FENZA Documents

WITCHCRAFT:
CASTING A SHADOW OVER MISSION

An overlooked, but promising, approach to meeting Christ in the faith

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Food for thought for a second evangelisation of the Bemba rural area in Zambia

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(English Translation by Fr Maurice C.J. Gruffat of *Une ombre dans les missions : LA SORCELLERIE Lieu meconnu de la rencontre du Christ dans la foi*)

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FOREWORD

Why this booklet

On the occasion of the centenary of the Catholic Church in Zambia, the Regional Superior of the White Fathers asked me to write a few pages on the history of the Mission between 1891 and 1991. Those pages were published in *Our Region*, the White Fathers' magazine for the Zambia Region, and also—in abbreviated form—in the bulletin of the Zambia Episcopal Conference, *Impact*.

At the time preparations were being made for the centenary, the White Fathers were preparing their General Chapter. It was an occasion for further reflections along the same lines, and some of them were published in the same bulletins. The White Fathers were having a good look at the reasons for their continuing presence in Zambia and asking questions about their future.

It was a time when there was a lot of talk about a *second evangelisation* and about *inculturation*. Was it not a clear indication that the time had come for us to think about a new approach to pastoral work? As a matter of fact, conferences were organised, articles were written, and reports were made on various pastoral experiences, pointing in new directions. Fr Oger, the author of this booklet, gathered together those minutes, articles, and reports, or the main ideas thereof, in one volume, edited in 1993, under the title *Our Missionary Shadow*.

The word "shadow" may cause surprise. The point is that we are dealing here with one aspect of ourselves and our lives we are not so very keen on looking into, but which we must fully assume as an integral part of our—hopefully harmonious—personality. We can apply to our work of evangelisation what psychologists say about the total blossoming of a human personality. In their analysis they start with what they call in their technical jargon a "confrontation with the shadow", in other words they begin to analyse traits of character that have so far been considered as unprepossessing, that have gone largely unrecognised and unappreciated. The history of the Mission seen from the African perspective, i.e., as it was lived by the local people, Christians and non-Christians, is overcast by many such shadows. In other words, there are many aspects of it that are still unknown and ignored.

History shows that the Christian message has not always been understood and received as we thought it had (i.e., the message as *we* understand it). The local people, even baptised Christians, are still sharing a magic-religious mentality. In other words, their behaviour and reactions to events are still deeply rooted in the past: theirs are still the behaviour and reactions their forefathers had one hundred years ago in similar circumstances. We find this behaviour and those reactions terribly shocking and disappointing. Witchcraft is the most

striking of those surviving, fast-enduring realities of the past that are beyond our understanding. That is what I came to realise when I was writing all those articles for the centenary.

In fact those articles of mine were the end result of six years of research I had carried out with a view to publishing a history of the parish where I was residing at that time. They were the end result of twenty years of teaching in the Language Centre of Ilondola in the course of which I was gradually led to an in-depth study of the Bemba language and to a true initiation into Bemba culture. This was after forty years of pastoral work in a Bemba milieu. I was forced to look back over my past as a missionary engaged in pastoral activities among the Bemba people with a critical eye and to assume my past mistakes and all the wrong moves due to my ignorance of the people and their background.

As I said earlier, there was much talk about a *second evangelisation*, and how indispensable it was for the survival of Christianity in the country. But this necessarily called for a new approach to pastoral work. Hence the suggestion of conferences, seminars, and articles to deal with the problem. When I decided to collect all this material, I already had a lead to follow in order to classify all those dissimilar ideas and suggestions in a logical way and to complete them with further elements of personal reflection. My main clue was very simple and straightforward: *let us look at things with new eyes, and we shall see that the Church ought to look different, that history ought to be read differently, that people and events ought to be seen in a new light, that the language ought to be studied with a new mind, that we ought to look at ourselves, our presence and our work among the Bemba from a new angle*. My main clue was that ***we had to penetrate into the mentality of the people in order to see things as they do, feel things as they do, react to events as they do, so as to be attuned to their minds and feelings and talk a language they understand*.**

This booklet was written at the request of the White Fathers in France, for people who are not familiar, as I was repeatedly told, with the Anglo-Saxon approach to life: the latter are more pragmatic in their approach to the problems of life and do not spend much time and thought on theoretical discussions. Their approach is simple and straightforward: they go from the problems as they see them in life straight to a program of action likely to solve them without much talk in between. In fact, missionary activity in Zambia for a whole century had been too rigid: it was centred on the preaching of Catholic Doctrine, the administration of the Sacraments, and the organisation of the visible Church without much consideration being given to what the people really thought and felt deep down in their minds and souls. The traditions of the people that did not fit in were termed “pagan practices” and were to be abandoned. The missionaries did not spend time asking themselves whether the people they were evangelising really understood what they were

doing, what they were letting themselves in for. They forced the local people into the general mould of the Catholic Church and cracked down on them whenever they tried to wriggle free. They took it for granted that the people asking for baptism knew Christ and opted for his teaching and his way of life, and that *they were implicitly ready and willing to break away with their past*. **That is exactly what they were *not* doing.** Deep down in their minds and hearts, they had not changed, they were still their own selves, with the same feelings and reactions before the existence of evil as their forefathers had one hundred years before. The missionaries were upset**,** they taxed their Christians with unfaithfulness and hypocrisy. That was a wrong move, unfair to the people.

It is high time for the missionaries to stop and to ask themselves whether they ought not to take a new approach: to take the people as they are, not as the missionaries think they ought to be when they become Christians**;** to see how far the local people with their beliefs and mentality can fit into the Christian mould without losing their originality, and therefore how much Christianity can absorb of the local culture. It is not pleasant to ask this question, but ask it we must: **is Christianity in Bembaland not an artificial addition to the local culture, even an *alien* addition?** It is high time for us to make a serious effort **to integrate Christianity in the local culture in order to transform it from the inside.**

This booklet retraces the thought process I went through from 1952 to 1993, from the time I began to work in the mission field and came into contact with witchcraft till the day witchcraft became a bone of contention between Rome and the Church of Zambia in the years after 1978 in the "Milingo Affair". It is the same process many missionaries went through from the time they began work in the mission field and the same Milingo Affair. Archbishop Milingo, head of the Catholic Church in Lusaka, believed he had healing powers and, as a true African, believed he had the duty to use this gift for the good of the people. Rome did not see eye to eye with him on this point and removed him from his seat. It was a striking case of Roman Establishment versus Local Culture, and local culture came out worse in the encounter. That is what I have known throughout my life in the pastoral field: clashes between the way of life as imposed by the missionaries and traditional customs in circumstances where witchcraft came into full play—clashes between the past and the present in which I was sometimes personally involved. This booklet is a personal testimony to the existence of the need for inculturation as an essential part of the missionary message.

The people concerned in this booklet: The Bemba of Zambia

Zambia is the former Northern Rhodesia, a British colony that became independent in 1964. It is the size of France, Belgium and the Netherlands together. The country comprises some 75 different tribes, each one with its own language. But those 75 languages are akin to one

another and are classified in several linguistic groups, such as the Bemba, the Tonga, the Lozi, the Nyanja, the Lala, the Lamba, etc.

In the present booklet, the term “Bemba milieu” will as a rule refer to the context of Zambians who have been evangelised by the White Fathers in the north of the country, in the Dioceses of Mansa, Kasama, and Mbala. To those must be added the people from the northern districts that migrated and settled down in the Copperbelt, in the Diocese of Ndola. It is a historical fact that the labour force for the copper mines was mainly recruited in the Northern and Lwapula Provinces, where the Bemba—or at least Bemba-speaking people—are in the majority. In the Diocese of Lusaka, Bemba-speaking people are estimated to represent 50% of the total population.

Bemba-speaking Zambians have been deeply marked by their history and by the history of the Church. They are a Bantu tribe that migrated from the northwest. In the course of their history they came into contact with the slave raiders of Islamic and Arabic origin from the east. The original Bemba were warriors who were in full colonial expansion at the expense of the neighbouring tribes at the end of the nineteenth century. Their political and religious system was strongly centralised, and this certainly made it easier for the White Fathers to win them over to the Christian teaching. The coming of the missionaries and of the colonial administration gave great importance to their language, so much so that Chibemba became the official language in the north and in the Copperbelt. Among the Bemba-speaking people, the percentage of the Catholics can be very high, up to 60% and more of the local population in some places.

Those characteristics are not found in other ethnic groups in the south or the southwest, which speak other languages and which often settled in their part of the country much earlier than the Bemba. Such is the case of the Tonga, for example, who are also a Bantu ethnic group but one which came from South Africa. In those ethnic groups, the percentage of Catholics is generally much lower. They were brought to the faith by the Jesuits, whose approach to evangelisation was different from what constituted the essence of the White Fathers’ apostolate. It is often said that the Jesuits went for the formation of the élite (whoever the élite were at that time) while the White Fathers aimed at bringing the masses to Christ. In the Eastern Province, the White Fathers started and developed the Diocese of Chipata, whose history is linked more closely with that of Malawi. In this part of the country the dominant tribe is the Ngoni, who were latecomers since they migrated from South Africa in the nineteenth century to put a great distance between themselves and the Zulu of Chaka. The Protestants were the first messengers of the Gospel in what is now Malawi, since they settled down there twenty years before the White Fathers.

For this reason, I was bound to demarcate the ground of my research and enquiry with great precision, the more so since I began my years of pastoral experience at Chilonga-Kayambi in the Diocese of Mbala in 1952 and spent most of my time later in the Dioceses of Kasama, Mansa and Mbala when I was appointed Regional Superior of the White Fathers. When I left this post, I was sent to the Ilondola Parish and to the Bemba Language Centre of Ilondola. That is where I spent 25 years in intimate contact with the Bemba language, Bemba milieu and Bemba culture by dint of years of close contact with the Bemba people. I am now in a position to read the message of the Gospel with the eyes of the Bemba.

