



Testimony of a (fake) diviner

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Collected by Fr. Robert Lavertu (Lumko Witchcraft Publication, 2000)

It happened in 1986, in January. When I left school, I went to my own village in Serenje District to join my family who were peasant farmers. At that time, in the village, there was a witch finder (diviner/*nganga*) who was very “hot”, performing divination rituals, identifying wizards and witches, and collecting money and property, including animals in great numbers. Old men and women were scared, especially those who were already suspected, thinking that they will be the next victims of fate.

Those who were caught and proved to have no money or property were made to cultivate a lima or two, depending on the state of their health. At that time, I was ignorant just as most people were. We thought the witch finder was a second Moses liberating people from witchcraft activities, so that mysterious sickness or death would come to an end.

Upon spotting me in the audience, the witch finder approached me and asked me if I would like to become his secretary. To this I agreed because I knew he and his associates were making a lot of money. I was taught how I was to carry out my important job. Firstly, to know how to be tactful during the interrogation of our clients. Secondly, to have no mercy.

Then my training went on bit by bit up to the extent of how to hide the so-called charms in the houses of suspected people. At first I asked the witch finder a question about how he knew that one is a witch or wizard. He said that was very simple: “I see a kind of mist coming from the house of a wizard going somewhere, and coming back again.” This answer remained in my mind, because I wanted very much to have those kind of eyes with very strong Vitamin A.

The other thing which touched me deeply was when the witch finder saw me talking with a suspected witch/wizard in a merciful manner—then he would call me and warn me not to do that. I had to mistreat those condemned people.

After staying in this important job for 3 months, I wasn’t at ease with myself because cruelty is not in my nature. I quit my job, and joined the Catholic Church. Previously I was a UCZ (United Church of Zambia) member. Next, from 1986 to 1997, almost 11 years, the experience I had, the tricks I had learned or discovered—I just kept quiet about that, although similar things from different people were still rampant in the area.



Then, in 1997, when I was a church councillor attending a leadership seminar, there rose an argument on witch hunting. There were between 40 and 50 people in the seminar, and many were saying that witch hunting was real and that we should support witch finders. At this point, I came to realise that it was the right time for me to condemn this barbaric thing of abusing human rights by taking advantage of those who are ignorant. I said: “The so-called witch finders are thieves and tricksters”. Then I shared my experience with them. Two others supported me by giving their testimony on past experience with witch finders.

Then the parish priest said: “If you know those tricks, can you perform so that people can understand you better?” We then arranged for the first seminar on witch finding at the parish, in which we created a drama on divination—hence the birth of a witch finders’ drama group. We did many seminars in Serenje Parish, and we were invited to different parts of the country. Everywhere the problems encountered were the same: ignorance, a strong belief in witchcraft, and a lot of confusion.

When our parish Justice and Peace Commission saw that it was important to sensitise people through this kind of seminar, they organised more seminars, inviting heads of departments, officers-in-charge of the police and Office of the President, the District Executive of THPAZ (Traditional Health Practitioners Association of Zambia), as well as staff from the Judicial Department and the hospital. Together with the drama on witch finders, we would explain the law of Zambia (Cap. 90, the Witchcraft Act) and the role of the Traditional Health Practitioners Association. At the very first seminar, the Officer in Charge of Police revealed that Serenje had the highest crime rate in the Central Province for witchcraft-related murders. About 30 to 35 victims were reported killed every year, merely on suspicions by neighbours or family and accusations by the witch finders. So we organised more seminars in the parish, and we formed new groups in the sub-parishes and showed them all the tricks, so that they could conduct the same seminars in their own areas.

After many more seminars around the district, the police came to confirm that we have made their job easier, and the number of people murdered on suspicions or accusations of witchcraft has been greatly reduced, down to 5 or 6 per year now. It is a great achievement, but it is not the end. We have a lot more to do, especially in some parts of our country where suspicions and accusations and witch finding are still rampant. To this end, I can only urge my fellow Zambians, and Christians of different denominations, to join hands to fight this evil which has retarded our country’s development.