bishop ) addresses directly the demonic world. (According to the rubrics, this exorcism should be accompanied by medical and psychiatric experts, and needs to be protected from giving rise to a public spectacle, to curiosity, and to speculation.)

In the Zambian reality there are some complications which need to be addressed:

- Satanism and demon possession have become so much part of a belief system that



many people see demons behind HIV, diabetes, high BP, family issues, marriage problems, with the hope that these demons can be cast out, if one has but sufficient faith. Frequent exorcisms may reinforce this belief-system.

- People (especially Pentecostals/charismatics) have internalised the repertoire of “Satanic possession” which comes in different forms: convulsions, aversion to sacred Christian symbols, vomiting during prayer and trance, etc. It is important to notice that the closed and safe environment of a church group, the expectations raised by testimonies of healing, the speaking in tongues, repetitive singing and the focal point on a charismatic leader, do have hypnotic effects: People who look for an “instant-cure” can fall easily into a trance and express all the signs of demon possession and Satanism. Casting out these “demons” may bring healing in some cases, but more often it may become a futile engagement with imagined spiritual battles or warfare. It can create dependency, and it can reinforce a feeling of powerlessness: In the long run, people may come to see themselves more in the hands of demons than in the hands of God.

Exorcism is a ministry of the church. However, it is not an instant cure as many have come to expect. If people need it as a visible sign of liberation, it should be part of a wider framework of deliverance; otherwise “the demon comes back with seven others more wicked than itself ...”

### ***Deliverance***

“Deliverance” is a wider approach to the problem of Satanism than exorcism. The Biblical model is the deliverance of the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. More important than the destruction of the army of an external enemy was the purifying journey through the desert, through which an inner identity was built up and a people was formed in relation to their saving God.

In the centre of deliverance stands the afflicted person, not the demon. Deliverance in this context aims at strengthening the own inner powers, self-confidence and faith of the person who feels possessed by an external demon. It also addresses the issues (including family issues) that make the person vulnerable to experiencing demonic attacks. The existence and influence of demons is not denied, and it can in fact be taken for granted (as most people in Zambia do anyway). But the focus is directed on the person, not on the demon.

In deliverance, the attitude towards the “possessed” person is always a positive one. A common misconception is to see this person as possessed either by a “real demon” or by a “psychological demon” — meaning a person with frightening visions or weird behaviour is either demon-possessed or a nut-case, but in any case a problem. A better starting point is to recognise that the person is extraordinarily gifted or has passed through very difficult



experiences and has developed coping mechanisms. The person is suffering, but has something to offer to the world. Like an artist, he/she can give us eyes for another reality — whatever the ontological reality of the demons may turn out to be.

### ***Ten-step pastoral approach***

The following 10-step approach has arisen out of a long practice of dealing with cases of Satanism — especially by the members of the Think Tank on Satanism. They don't constitute a chronological order — and not all steps are necessarily effective or applicable. In the end it is not always clear which step or steps really helped. But altogether they have proven to be successful in many cases, even in very acute ones. With time, demons left — even where people displayed very visible and fearful signs of possession.

#### **1. Listening — as a person of faith — to the experiences of people, without judging them or claiming to know better**

Suffering people are the *owners* of their own experiences. They themselves determine which concepts rightly or wrongly describe their sufferings. Describing accurately is also a form of re-living an experience. A listening ear is the starting point. If the listener is a person of faith — he/she by the very act of listening will also inspire faith. By our way of listening we help the suffering person to describe (and thereby to re-live) their frightful experiences in faith and trust, rather than in fear and suspicion. This alone can lead already to an enormous transformation of an inner experience — without a word (or with very few words) coming from the priest.

#### **2. Bringing people's experiences into prayer**

People come to us priests as “men of God” and they expect from us to pray with them and to help them to pray. Our presence often means to them also the presence of God. We pray in a way we feel at ease in — so that our prayers inspire confidence and trust. Sometimes it proves effective to bring people's images and their dream-materials into prayer before God. For children, working with their own drawings often helped. Sometimes it helped to encourage the sufferer to speak a prayer after the priest. The Catholic Church has many rituals (blessings of homes, families, sprinkling with holy water, ...) since people are often in dire need of tangible signs. Here is also the place for the “minor exorcisms” of which the church has a rich tradition. Some people (but not all people) may need some dramatic forms of prayer at one point during the process of deliverance, and room for creativity can be given.



### **3. Knowing God in a new way**

Satanism feeds on a dualistic worldview. Look at the image we have of God and the Devil with the aim of increasing confidence and trust (monotheism instead of dualism) and placing the Devil in the place he belongs. Some Bible texts (Ps 139...) have proven helpful. A support group (point 7) also can play a great role in helping the sufferers to let go of their images of God and the Devil and to discover God in a new way.