Note on witchcraft

First, let us point out that the word "witchcraft" gives rise to a certain amount of confusion when used in the documents of the White Fathers. The language used at the beginning was French, and "sorcier = witchdoctor" and "sorcellerie = witchcraft" can refer to a witchdoctor and his sorcery as well as to any other person supposedly endowed with magical power. The men fighting the witchdoctors with magical powers are also referred to as "sorciers" in French. In fact, in the early documents of the White Fathers, the words "witchdoctor" and "witchcraft" apply to the practitioner and magic art in general and "witchcraft" applies to all superstitious beliefs and practices.

Witchcraft is often—at least in a French context—synonymous with black or evil magic. D. Camus, in his book *Pouvoirs Sorciers* (1991), makes a distinction between malevolent witchcraft, which casts evil spells, and benevolent witchcraft, which removes evil spells. Fr Eric de Rosnic, S.J., an anthropologist who worked in the Cameroons, makes the same distinction and calls the first "ensorceleur" or "sorcerer" or "sorcerer-witchdoctor", and the second "désensorceleur", a named coined in French for the context by the author, and which is best translated into English by "witch-hunter". We shall use the terms "sorcerer" (at times "sorcerer-witchdoctor" or even simply "witchdoctor") and "witch-hunter" in the English translation of this booklet, as being the expressions that stick best to Chibemba.

The Bemba have two different words, *nghanga* and *muloshi,* to designate people with magic powers. The *nghanga* is a magician, diviner, doctor in medicine, healer, and witch-hunter rolled into one, and is usually considered to be a good person. The *muloshi* is the sorcerer-witchdoctor, always the very incarnation of evil.

Any human being—whether a man or a woman, a chief or a commoner, a diviner or a healer, a minister of religion or a simple layman or laywoman—can be suspected of being a *muloshi*, a sorcerer-witchdoctor. It means that any human being can dispose of the power of life and death—what is called *bwanga* in Chibemba. This *bwanga,* this power of life and

death, the *muloshi* can manipulate at will, as he or she sees fit, consciously or unconsciously. The *muloshi* enjoys this evil power for his or her own selfish benefit, never for the common good of the community.

The *nghanga* enjoys the same magic powers at a high degree, but places them at the service of the whole human society.

The only distinction between the *muloshi* and the *nghanga* is the way they relate to the society they belong to, the way this society looks up to them in relation to the good or the evil they can perform. Whenever the society is suddenly in the grip of evil forces, it becomes of vital importance to ferret out those that make evil use of their power of life and death (*bwanga*) or who misuse their means of personal protection against witchcraft (*ifyabwanga*) by turning them into a pursuit of antisocial purposes. It is of vital importance to ferret out the *baloshi* (plural of *muloshi*), and that is the job of the *bashinghanga* (plural of *nghanga*). Both the *muloshi* and the *nghanga* are experts in *bwanga* or power of life and death, but the first uses it for evil purposes, while the second uses it to neutralise the first. The *nghanga* uses *bwanga* to expose the *muloshi* who is misusing *bwanga*.

This work of exposing *baloshi* was formally carried out by the village *nghanga*, the local diviner-healer-medicine man. The *bashinghanga* are still active in the rural areas, but nowadays (since the 1930s) there are expert village cleaners called *bamucapi* (*mucapi* in the singular). This is done in principle under the supervision of the chief or *mfumu*, who is the vital link with the ancestors, who are at the root of all power in the tribe, political as well as spiritual.

The English word “witchcraft”—“sorcellerie” in French—does not entirely cover all these various social aspects of the magic world.

That is why, in this booklet, the terms “sorcerer-witchdoctor” or even simply “witchdoctor” will always refer to the *muloshi*, the evil-intentioned magic man. The terms “diviner” and “witch-hunter” will always refer to the *nghanga*, the good-intentioned magic man. The term “sorcerer” will be used indifferently for both. The *mucapi* will always be translated by “witch-hunter” like *nghanga,* but it will always be in the context of cleansing a whole village from *baloshi*. When faced with the prospect of being bewitched or harmed by magical means, individual men and women go the *nghanga* for consultation, while a village sends for the *mucapi* to expose the manipulators. As for the power of life and death or *bwanga,* we shall call it “magic”, because it is a power that comes into action automatically, without the holder of this power being necessarily aware of it, but which can also be manipulated.

The French word “sorcellerie” and its Anglo-Saxon equivalent “witchcraft” will be used to designate:

- the concept the Bemba have about the evils within life,
- the way the Bemba deal with the social evils accruing therefrom,
- the system of control the Bemba have developed over the manipulators of magic powers for personal protection (*ifyabwanga*, charms, etc.) when the manipulators use them for antisocial purposes.

For the Bemba the world here below is a world of life and death, of gut-wrenching fears and sufferings, of suspicions and accusations, of hatred and revenge. It is into this world we are sent to bring the Good News.

Summary

Witchcraft in its widest sense is a social phenomenon, a system for tackling the problems of evil and death. Could witchcraft not be an obvious place for the people to meet with Christ “who died and rose from the dead”, outside the church in their natural background, within the intricate context of their everyday life? Could witchcraft not be a providential occasion for believers to meet together in Christ?

This booklet is divided into four parts. The first part will deal with my gradual awareness of the importance of witchcraft in the life of the people, from 1953 onwards. At first I came to realise that the people resented the attitude of the Protestants towards witchcraft, as well as the systematic ignorance of the Catholic Church towards their deepest aspirations expressed in their recourse to witchcraft in times of crisis. From 1955 onwards I became aware that traditional religion (in which witchcraft holds an important place) continued to be practised by Christians, but on the sly (so as not to get into trouble with Christian ministers and priests). The culminating point in this awareness that there was a serious misunderstanding between the Church and the people as regards witchcraft was the Milingo Affair. The Archbishop of Lusaka was removed from his seat because he was deeply engaged in healing sessions for the benefit of the people. That is when we were confronted in a dramatic way with the problem of evil, of illness and healing, and of salvation **as seen by the local people**, not as taught by the Church.

The second part will deal with the coming of the missionaries in the last decade of the nineteenth century and what we must think of those events. We shall see how the coming of the missionaries had a tremendous impact on the Bemba (for the better and for the worse). We shall then ask the vital question: after one hundred years of evangelisation, has

the time not come to have a new approach to it? Which "Christ" are we supposed to announce nowadays (the Christ of the early days as understood by the foreign missionaries, or the Christ as seen by the local population against the background of their own culture)?

The third part will be a systematic attempt at meeting the Bemba on their own ground, at understanding their mentality. We must come to terms with the right of the Bemba to have their own way of looking at things, including the Gospel. We shall delve into the Bemba language in search of the right words to express Christian thoughts, because Chibemba is rich with words having a profound meaning if understood properly and in the right context.. We shall study their customs from the angles of anthropology and history. We shall look at the vision they have of the world outside, in particular of us who have come to live in their country. We shall be forced to draw conclusions that will call into question the wisdom of the past as regards the past methods of evangelisation, and which will compel us to envisage a new approach to pastoral work. We shall bear in mind the example of Jesus of Nazareth throughout his public life (questioning the present, challenging the future).

The fourth part will be an appeal to us to come out of our ready-made ideas and prejudices in a serious attempt at meeting Christians and all other Zambians on their own ground, bearing in mind that these people go about their daily life with gut-wrenching fear of witchcraft. Our task will be to make them understand that Christ, "who died and rose from the dead", understands their fear, that he takes them as they are, and that he is ready to accept their faith as they are prepared to live it in their own social context.

"The Lord was there, and I did not know it" (Genesis)

Paris on 13-02-1995.

Part I

COMING FACE TO FACE WITH WITCHCRAFT

Chapter 1
LENSHINA'S STAND AGAINST WITCHCRAFT (1953–1964)

Hardly six months after my arrival in the Diocese of Abercorn—today the Diocese of Mbala-Mpika in the Northern Province of Zambia—in October 1952, the news that a woman had died and then risen from the dead began to circulate around the villages of the rural area.

The Diocese of Abercorn was just going through a period of profound revival at that time. A new bishop, whose policy was to encourage the missionaries to be in permanent contact with the surrounding population, had just been appointed. To attain this purpose they were told to visit the people in their villages. The missionaries were urged to multiply the number of outstations for greater efficiency: a church and a house for the visiting priest was to be built in an important village at the centre of a given area, serving in fact as a sort of sub-parish for the villages of that area. That is where the visiting priest was to stay for days at a stretch instead of spending a tremendous amount of time on the road going from one village to the next. That is where the people were to gather for religious instruction and for receiving the sacraments. It was thus possible for the limited number of missionaries in the field to conduct periods of religious instruction for adults, for catechumens, and for children, who came to the centres, which were never very far from their own villages. The new bishop also insisted on the necessity of developing Catholic Action in the outstations and the villages so as to involve ordinary Christians directly in the apostolate. Evangelisation was to be the work of the people.

That is the situation I found when I reached Kayambi, the mission station to which I was appointed on arriving in the Diocese of Mbala, in what was then Northern Rhodesia. The people came in large numbers to meet the priest whenever he came for an official visit to their centre. We spent a lot of time distributing the sacraments. The news that a woman had risen from the dead was to change the situation radically.

The Lenshina Movement & Lenshina's Lumpa Church

This person who had risen from the dead was Alice Lubusha Mulenga, a very ordinary woman who was married to a certain Petros and who had children. She soon became very popular as a sort of prophetess under the name of Lenshina. She soon drew masses of people to her village. The long and short of it is that she stood against witchcraft and proclaimed loud and clear that she had been entrusted by God with the mission of bringing witchcraft to an end. No wonder that people who live in constant fear of witchcraft flocked to her in droves! She was simply urging the people who came to her to get rid of their "ifyabwanga", all their charms and amulets, whether they were for their personal protection against witchcraft or as gadgets for casting spells over their enemies. The people obeyed her

blindly, throwing at the foot of the tree where she had had her vision all their charms and amulets, including—for the Catholics—all rosaries, medals, statues, and images.

She placed Christ right in the centre of her campaign of liberation and of her doctrine. She instituted a new baptism, which had the power of rendering her followers immune to the attempts of evil people who planned to cast evil spells on them. She led a vicious campaign against the missionaries and the diocesan priests, accusing them of being the worst *baloshi* or witchdoctors in existence. The mission stations were branded as refuges of *baloshi*. In no time Lenshina had more than 50,000 followers, whom she organised as a church. The aim of this church was to uproot witchcraft from the land, for the Christian churches had lamentably failed on this point. Lenshina's position was very strong, for she claimed that she had received this mission from Christ himself, when he appeared to her at the time of her "death-and-resurrection". She was responding to a deep need of the people: to put an end to witchcraft, which maintained them in a permanent state of fear. She was not simply condemning witchcraft, as the priests did, she was trying to eradicate the root of the evil.

Hence the tremendous success she met everywhere. Entire villages of Catholics went over to Elenshina and turned their backs on the priests. In some places the priests were forbidden access to the villages and were covered with insults. Visiting the villages became hazardous. We had to abandon the princely style of the past, when we moved into the villages and centres with a caravan of porters with tents and food supplies, a cook and a boy. At that time those impedimenta were still at least partly justified, for the Fathers were still going on foot, or on bicycle. We were forced into a more evangelical style of life, if I may say so.

But many Catholics remained faithful to their Church. They backed one another when faced with the hostility of the Balenshina, as they came to be called. They took pride in remaining faithful to the Fathers and to their baptismal promises. But the Lumpa Church had one important result: witchcraft became a topic of conversation and speculation among the people, when they gathered in the evening round the fire. It was during those informal gatherings round the fire in the evening that I had my first contact with a whole Bemba vocabulary that our manuals, our catechism books, our prayer books and other pamphlets never used. A whole new world was being gradually unfolded before my eyes.

The Lenshina Movement, the Lumpa Church, came to a standstill when they clashed with the Government in the year of Independence, in 1964. It was a bloody confrontation, which led to a migration of the adherents of the Movement to the Congo and to the Copperbelt. The Lumpa Church was outlawed. The Lenshina Movement did not disappear, however, and

in my humble opinion never will, for it was the expression of a popular protest against the ignorance in which Bemba culture was held by the official churches.

The reactions

The Protestant Church of Lubwa, of which Alice Lubusha Mulenga was a member, never contested her claim that Christ had appeared to her. They gave her permission to be a preacher in her village. Her doctrine was a puzzle to the ministers of the Lubwa Church, but they did not oppose her. She broke away from the Lubwa Church later, on a matter of money collections and the use this money ought to be put to.

The Catholic Church did not take seriously her story of death-and-resurrection and of her vision of Christ. The missionaries did not panic at first when the people began to move in droves to her village: they really thought that this infatuation of the villagers for the prophetess would only be a flash in the pan. The Fathers went so far as to turn Lenshina into ridicule instead of wakening to the fact that she was creating a new church at the expense of theirs. The bishop of the diocese had to take them to task, reminding his priests that their attitude was not Christian. The bishop asked us the members of the mission staff to adopt a more respectful attitude. He also warned us not to lose heart before the damages the Lenshina Movement was causing to the parish, but to multiply our visitations in the villages (Mbala Circular 3/57). When the Fathers finally realised that the Lenshina Movement was no joke, nor was it a passing whim, they got down to tackling it seriously and building a whole apologetics in defence of the True Faith. Our arguments, however, were not too suitable, for the bishop felt the need to send us a circular letter again (Mbala 4/57), pointing out where we were going astray.

The Lenshina Movement was, first of all for us, a shocking revelation as regards the reputation we enjoyed among the people: we were witchdoctors! The medals, rosaries and images we were so fond of distributing to the people were ranked by Lenshina herself with the *fyabwanga*, as malevolent magical objects. The sacramentals and the sacraments, more particularly the Sacrament of Penance with the obligation for Christians to confess their sins, were rejected by the Balenshina as instruments of the type of witchcraft practised by the *basungu*, the white people. They had been led to believe, they said, that those sacraments and sacramentals would make them share in the power of the white people, but they were as disarmed before suffering and death as before. The witchcraft of the Whites was of no use whatsoever to the Africans, and there was even a tendency to say that it was being turned against the Africans. We were at the time of the struggle for national independence, 1950–1954. Lenshina was simply rejecting the European concept of Christianity, especially Catholicism, on the ground that our medals, rosaries and images as well as the use of the

sacramentals were strangely akin to the traditional means of defence against witchcraft, to the *fyabwanga* against witchcraft. She was preaching on behalf of Christ, who she said was an African that had come to liberate the Africans. She was exhorting her adherents to break away with the past, with the traditional practices of witchcraft, *bwanga* and *fyabwanga,* as well as with all the teaching of the missionaries and the devotional objects they were encouraging their Christians to have and wear. She had her own ways of fighting and overcoming witchcraft, she said. In fact she created a church of fanatics and fell back into the vicious circle of witchcraft, since she was very soon accusing all her opponents of being the cause of all evils, of being *baloshi*. She was back to square one.

Witchcraft before and after Lenshina

The ordeals by poison and boiling water

Everybody knows that, in African society, epidemics, disasters, accidents and death are caused by *baloshi*, i.e., by men and women acting through malevolence and using witchcraft. African society felt the imperative need to protect itself against those malevolent persons and in the course of the centuries, under the responsibility of the chiefs, it had set up a whole system for ferreting out those *baloshi* and for neutralising their evil spells.

One of the first things the first missionaries witnessed when they reached Kayambi was the ritual of the new moon (see Diary 24-07-1895). The people called the occasion “the day of the witchdoctors”—very significantly. In short, all the villagers were on that day expected to bring out into the open all the charms and amulets they kept in their houses as protection against the witchcraft. Those magic objects were inspected, and the persons who were found guilty of evil intentions by the type of charms and amulets they were keeping were severely dealt with according to tradition. In the evening the village was declared purified for a month.

For precise cases of death or disaster, the local *nghanga* or diviner dealt with them on the spot: through consultation with the spirits of the ancestors, the people believed that he was perfectly able to point out the person(s) supposedly responsible for those regrettable events. When it was a more serious case (when the culprit proclaimed his innocence and refused the verdict of the *nghanga*, or when it was a case involving the whole community), the case would be taken to the chief, and the chief would call in an expert *nghanga*. The suspected culprits would as a rule be subjected to an ordeal by poison or by boiling water: there was no appeal against the result of the ordeal, the persons were declared guilty if the

poison killed them or if they were badly scorched by the boiling water; they were declared innocent if they came out unscathed from the ordeal.

As to be expected, the Colonial Administration put an end to those ordeals and in 1914 made a law making accusation of witchcraft a legal offence liable to prosecution. Trials by ordeals continued as in the past, but all in secrecy.

The bamucapi *or witch-hunters*

In the 1930s, a new brand of magicians began to appear in Rhodesia: they pretended to have the magic power of exposing the *baloshi* hiding among their fellowmen and women in the villages. They came from what is now Malawi and were called *ncape* or *mucapi* (plural *bamucapi*). These foreigners came to fill up a gap and were an answer to the greatest wish of the people: to be free of witchcraft. Needless to say, they were at once extremely popular. They were welcomed by the chiefs and they started making the rounds of the villages to ferret out the witchdoctors and witches who, the people used to complain, were crawling all over the country and carried out their nefarious activities with complete impunity, because they were acting on the sly. What was new in the procedure: instead of selling the *baloshi* into slavery or putting them to death, the *bamucapi* gave them a potion to drink, called *mucapi* (hence the name given to the performers of the cure), which was supposed to neutralise the power of evil in them.

The missionaries, it is unfortunate to say, did not take the newcomers very seriously on the ground that they were only another bunch of charlatans, con men, and swindlers. (See the Annual Reports of 1933–1934, page 385, and 1934–1935, page 332.) The missionaries based their attitude on the conviction that the people would soon realise that, *mucapi* or no *mucapi*, the problem of sickness and death remained unchanged. Contrary to the expectations of the missionaries, the *mucapi* was soon to become a traditional figure, which would henceforward hold centre stage. This explains the success of the Lenshina Movement from 1953 onwards: fear of witchcraft is deep down the people's souls and minds, and they are ready to do anything and to believe anything that promises security in their lives. In the 1950s, like in the 1930s, witchcraft remained the main preoccupation of all Africans in this country, Christians as well as non-Christians. Lenshina died in 1979, long after her church had been condemned, but her movement has survived under the name New Jerusalem. Fear of witchcraft is still there.

The accusation of witchcraft

In the course of the enquiry that was conducted by the government on the causes of the bloody conflict between the Lenshina Movement and the Republic of Zambia in the very year of Independence (1964), one of the reasons given was the failure of Christian churches, all of European origin, to take witchcraft seriously. In 1994 the situation is very much the same: the Christian churches are still openly challenged to take witchcraft more seriously. The situation is, in fact, more serious than ever because the spectre of witchcraft and witchcraft hunting is looming over society more ominously than ever before. Formerly witchcraft hunting was the work of a few experts who were consulted by individuals or hired by a community. Nowadays all sorts of religious sects claiming to be of Christian inspiration have multiplied alarmingly, and they all try to endear themselves to the people by pretending that they have the power to free them from witchcraft. The trouble is that nowadays many individuals and sects have got official approval from the state to engage in witchcraft hunting: all they have to do is to get an official certificate that they practise "traditional medicine", that they are—to use the official jargon—"traditional health practitioners". It is all too easy to say that all these people are charlatans in spite of their official papers, and that they ought to be removed from the public scene. The fact remains that they are a glowingly attractive answer to a real need of the people. The conclusion is that it is in this real-life experience of the people that we should try to meet the people (not by staying on the sidelines and dismissing witchcraft hunting as mere charlatanism).