### **4. Family therapy**

Involve the families. Encourage family prayers at home. Speak about family issues and childhood experiences. People who have been wounded in their families are more vulnerable towards experiences with demonic powers. Many Satanists had a traumatic childhood. Some experienced rape or other forms of abuse. Other youths live with high expectations from their parents or guardians, with which they cannot cope. Others have serious problems in school. The most frequent theme, in our experience, involved issues of belonging: People overpowered by evil forces were often youths who did not develop a healthy feeling of belonging to their families. They always felt (since childhood) that they were belonging somewhere else. The world of Satanism thereby could become part of their world — especially during the time of puberty, when the inner world is totally restructured.

Linking experiences of Satanism with childhood traumas or with a lack of feeling of belonging to the family does not reduce spiritual demonic experiences to “psychology”. It acknowledges, however, that the spiritual world is not independent of the issues with which we have to cope in our inner world.

By involving the families, we do not propose that Satanism is always linked to family issues. In fact we witness experiences of Satanism also in healthy families. The involvement and concern of the families releases a healthy sense of belonging that strengthens the faith and confidence of the afflicted persons. We encourage forgiveness when family issues have been identified.

At the same time, and this is important, we discourage the family from absorbing the problems of the victim or feeling responsible for them. “Victimhood” should not be encouraged (say, by blaming the family, or specific family members, or the past, for the experiences that the person goes through). The main actor in the process of deliverance remains the victim of Satanism, not the family.



## 5. Diminish fear towards suspected people

“The more you fear them, the more vulnerable you become”. Help the family to engage actively with the people who are suspected. (This often proves the most difficult part, but it is an essential part.) A number of people who have been terrorised by dreams and day-light visions of suspected people (often close relatives), become cured the moment they try to relate to these people in a normal and human way.

Films like “Kirikou” have helped a number of people to see in “Satanists” and “witches” not people who are evil in themselves, but human beings who also need to be loved.

## 6. Distinguish the outer world from the inner world

Both worlds are real, but they need to be addressed in different ways.

- The outer world is our common world. It is open to everyone. When Satanism is suspected, address the relevant issues in the outer world: dropping school attendance, rude behaviour, disappearing (find out where they are in the outer world), lies, or even ritual crimes (requiring police attention).
- Inner world belongs to me alone. Biblical examples include the visions of St. Stephen and St. Paul. This world is addressed by faith: let God grow in the inner world, and other powers will diminish. Some people may need visible signs of the victory of Christ: holy water, laying on of hands by a prayer group, or a prayer ritual. The key, however, is to strengthen one’s own inner powers, not dependency on external powers. Discover that God is also *in* you, and not just outside you.
- Beware of “prophets” who mix the two worlds (following visions about other people).

## 7. Build up a support group

A priest cannot be everywhere at every time. If he has a support group whom he can trust, then continuity and follow-up can be assured even in the absence of the priest. It is not advisable to involve the whole group in every case. Different people will bond with different patients. Confidentiality needs to be assured. Big numbers are not required. Such support groups can be trained at the parish level. With time they can acquire counselling skills and a good theology and spiritual life. In Regiment Parish, the “Fingers of Thomas” developed into a support group for a number of Satanist youths.



## **8. Encourage self-acceptance, patience, and realistic goals in life**

Don't force things. True deliverance takes time. God knows what we need. Even negative experiences can be stepping stones towards God.

Self-acceptance has also a medical side. We encourage victims (after some time, and with counselling) to take an HIV test. The virus has effects on the psyche and on perception. It is not rare (unfortunately) that people who experience demon attacks are HIV-positive. Some may have a hidden hope that the "HIV-devil" can be prayed out by a charismatic group or pastor. When they accept their status and take responsibility and control over their life (ARVs ...), the visions and attacks also become rarer or cease completely.

Apart from HIV, seeing visions and hearing voices can become a permanent condition for many people (150 support groups exist in the UK alone). They are not necessarily demonic, and one can learn how to live with them.

## **9. Guide people to look for God in the ordinary events**

People who always look for God in the extraordinary and in supernatural miracles forget about God's presence in the ordinary and are more prone to be affected by Satanism.

## **10. Catholic faith is rich and sound: Help people grow into a regular and holistic Catholic life**

Discourage people from "hopping around" from one pastor or charismatic healer to another.

These 10 steps may look at first sight very time-consuming. However, with a good support-group that works hand in hand with the priest, a few visits to the family can readily make a real difference in a person's life.

## **PS**

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, the existence of the Devil was never seriously doubted, neither by orthodox Christianity nor by heretics, except in the modern





Western world. Since it was taken for granted, there are few doctrinal statements about the Devil. At the same time, the Catholic Church

- discourages any forms of curiosity and speculation about the reality of the Devil
- discourages any form of fascination with the occult
- doctrinally rejects dualism (that the Devil is evil in himself) and a dualistic worldview of a good and an opposing evil principle of life
- denies that the Devil can take away our freedom and responsibility in a total sense ("the Devil tempts, but man is responsible for the evil he does").
- encourages a critical attitude towards all perceived forms of possession
- maintains that evil is a mystery that cannot be fully explained
- assures that Christ has won victory.