We may quite understandably loathe those that claim they have the power to cleanse a whole village from witchcraft, witchdoctors and witches. They may be professional witch-hunters like the traditional *bamucapi* or they may belong to those new religious sects. We may have good and solid reasons to loathe them. On the other hand *the witch-hunters do a job we fail to do*, and therefore, whether we admit it or not, ***they give us offence***. We do not like to see operating in our field of apostolate people who do not belong to our group and who perform a work that ought to be ours. Let us take a witch-hunter apart and let us look at him straight in the face. Let us forget for a while the abuses inherent in witch-hunting, the fact that it is easily turned into a racket. Let us try instead to find out which need he meets and which gap he fills. The *mucapi* exploits the visceral fear people have of witchcraft, he manipulates them, and he is the cause of much injustice. *The people know it* ***and yet they ask for him*** in spite of our opposition, in spite of the police, in spite of everything. ***Simply because the mucapi meets a social need***. The whole history of the Church reminds us that it is not sufficient to condemn, one must be prepared to replace what is removed.

The appeal of the Bishop of Mbala

In this context I want to quote from a letter written by Bishop Telesphore Mpundu, the Head of the Diocese of Mbala-Mpika. “I have no doubt,” he writes, “that witchcraft (the belief in witchcraft) and spirit possession are symptoms of suffering or slavish dependency in our people. Christ came to free them from this abject dependency. Why is it that the Word of God has so far failed to achieve anything against this phenomenon? I think that the reason for this failure must be looked for in the fact that the Word of God was not used as a direct attack on the deep causes (of the infatuation of the people for witch-hunting).” Bishop Mpundu, then, encouraged the missionaries to continue looking for a way to attack the deep causes of belief in witchcraft and witchcraft-hunting directly. He was commenting upon a pastoral and liturgical experience that was carried out in our parish along this line, and upon which we shall comment further.

I read this letter of Bishop Mpundu’s as an appeal for a second evangelisation aimed at transforming the Bemba mentality in depth. After 100 years of pastoral work among the Bemba, the missionaries are still ***warmly welcomed strangers*** in the Bemba society, ***but they are not really integrated***. The Local Church is fully conscious that evangelisation must now reach the cultural roots of the people. The missionaries still have a part to play in this effort of the Local Church for inculturation. The Bishop has pointed out witchcraft as being the obvious meeting point between Christianity and the local culture. Many people in this country are Christians and they did not have the feeling they were betraying their culture when they became Christians. Witchcraft, however, has always been frowned upon as being incompatible with the Christian faith, and yet belief in witchcraft is still an integral part of their mentality and their traditional culture. They must find a way of reconciling these two apparently irreconcilable opposites. As for the missionaries they must stop rejecting witchcraft and magic as being forms of charlatanism, not worth bothering about, out of respect for the local culture.

The aim of this booklet is to suggest new ways of looking at witchcraft and witchcraft-hunting to see how some elements and rituals can eventually be borrowed and adapted to pass on the Word of God to the Bemba people, so that the latter can more easily and readily accept Christian teaching on such important topics as suffering and death.

Chapter 2
EMILYO THE MYSTIC (1953–1970)

The challenge put to us by Lenshina the Prophetess had its origin in Protestantism, since Lenshina at one time belonged to the Free Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian version of Protestantism. From Northern Nyasa—nowadays Malawi—there came at about the same time a religious sect called *Mwakalenga*, which was proclaiming very loudly that they were people taking their cues from the Old Testament and were followers of Abraham. The members of the movement were all cattle herders and farmers and they were strongly advocating polygamy. In 1953 we had a head-on collision with them in the northern part of Kayambi Parish. No wonder, for they were from a tribe akin to the Mambwe, who formed the main population of the northern part of the Mission. Strangely enough, they did not take part in the general rush for Lenshina. They stayed put, as if they were not particularly concerned about witchcraft in their midst. I later discovered that the people who had opted for this religious movement were fully satisfied with what they were taught and did not look around for new beliefs.

I mention this here because at the time of Lenshina a whole section of the Catholics remained faithful to their Church on the ground that they were fully satisfied with what their *BaShifewe* ("Our Fathers"), as they used to put it themselves, were teaching them and they did not want to listen to any novelty from anywhere else. They were really the faithful, and it is among those faithful that the next movement of dissent arose within the Catholic Church.

The Mutima "Church of the Sacred-Heart" of Emilyo Mulolani

In the 1950s, at the time of the Lenshina Movement, a former seminarian named Emilyo Mulolani was founding another church, the Church of the Sacred Heart, as he came to call it. One thing is certain: Emilyo had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. After leaving the Senior Seminary, he became a primary school teacher in one of the parishes in Lusaka, the capital, where he showed an exemplary devotion to his work. It was at that time that, on the ground that he had been so ordered in a vision, he began to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart among the people. He was a born preacher and began to explain the mysteries of the Christian faith in a totally new way, in a lively language the people had no problem understanding. The fact that he had been in the seminary and that he was a teacher attracted to him, not only the simple people, but also—and in a sense more especially—the colonial elite: teachers, hospital staff, civil servants. Lenshina was besieged by the common folks who were running to her from the faraway villages in the rural areas. Emilyo became the idol of the elite.

The Catholic missionaries were at first happily surprised with the success he met in preaching about the Sacred Heart in the course of the first year of his particular ministry. They were certainly disturbed to hear that he had received his mission in a vision from heaven, but he was a man of great eloquence and was insisting a lot on the mysteries in the Christian faith. I ought to say that he hammered more on the mystery at the heart of every religion than on the mysteries of the Christian religion. That is where the shoe began to pinch seriously. Emilyo was gradually sliding down the slope of distorting the Christian teaching, accusing the missionaries of having hidden the secret at the heart of the Christian religion (see *Notes et Documents* 51–64, page 429). He gradually tended to preach a brand new mysticism to the Christians, who were not prepared for it.

Emilyo was all for the Good News as brought by Christ, but only at the level of the spiritual: to live the Good News in the spirit and by the spirit. He was in fact playing on the Bemba word *mutima*—the equivalent of the English "heart"—which he used in two different ways or in two different contexts, as it were. He used *mutima* in its biblical meaning, the inner part of man. He also used *mutima* in the traditional meaning of the word "the inner part of man that dictates what is to be done" (without reference to any outside obligation), the meaning that is implied in the Bemba saying "*mutima e mayo kaiyebela* = the heart is like a mother, she does what she likes" (to be compared to "*Lesa tumba nambo, mutima kaiyebele* = God is powerful, he does what He likes, i.e., what His heart tells him"). Man has a body, but the body cannot be an obstacle to life in the spirit; it must be at the service of this life in the spirit. We must therefore pray like small children who are innocent of all evil. To prove his point he always said that children like to bathe and swim naked all together, without being the least ashamed of their nakedness. Moreover blood relationships come after spiritual relationships. He gradually came to break away from the traditional values like family, marriage, obedience to parents, etc. He lost his way inside his own mysticism and landed in licentiousness. But all the same he had this striking intuition that the Bemba soul had an inclination for the mysterious, not to say for spiritual radiance. He drew our attention to the fact that our Christian religion was somewhat too much a matter of the brain, and that the body was not given enough place in the expression of religious feelings. He was, on this point, in accord with Lenshina who insisted so much on traditional rhythms and tunes to spread her teaching and to pray. As regards witchcraft—the topic at the centre of this thesis—Emilyo seems to have ignored it completely, since it does not appear anywhere in his sublimated teaching. All his followers were supposed to address one another as "brothers" and "sisters" and live together as "brothers" and "sisters", which ultimately led to too many cases of promiscuity.

Emilyo's movement did not survive popular criticism. It was soon split into two branches. The branch of strict observance quickly became involved in politics. The Mutima Church was

banned in the 1970s. In the 1990s Emilyo was still alive. He had expressed the hope of meeting the bishop of the diocese in which he was living. On the occasion of the Pope's visit to Zambia in 1989, he expressed a desire to meet the Supreme Pontiff. Emilyo Mulolani was definitely a sincere believer, but not humble enough to see when and where he was in the wrong.

Our reactions

The official Church was naturally wary of a man endowed with natural eloquence and who pretended to have had a vision enjoining him to spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart. The missionaries were warned against Emilyo Mulolani and his ideas by three circular letters in three dioceses. He nevertheless continued to come and visit the parishes and he met with great success and popular support everywhere. It was at a time when an American priest, Fr Peyton, had been permitted by the bishops to conduct his campaign for the recitation of the rosary under the motto "The family that prays together stays together". Fr Peyton was explaining to his audiences that he had engaged into this apostolate under the sudden impulse of divine inspiration (see *Rapports Annuels 1955–1956*, page 216). The local people who were flocking to Fr Peyton's meetings as well as to Emilyo's gatherings began to ask themselves one question: "How is it that both men are acting under divine inspiration, but one is not allowed to preach?" Emilyo had a ready-made answer: "Peyton is a White Man and is allowed to preach. I am a Black Man, and I am forbidden to preach!" ("Letter to Fr H. Pelletier, WFZ").

In the Diocese of Mbala, an attempt was made by the staff of the central parish to integrate the BaEmilyo—as they were soon called—in the Association of Apostleship of Prayer. Emilyo was absent when his adepts gathered around the bishop for considering the proposal made to them. He turned up unexpectedly in the course of a meeting and sent word he would like to participate in the debate, but he was refused admittance (*Rapports Annuels 1955–1956*, page 216). Emilyo and his followers broke away from the Church there and then. That is when they began to drift into their objectionable religious practices.

Emilyo misread the true purpose behind the teaching of the Church

Emilyo was in the Senior Seminary for a while where he had begun to be taught theology. When he began to preach about devotion to the Sacred Heart and his views on the mystery that is at the heart of every religion, more particularly the Christian religion with its mysteries, he was challenging the Church on a ground very different from Lenshina. He was

not blaming us for failing to free the people from the evil of witchcraft—in other words for inefficiency in transforming the life of the people for the better—but he was accusing us of distorting the Christian Message *by hiding from the Africans part of the Christian Mystery*. We the Europeans were deliberately refusing to disclose and communicate all the "Christian Secret" to the Africans. The question the missionaries were faced with was the following: what did the Africans think was the right way for them as Africans to have access to a religion brought by the White Man?

One incident that took place at Malole Secondary School (Kasama) put me on the track leading to such speculation. European and American teachers at the school were complaining that they were unable to set their pupils on doing personal work (through research, for example) instead of spending their time learning things by rote. Their pupils were clamouring for a course in every subject and spent their time copying those courses, reading and re-reading them. If they failed in the examination, they were likely to accuse their teachers *of having hidden something from them, that their course had been intentionally truncated to make them fail their examination, that they had not had full access to the academic knowledge of their teachers*. This was typical of a whole mentality, which demanded serious consideration on our part. For the Africans school learning was communion with the knowledge and way of life of the Europeans by osmosis, as it were, by simple contact with their courses, not by personal reflection on the part of the students. This was, strangely enough, very akin to magic.

A.M.D.G.

A warning from the past: The native church

The Annual Reports of the White Fathers from 1930 to 1938 refer time and again to the existence of *Native Churches* in this part of the world. The popular infatuation of the early years for the teaching of the missionaries had faded away, the Reports say in substance, and the people were looking around for alternatives. They were more particularly attracted by a church of American origin (Negro-American origin?), the Native Church. A certain Matafwali, hailing from Malole Mission, adhered to this church and settled down at Bukaya Musenge, near Kasama. The main point of his teaching was simple and straightforward: "A black man will never be able to become a white man. The black people will never be accepted in the society of the white people. Why do you join their church?" (*Rapports Annuels 1935–1937*, page 288).

The reaction of the missionaries and many people was once more strangely beside the point. It was maintained by and large that those Native Churches were all of Bolshevik inspiration. The preachers were fiends, wolves in sheepskins, whose teaching was ridiculous, absurd and grotesque. They were agents and spokespersons of the Communist ideology. Such were the remarks gleaned here and there in the Annual Reports of the White Fathers from 1934 to 1938. The missionaries at that time knew only to condemn those Native Churches without trying to find out what was the reason behind them. The movement was not taken seriously, and therefore no effort was made anywhere by anybody to find an explanation for *the dissatisfaction* of so many people with the Christian teaching and the Christian Church as they knew them.

The African Christians were wary of this Native Church and did not respond to its appeal for independence from the "Church of the Whites". This is in a sense quite understandable. They had made great sacrifices in abandoning their traditional beliefs and practices in order to adopt the beliefs and practices of the missionaries. Let us not forget that they had to follow a four-year catechumenate and get used to a new ethics before being baptised. Nobody was forcing them to break away with much of their past, they were doing it willingly. They were taking their call to follow Christ according to the teaching of the Catholic Church very seriously indeed! The reason is that they had an instinctive faith and confidence in the missionaries who were teaching them and who were opening their Church to them. The missionaries were their *bashifwe* ("our fathers"). The Native Churches met with very little success, because they failed to win the confidence of the people as the missionaries had, in spite of the fact that they were apparently speaking a language that ought to have been more attractive to them.

The unconscious motivations behind the acceptance of Christianity by the Africans

The Native Churches urged the African people simply to break away from, and turn their backs on, the "White Churches", as they called them, with the simple understanding that "Blacks cannot become Whites". In fact they were bringing to light one of the unconscious motivations behind the mass conversions to Christianity among the African populations right from the beginning. The Africans were striving to become like the Europeans, i.e., rich, strong, and apparently blessed by God. To adopt their religion was one way of sharing in their power and prestige. The prestige of the Europeans was so great and unquestionable that, at a meeting in which Matafwali was preaching about breaking away from the White Church, one in the audience shot at him: "We are ready to believe you if you can make an airplane" (*Rapports Annuels*). The people had accepted the new vision of the world brought

by the missionaries because it was very much akin to their own traditional views. The missionaries preached about the existence of an invisible world of spirits where the souls of the dead gathered after death, animated by good intentions towards the living, where Christians who had played an important role on earth enjoyed special powers (the saints), and where the living had protecting spirits looking after them (the guardian angels). The missionaries were freely distributing new talismans (medals, crosses, rosaries, etc.) and they had their own way of worship and their own way of praying. Then came World War Two (1939–1945), in which a good number of Africans took an active part when they were mobilised in the armed forces. That was a hard blow to European prestige: *the Africans came to realise that the Whites were just ordinary men as they were, no better or worse than they were, and that the Africans were perfectly capable of sharing in the superior knowledge of the Whites when they were given a chance to learn*. That was the time when prophetic and messianic movements began to be launched by local people, when the local populations began to become conscious of their own identity and to think about things in terms of their own mentality and identity. The White Man had ceased to be a powerful figure looming over them.

Contrary to the Native Churches, *Emilyo Mulolani* accepted all the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. He was urging his followers to be overzealous in the practice of their Catholic faith. His infatuation for the cult of the Sacred Heart was an embarrassment to the missionaries. But he was accusing the missionaries of racial discrimination in religious matters since they were hiding Christ's authentic teaching from the Africans. He was accusing the missionaries of deliberately concealing from the Africans what he called "the secret side of Christ's message". Deep down in his mind and soul, without realising it, he was convinced, like the students of Malole who failed their examination, that he was deliberately prevented from fully sharing in the knowledge, power and prestige of the Whites**;** he was convinced that the white missionaries were deliberately refusing him and the Africans access to Christian authenticity because they were Africans.

Was this the result of a mentality steeped in magic?

You may accuse me of reading all these events through a daring perspective, but I was brought to it by years of reflection on actual events. I was forced to abandon my position on the side of the Christian Church, where condemnation of all heresies comes naturally. I tried to enter into the mentality of the people to see how ***they*** lived all those events and how ***they*** looked at things. They are people for whom the world of magic is real: they live in communion with the world of spirits, even if only through fear. We look upon the world of

magic with scepticism and condescension. There was bound to be serious misunderstanding in the long run.

The Native Churches were saying: “It is impossible to be like the Europeans”, and *this may be quite true from the way they look at things*, ***because we make things look much too European***. Who can blame them for having their own vision of Christ and Christianity?

Lenshina proclaimed loud and clear: “The Europeans have failed to free us from the slavery of witchcraft, because they do not understand what witchcraft means to us.” There is a lot of truth in this.

Emilyo proclaimed that the Africans would like to have their full share of Christ’s revelation and Gospel, without anything being hidden from them. We should ask ourselves why our approach to evangelisation gives people like Emilyo and his followers the impression that they are denied access to the ***full*** Christian revelation. They are ready and eager to believe the same as the Europeans, they say, but they are denied by the Europeans free access to faith. The Emilyo movement may have contained the seeds of another concept of faith. Emilyo and his followers were prepared to adhere to a religion brought to them by the Whites, but **adhesion to the doctrine was apparently not their idea of faith: it is a European concept of faith, on which the Europeans insist in season and out of season**. *The BaEmilyo thought of faith in terms of “initiation” and “communion”, and they had the impression they were denied this access to Christianity*.

There is food for thought in those aspects of the prophetic and messianic movements that followed World War Two. We are back to the central idea in this booklet: to find a new approach to evangelisation.

A.M.D.G.

Chapter 3
THE ROYAL ANCESTOR, NONDO AND HIS CULT

In 1953 Kayambi Mission was hardly 60 years old. The mission station had been opened in 1895 and was considered the ancestor of all the Catholic missions in Zambia and Malawi. Village life was still very much what it had been sixty years previously at the coming of the first missionaries. Each village still had a central place where the men were wont to gather in the evening on their way back from work. It was the ideal place where you could meet the villagers, sit with them and listen to their conversations. That is where I really came to learn a lot about traditional religion: simply by listening to the elders talking about past historical events, a topic they were very fond of. In the course of those stories, religious traditions and beliefs were very often evoked, because they were an integral part of life, and the narrators liked to talk about them.

We had noticed that, in certain villages, there was a major obstacle to evangelisation. In those villages there were few Christians and they were very irregular in attending prayer meetings. More striking even: the children, usually so eager to come to those gatherings, were normally absent. I found out that, in every case, the "obstacle" was either a *nghanga* or a minister of the traditional religion in charge of the local sanctuary dedicated to the spirits of the ancestors or of the lords-and-masters of the land, or the presence of an elder who had an official function in traditional society, like being the keeper of a chief's relics. One of them was the minister who presided over a trial by poison, of which we spoke earlier in this booklet about witchcraft. As those social and ministerial functions were hereditary, it was possible for me to draw up a map of all the villages that sheltered a place of traditional worship and how they were geographically disposed in relation to one another. That is how I found out that we were facing two different kinds of worship: the royal cult (concerning the spirits of the ancestors of the Bena-Nghandu Dynasty or *mipashi*) and the territorial cult (concerning the spirit protectors of the land or *ngulu*).

The royal cult

This expression, "the royal cult", refers to the cult the Bemba have for the Chiefs of the Bena-Ngandu Dynasty. The Bemba were the conquerors of the country evangelised by Kayambi Mission. The first chief of royal blood who occupied the district and died therein became the object of a cult in connection with the cult of the royal ancestors in force in the heart of Bembaland. At the place where this chief died, there was a hut built to shelter his relics, and that is where he came to be honoured and venerated. That is where the elders of the land and the people would naturally come to ask for rain. Sacrifices were offered to the chiefs' spirits, usually an ox. It took me three years of patient investigation and questioning, and crosschecks, to discover where the site was exactly located. One day I managed to catch

the three guardians or ministers of the cult of the ancestors napping and visited the sanctuary. It was an ordinary hut, like all the huts in every village, sheltering the dead chief's *cipuna* or stool and other relics.

When the Paramount Chief in power died at the beginning of the twentieth century, his remains were taken in procession throughout the country, as if he were taking possession of it. Wherever the cortege halted became a place of cult—and there were half a dozen of them—where a sanctuary was built and a minister of religion appointed. They were still in existence in 1953, and Christianity did not have a chance to take root in those villages as long as the sanctuaries were maintained and the religious functions fulfilled.

The cult of the Bemba is centred around the *mipashi* (*mupashi* in the singular), a word that refers first of all to the spirits of the ancestors of the Bena-Nghandu Dynasty, and then to the family ancestors of every Bemba man and woman. The whole political system of the Bemba tribe is rooted in this cult. In other words, the Bemba political system is essentially religious.

The territorial cults

Besides this royal cult, and very often imbricated with it, were the cults of the spirits-and-lords of the land. They were in the country before the arrival of the Bena-Nghandu and they were not linked with the royal family. They were as a rule linked to a site or to a natural phenomenon. The territory east of Kayambi Mission is an extensive lowland into which flow and disappear three or four rivers. Most of it is flooded by the end of the rainy season, and teeming with fish. Formerly, when the rains were over, the whole population converged to this sort of lake to kill the fish. The fishing, however, could not be started before one fish had been offered in sacrifice to the goddess of the site. In the other mission stations in Bembaland, the places of cult of the local protective spirits are more permanent and clearly marked-out, like the Chishimba Falls near Chilubula (Kasama).

The word the people use for designating the spirits that dwell in those privileged sites (rivers, rocks, trees, waterfalls, etc.) is not *mipashi* but *ngulu*. Who are they? Some were certainly the spirits of ancestors lost in the mist of time, of people who lived long before the Bemba of the Bena-Nghandu Dynasty invaded and conquered the country. Some were, as the expression goes, the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land. They were sort of land deities that had always been venerated in some conspicuous places**,** like the Chishimba Falls. They were very important, for they were held responsible for rain and good crops, and sacrifices were offered to them on recurring occasions. Pilgrimages were made to them in

cases of natural disasters plaguing the land. This cult of the *ngulu* did not compete with the cult of the *mipashi*, for the conquering Bemba had been wise enough to preserve the cult of the natives of the lands they conquered.

In the 1950s, those cults were still frowned upon by the Catholic Church as being the expression of the traditional pagan religion and they were of course prohibited to Catholics. But many Catholics continued to venerate the *mipashi* and the *ngulu* in secret, privately or in ceremonies carried out on the sly. There was a minor earthquake in Kayambi Mission when we began to mention those cults in our instructions and in our homilies *without condemning them*, because we had at last gone into what was behind them and there was nothing reprehensible in most of it. The people were at first dismayed that the Fathers had found them out but were happily surprised to realise that they were not being blasted to hell. “The Fathers have changed,” they said, “all we do is no longer sinful in their eyes”. That is a remark that was overheard in February 1955 in the village of one of the guardians of the sanctuary dedicated to the memory of the spirit of the chief who had founded the village.

Looking back on the missionary past

Local cults were automatically condemned

Local cults were seen as pagan, they did not belong to the teaching of the Church and they were mostly against some of the Church’s basic teaching. For the Church, everything was simple and straightforward: OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THERE IS NO SALVATION. Anything outside the Church was termed pagan and therefore evil and forbidden. The encyclical of Pope Pius XII had not made much of an inroad to the mentality of the hierarchy and the people in 1953. The first missionaries had already condemned traditional religion as pagan and therefore to be rejected *before* they even came into contact with it. In the diary of the first Catholic Mission in Zambia, Mambwe, opened in 1891, and in the diary of the second mission, Kayambi, opened in 1895, the word *sorcelleries* (“witchcrafts”, in plural) was used to designate anything that was shocking, which the missionaries disagreed with, without any distinction being made between “religious” and “superstitious”. All religious rites, all practices of a magic character, even all simple, straightforward popular rejoicing were seen as public social or religious manifestations steeped in pagan superstition, and therefore basically evil. The missionaries were proud to say that they had been sent to wipe the slate clean and fill it with the Good News. We shall see further how the events that marked the beginning of Kayambi Mission were profoundly affected by this narrow-mindedness, totally non-Christian.

The cults were officially condemned

In 1931 Bishop Larue, Vicar Apostolic of the Bangweolo Vicariate, in the handwritten newsletters regularly dispatched to the mission stations called *Les Petites Nouvelles et Renseignements*, in the issue Number 26, dated 3 February 1931, published a letter in Chibemba to be read out to the Christians and the catechumens. I quote it here below in English word for word:

> Listen to me your Bishop with both ears. I recently got news of something terribly evil: Chitimukulu, the Paramount Chief of the Bemba, wants the people to worship the spirits of the dead. You all know very well that God, the Master of everything, has forbidden Man to worship the spirits of the dead. His commandment is: "You shall adore God only." It is therefore forbidden by God in person to worship the spirits of the dead. Chitimukulu is the Paramount Chief, but he does not have the power to order you to do what God forbids. God is the Creator, is the Supreme Lord above all the Chiefs of this country. God is greater than Chitimukulu. As a consequence, I, your Bishop, God's messenger, give you the following order: refuse to obey Chitimukulu when he tells you to adore the spirits of the dead. The baptised Christians who would comply with the Chief's order and adore the spirits of the dead, I shall ban from the Church. The catechumens who shall do the same shall have their names crossed out of our registers. As for the postulants, they shall not have their names entered on the lists of the catechumenate as long as they have not repented. That is what I am prescribing with God's power behind me, for I am your Bishop and the great messenger of God in your country.

I won't stress the fact that the whole misunderstanding rested on the wrong interpretation of the words *kupepa mipashi*: the early Fathers interpreted them as meaning "to adore the spirits" while in fact the people understood them as meaning "to invoke and pray the spirits". Let it be said here for clarification's sake that the Bemba do not adore the spirits of the dead as we adore God; they simply honour them, and invoke them, and appease them by offerings. I want to insist on a much more serious blunder: the Bishop and the missionaries seem to have totally ignored that the basis of the power of the Bemba Chiefs was the cult of the spirits of the dead. The bishop and the missionaries overlooked the fact that the political power of Chitimukulu and all the Bemba Chiefs does not exist and cannot be exercised without reference to the spirits of the ancestors. We cannot imagine a bishop writing such a letter nowadays to a political figure. Can we imagine the terrible situation in which this uncompromising letter from the head of the Catholic Church placed Chitimukulu and all the Bemba Chiefs, since it was undermining the very foundation of their power and their prestige?

Two religious systems officially existing side by side unbeknownst to the Catholics

One of the reactions of Chitimukulu to the bishop's blunder is well known. His capital is only a few kilometres away from the residence of the missionaries at Malole Mission (Kasama), which was founded in 1922. In the diary we are told that the Paramount Chief of the Bemba had remained in good terms with the missionaries up to that unfortunate letter of the bishop's. He had been displaying in his main residence where he was holding his audiences a portrait of Bwana Motomoto Dupont, founder of the Vicariate Apostolic and predecessor of Bishop Larue. In 1934, after the contents of Bishop Larue's letter was brought to his knowledge, he removed all evidence of his former friendship with the mission and severed all relations. Moreover he tried to harm the Catholic Church wherever he could, for he was the Paramount Chief and as such, he could dictate the attitude his subjects were to adopt towards the "foreigners". Thus it was that in 1934 he advised Chief Nkula, one of the three Senior Chiefs of the Bemba, to deny the Catholic missionaries permission to build a mission station near his capital (Letter of the District Commissioner of Chinsali to the Provincial Commissioner of Kasama, dated 07-02-1934).

A succession of events took place at that time, which were significant as regards the vitality of traditional religion in spite of the inroads made by Christianity into the social substance of the country. Chief Nkula finally gave his consent to the implantation of a Catholic mission near his capital. But he was determined to safeguard the cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land, which was at the root of his power and authority, by finding a way to neutralise the religious power of the foreign missionaries, which was openly militating against his by forbidding the Catholics to share in the cult of the ancestors. He was bound to take this attitude if he was to safeguard the basic interests of his subjects and of his district as he saw them. In 1935, unbeknownst to the White Fathers who had settled at Ilondola, he installed a *shimapepo* 100 metres from the mission church, whose job was to officiate in the rites of the cult in honour of the spirits of the ancestors and the spirits lords-and-masters of the land on the mission ground and the surroundings to keep all dangers away; all on the sly, of course, for the "foreigners" had to be kept out of the whole scheme at all costs.

The funny side of the affair is that the Catholic missionaries were inveigled in the establishment of a place of cult in honour of the spirits of the ancestors and lords-and-masters of the land at their own door, practically inside the headquarters of the mission. Chief Nkula knew he could not indefinitely refuse Fr van Sambeck permission to open a station at Ilondola. He then made plans to establish his own *shimapepo* at the mission station itself and he carefully prepared his man for this delicate function, as one of the

elders explained to us many years later. This man chosen by the Chief to perpetuate traditional religion side by side with Christian religion followed the normal catechumenate for admission into the Catholic Church—he was a Protestant—and was baptised. Then he was appointed headman of the village in the immediate neighbourhood of the mission station. In the meantime the chief's *shimapepo* endeared himself to the missionaries, for he turned out to be a fervent Catholic, and very active at the service of the Church and the Christian community. The long and short of it is that Father Superior summoned him to the mission, where he became his right hand man in the life of the parish. When the time came to choose a new headman for Ilondola village, Father Superior proposed his candidature to Chief Nkula, who was only too happy to oblige.

Thus it was that, from 1934 up to 1991 when we finally discovered what was going on, a member of the family of this headman-cum-*shimapepo* had been exercising the function of priest of the traditional cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land in the shadow of the Catholic Church, whether he was headman or not. Thus it was that for fifty-seven uninterrupted years two cults—should I say two systems?—had been maintained in function side by side without any trouble at all. The cult of the Catholic —i.e., universal—Church was by then firmly established and widely spread in the district. The traditional—i.e., territorial—cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land had been maintained without anybody being the wiser, but a great moral support to those in the know who were attached to the past.

A very similar case is reported in a book of Ian Cunnisson's entitled *The Lwapula peoples in Northern Rhodesia* (page 120). In 1932 a certain Luka, hailing from Chibote Mission, was summoned by Fr van Hofwegen, Superior of Lufubu Mission, in the Lwapula Valley, to be one of his catechists. At the same time this Luka was ordered by the local chief to build a village some five miles from the mission station in the bush. His official job was to look after a bridge that was of vital importance, but he was also secretly entrusted with the task of being the guardian of the tomb of an important Lunda prince of the past who was invoked in case of hurricanes and thunderstorms: in other words this catechist of the Catholic Church was at the same time a priest officiating in the rites for the invocation of the spirit of a dead chief for the good of the country. In the local mentality there was no incompatibility between the two functions.

In both cases, the Ilondola case and the Lufubu case, the men who became actively involved in the performance of two different cults within two different religious systems occupied a privileged position in the Catholic Church and had the full confidence and support of the Fathers. It looks as if the traditional chiefs chose those men deliberately, not only to ward off all suspicion on the part of the missionaries (that was evident!), but also because those

Christians actually made ideal traditional priests for the traditional cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land. The chiefs certainly did not see any incompatibility between the two functions. Deep down their hearts the chiefs—and the common folks for that matter—have never understood why the Catholic priests used to become so wild when the local Christians showed an instinctive attachment to the cult of the ancestors, so very akin to the cult they were taught and encouraged to give the angels, the saints and the dead. It looks to them—and to us also in a certain sense—very much like a storm in a teacup.

In 1992 at Ilondola we pulled down the sanctuary of the old church, which was threatening to collapse. In the course of the work, which consisted in dismantling the wall brick by brick to save as many of them as possible, the labourers unearthed, under what must have been the corner stone of the building, a small receptacle which they declared must have contained charms. They were closely questioned on the nature and the purpose of those charms, but their answers were rather evasive and embarrassed. I understand them: they knew it must have been the work of the *shimapepo* of Chief Nkula who was fulfilling his function as priest of the cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land. This incident sets us thinking and wondering. *Traditional cult may well be, in the minds of the local people who are Christians and non-Christians, something to be performed secretly side by side with the Christian cult or any other cult without one excluding the other*. This brings back to my mind a remark made in my presence in the 1960s by one of our teachers who was an excellent and devoted Catholic: “Father,” he said to me, “I never take a direct part in the rites of the cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirits of the lords-and-masters of the land, but I feel at peace and at rest to know that the traditions of the past are being observed.” There is food for thought in this remark. How far is it fair on our part to accuse of treason Christians who are attached to some aspect of traditional religion?

Conclusion:

One conclusion imposes itself on my mind at this point: the first missionaries approached the work of evangelisation with admirable zeal, but in total ignorance of the activities of traditional religion. They were intimately convinced that they had the Absolute Truth, and all other religious systems were things of the past, likely to become instruments of the Devil and therefore downright evil.

One hundred years later, in 1991, on the occasion of the centenary, we were challenged to evaluate the vitality of this traditional religion, which had not been swept out of existence by the implantation of Christianity or the progress of unbelief, even in the towns. We had in

the past decade become seriously aware of the necessity of a change from the past attitude of the missionaries towards traditional religion, and the people who had always been considered as the guardians of the traditional cults of the spirits against the encroachments of foreign cults were relaxing their hostility and mistrust. One of the great Bemba Chiefs, Mwamba, was invited to meet the pope in Lusaka in the course of his 1989 visit to Zambia. Two years later, on the occasion of the celebrations held for the centenary, the same Mwamba was baptised in the Catholic Church. He was the first senior Bemba Chief ever baptised a Christian, a tremendous step away from the past for a Bemba Chief. Bishop Mpundu, Head of the Mbala-Mpika Diocese who was baptising him, warned that it would not be easy for him to conciliate his Christian beliefs with his obligations as a traditional leader. The people who were attending the ceremony—and I was one of them—flatly said that it was *impossible* to be a Bemba Chief and a Christian, at least as things stand now. The power of a Bemba Chief is still resting on the cult of the spirits of the ancestors and of the spirit lords-and-masters of the land. The periodical performance of rites may still be carried out by *bashimapepo* and they are still frowned upon by the Church. More important—and more troublesome—is the exercise of the power vested in the Bemba Chief for fulfilling some public functions, more particularly concerning marriage and justice, all cases in which witchcraft used to play an important part in the past **…** and still does today. The Bemba traditional Chief is still expected to be answerable for the welfare of his people. It is on the matter of social conflicts that serious clashes are likely to occur between the traditional system and the Christian system. The position of a Christian Bemba Chief would be bound to be a very uncomfortable one at the best of times.

Chapter 4
MILINGO: THE ARCHBISHOP WITH HEALING POWER (1973–1978)

In the decade preceding the centenary there was a growing awareness of the true nature of witchcraft. We came to realise that witchcraft was—ultimately—the manifestation of individual and social suffering as seen through—and within the context of—the African mentality. Witchcraft had to be taken as an integral part of the traditional religious beliefs and practices, centred on the cult of the spirits: after all, is witchcraft not the art of inveigling the spirits of the dead into harming or protecting the living? The Christian evangelists were bound to come up with the conclusion that witchcraft was unacceptable to Christianity on various grounds. But witchcraft is an African reality, it is the way Africans look at suffering and death, at the causes of suffering and death, at the way of dealing with the causes of suffering and death. Africans are likely to resent any foreign interference in the way they deal with the problem of suffering and death.

That is the true reality behind the Milingo Affair in the 1970s. Milingo was tackling the problem of suffering and death in the African way, as it were. Rome got worried because he was spending much of his time on "healing seances", and the danger was real for Milingo to neglect his duties as supreme pastor of the Archdiocese of Lusaka. Moreover, Rome saw—rightly or wrongly—in those "healing seances" something akin to witchcraft practices, and this was very serious. Let us now try to throw light on this sad affair.

The case

Emmanuel Milingo, hailing from the Eastern Province of Zambia bordering on Malawi, was a young bishop. In 1973, at a congress of the Charismatic Movement at Ann Arbor in the U.S.A., he discovered that he had healing gifts. That was quite a revelation for an African who had been confronted his whole life with the problem of suffering and death in the African context. He was a bishop of the Catholic Church and he thought it was his duty to put his healing gifts at the disposal of his fellow countrymen, to show them that witchcraft was not the only answer. That is how Archbishop Milingo came to organise healing seances, preferably within the frame of the Eucharistic Celebration, so important to Catholics.

He quickly became very popular, quite understandably since he was addressing himself to the solution of the major problem in the life of all Africans: suffering. The people living in his Archdiocese of Lusaka, Christians and non-Christians, began to flock in droves to attend his healing seances and to consult him in his office or at his house. It must be said to his advantage: he never exercised his healing gifts outside his archdiocese. But his pastoral visitations of the parishes of his archdiocese were quickly turned into healing seances. He received a voluminous correspondence from all sorts of people living near and far. Mainly

men came to see him or wrote to him for consultation on what was troubling them. One of my parishioners in the Northern Province said to me one day: “There ought to be one priest in every parish doing what Milingo is doing in Lusaka.” This was a remark made in the *Northern* Province.

Archbishop Milingo saw his charismatic activities as an integral part of his concern for the poor and the destitute**,** who were legions in the enormous shanty compounds around the capital. He was doing his best to help them by building clinics and dispensaries. He was also outspoken in his criticisms of the inefficiency and corruption of the administration and the government. Archbishop Milingo, head of the Archdiocese of Lusaka and the dominant figure in the Catholic Church of Zambia, was a disturbing factor all around. Many among the priests and religious of the Catholic Church objected to Milingo’s healing sessions, which were very much in line with the Renewal Movement, on the ground that they were turning into shocking public exhibitions—to all intents and purposes, accusing Milingo of exhibitionism. There was talk of those sessions becoming far too hysterical, especially among the women. Milingo was accused of being more concerned about pleasing the African crowds than about preserving Roman Catholic authenticity. He was accused of introducing pagan ideas into his views on human beings and the human condition. Indeed he had published two pamphlets in which he advocated the actual existence of the world of the spirits as the Africans conceive it, and which he called the “world-in-between”. Rome had every reason to be worried. He was finally summoned to Rome for an explanation. The Vatican wanted to find out whether the good archbishop was not suffering from some psychiatric delusions as to his healing power and healing ministry and to test his theological knowledge on death and suffering and the invisible world of the spirits.

In Rome, Archbishop Milingo was found perfectly sound in mind and in knowledge. But he had now become a controversial figure in his own country. His departure had given rise to so much emotion, to so many controversies and quarrels within the Christian community as well as in the outside world, including among politicians, that his return to Zambia was thought unwise. The Vatican appointed him special delegate to the Commission for Migrants and to the Commission for Pastoral Ministry among Tourists and assigned him to a residence in the Vatican. In Rome he resumed his healing sessions in a parish, in some churches and in private homes.

The bone of discord: The world-in-between

A well-documented book has been written on Milingo, entitled *Spirit of Africa* (by Geerie ter Haar, London: Hurst, 1988). The word “spirit” in the title of this book refers to the African

soul, to the African mentality. The word “mentality” covers the whole concept of life: vision of the world, beliefs, a great variety of attitudes, of social and religious behaviour. This is very important to bear in mind if we are to judge Milingo objectively.

Milingo had advanced the idea of a “world-in-between”, of the reality of the world of the spirits, very much in the news. He took very seriously the existence of the “forces of evil”, the evil spirits or *fiwa* in the traditional religion. We might argue about the appropriateness of the expressions he used, but he had put his finger on a sensitive and painful point in African mentality. He was calling those forces of evil *machawe* meaning “foreign spirits”. He came from Eastern Zambia and he was using Cinyanja to express his thoughts. The vocabulary may have been different, *machawe* may have been somewhat different from the Bemba word *fiwa*, but the thought behind them was identical: the “forces of evil” *do* exist and they are individualized. In the healing sessions, the Archbishop called by its name the evil the person facing him was suffering from, and ordered that particular evil to come out of that person. On hearing how Milingo was proceeding to free a person from the evil he or she was complaining about, on hearing Milingo calling this evil by name and ordering it to go away, the spectators could not but recall the incident in the Gospel, in Mark 5:9 and Luke 8:30 (“What is your name”—“My name is legion”). Spectators with a certain baggage of theological knowledge could not help asking whether Milingo was curing people from physical illness or casting out devils. Healing or exorcism? No wonder a whole polemic developed around those terms. No wonder the Vatican had to interfere to put an end to total confusion.

Traditional Bemba data

The nghanga*: The medicine-man-diviner-magician rolled into one*

Milingo was in fact passing himself off for a *nghanga*. In 1956 an elderly man who was coming to the mission to pray regularly told me one day that he had been denied baptism on the ground that he had been—and still was—a *nghanga*. True, the missionaries were naturally suspicious of anything touching the trade of the village *nghanga* or diviner-medicine-man-magician. Those *bashinghanga*—to use the plural of the Bemba word—indulged in divination, invoked the spirits of the dead and chanted incantations to ward off evil spirits. They were fully-fledged witchdoctors, no doubt about that! This old magician was explaining to me that he was an expert in dropsy cases, and I personally knew two persons he had cured. He admitted to me that he would never deal with a case without first appealing to the ancestors for help, for suggesting to him the best remedy for this case. He was calling this invocation to the spirits “praying the spirits for help”. I found that his idea of

invocation to the spirits of the ancestors for help in a case perfectly orthodox from the Catholic point of view. He was beside himself with joy when I told him he could continue his invocations to the spirits, but that he should add the name of Christ to the list of the spirits of the ancestors he was wont to reel off before calling on the name of God. I added that if he could pray the Our Father seriously and honestly he could be baptised. This old *nghanga* was no charlatan!

As the years passed by, I was struck by the fact that most of the missionaries did not even know who were the diviners operating in their mission territory or parish area. I was struck by the fact that these men who were so important in the social life of the villages were on the fringe of our apostolate. Some missionaries hated the *bashinghanga* and spent time fulminating against the Christians who went to consult them. Most missionaries simply ignored them in the parish. The reason behind this ostracism of the *bashinghanga* on the part of the missionaries was fear or phobia of witchcraft, because they saw only the abuses and the evils of witchcraft. The *nghanga* was a witchdoctor, he operated as a witchdoctor among our people, and therefore he was part of the evil of witchcraft.

I think it is only fair to look at the *shinghanga* (the same word as *nghanga*) as ***a man at the service of the African society***. In the eyes of the people he is a diviner, i.e., he sees the hidden side of things, he is a medicine man, he is a healer, and he is a witch-hunter. ***In Bemba society his role is purely social***, he has nothing to do with the cult of the spirits. The rites he follows all have a healing character and purpose. As far as I know, there is a clear distinction between the *nghanga* and the *shimapepo*. The *nghanga* fills a social function, the *shimapepo* a religious function. The same man is never *nghanga* and *shimapepo* at the same time. One man cannot cumulate the function of *nghanga* and the function of *shimapepo*. (See in *Spiritus* 81 the article “Guérison et Salut”, pages 379–392, about the alien priest facing illness in the country where he works.)

Spirit possession by a ngulu

Milingo popularized the question of spirit possession. I came across such phenomena very early in my years of pastoral work in Kayambi Mission. I came across people who said they were possessed by a *ngulu*. All of them seemed to be proud of the fact, and I quickly drew the conclusion that there was nothing dishonourable about being possessed by a spirit—much the opposite. In the first case I came across at Sampa in 1953, the young lady was introduced to me as a person apart from the rest of the people, enjoying new privileges, but who had also fallen under new taboos. She was said to be possessed by the spirit of a chief. One year later, Kafusha—that was the name of this lady—fell ill. Ritual dances were performed to bring her back to health, but all to no avail: the illness refused to leave her. In

the course of my pastoral journeys, I often heard about sessions of ritual dancing and of initiation, but I was very careful to keep away from those manifestations of what I was told was pure paganism. Indeed the Catholic Church had condemned, once and for all, without appeal, the "*ngulu* phenomenon" as being diabolical. All Christians who participated in these "diabolical manifestations" were automatically excluded from the sacraments.

As the years went by, I repeatedly came into contact with highly respectable and influential people who were universally regarded as possessed by *ngulu*. I was gradually brought to ask myself questions. Then one day I was officially asked to make a study of the phenomenon that was officially called "*ngulu* possession". I had to look at it in a positive way, without prejudice, and I was gradually brought to change my opinion about "*ngulu* possession" and all that concerned *kuwilwa ngulu* ("to be possessed by a *ngulu*"). The Bemba type of spirit possession is one way of explaining certain types of illness of a psychiatric character, incurable but not lethal, by the presence in the person of a "visitor" from the invisible world**,** usually the spirit of an ancestor. Once this presence has been proved real and beyond doubt, the person is initiated into her new role as *ngulu* (they are usually women) and enjoys a new social status and a new prestige. This person may now dabble in medical activities or act as a prophetess. It is easy to understand that many abuses may slip into "*ngulu* possession". People who are looking for popularity or simply for respect may be tempted to fake "*ngulu* possession" in the hope that they may eventually manage "to pass the test" and be officially recognised as *ngulu*. This is the reason why this *ngulu* phenomenon is usually associated with persons who have been in a state of psychological and affective crisis, and persons living in a state of insecurity.

One aspect of spirit possession is very striking and gives the outsider serious food for thought: the persons that suddenly fall down writhing and foaming and twisting and babbling and who are declared by the onlookers to be apparently possessed by a *ngulu*, are always persons that were already torn by suffering or in the grip of illness of one sort or another; they are never perfectly sound persons. The demarcation line between spirit possession and witchcraft aggression is, therefore, not obvious, even for Africans. Only local experts, i.e., *bashinghanga*, can give a proper diagnosis, whether the person has been taken possession of by the spirit of an ancestor, or whether the person is the victim of malevolence on the part of fellowmen or women using witchcraft to wreak vengeance on their enemies. Only the same *bashinghanga* can prescribe the right attitude to adopt and eventually the measures to take in order to neutralise the action of the evil spirits.

The Milingo impact

Milingo was no doubt claiming to be a *nghanga*, versed in the art of healing and taking seriously the belief of the people that illnesses are caused by the intervention of forces from the invisible world of the spirits. He believed in modern medicine and showed his concern by building dispensaries in compounds. But to the usual remedies and medical treatments he would add recourse to the spiritual means allowed by the Church and popularized by the Renewal Movement: the healing rituals. It is absolutely undeniable that the use of healing rituals by Archbishop Milingo in his healing sessions was enthusiastically welcomed by the Africans because he was in fact renewing their traditional past. Let us repeat it because it is basic: for the Africans illness and death are not natural, they are the results of the intervention of supernatural forces. Illness, therefore, must be tackled with supernatural remedies as well as with medical treatments. Archbishop Milingo was a true *nghanga* in the tradition of the past.

To most of the ministers of religion in the Catholic Church (priests and religious), the stand taken by Archbishop Milingo on the ministry of healing came as a shock. There was already tension between the archbishop and the foreign missionaries, because the archbishop had not minced his words to stigmatize the attitude of some foreign priests and religious towards the local indigenous Church. Most of the White Fathers abstained from expressing their opinion in public for the simple reason that the initiative of this healing ministry came from the highest authority in the archdiocese, even if they felt somewhat uneasy about the dimensions and the direction the movement was taking. Some of us approved of Milingo's healing ministry, others openly collaborated with him in his healing ministry. As for the local clergy, they adopted very much the same attitude and kept silence, although deep down they had a lot of sympathy for Archbishop Milingo. Some of the diocesan priests were also engaged in healing sessions in their parishes. They were helping the people who came to them with complaints very much as the archbishop was doing in Lusaka. They were helping those people in the traditional way, with the medical means available nowadays and with the spiritual means put at their disposal by the Church. Some of these priests were even members of the Association of Traditional Health Practitioners and had the full approval of the Zambian authorities.

The aftermath

The Milingo Affair was a warning and a challenge to the Catholic Church in Zambia and I don't think the Catholic Church has so far paid any attention to the warning, nor has the Catholic Church taken up this challenge seriously. Lenshina and Emilyo launched movements that won over many Catholics, and all the Church could do was to condemn and inveigh

against all and sundry without asking why those movements were so successful, without acknowledging officially that they were answering a need of the moment. New sects and small religious groups are born every now and then in Zambia, and one of the things they do is to take over for themselves the role and function the *bashinghanga* (village magicians at the service of the people in difficulty) and the *bamucapi* (witch-hunters). They are still fulfilling these roles and carrying out their functions in towns as well as in remote rural areas. The best-known group of healers is the *Nchimi-Mutumwa*, which is operating with success all over the country with the full approval of the Zambian authorities.

Fr Clive Dillon-Malone, SJ, conducted an in-depth inquiry in the Study Department for Social Development at Lusaka University on the *Nchimi-Mutumwa Church*, which is a small group of healers. He published his work in several articles, in particular an article entitled *Mutumwa-Nchimi Healers and Wizardry Beliefs in Zambia* (Soc. Sci. Med., Volume 26, No 11, pages 1159–1172,1988). The problem of healing remains unchanged.

By way of conclusion

Let us ask ourselves, in all sincerity and objectivity, where our people are going for treatment when they are ill. They ***do*** go to the hospitals and dispensaries, which are opened to all, and which have been dispensing medical care free of charge for years after independence. But they also go in increasing numbers to “professional healers”, who are usually claiming appurtenance to religious groups. How far some of them may be sheer quacks is not for us to determine. What we are concerned about here is the apparent lack of awareness on the part of the Catholic Church, so deeply involved in the medical system of the country, that the people are hankering after a spiritual approach to the problem of healing while at the same time expecting to be efficiently treated by the means modern science has placed at the disposal of the medical profession. They may be excellent Catholics, but they won’t hesitate to go to a healer belonging to a sect or to one of the small religious groups that are abounding, and which do not hide their hostility to the Catholic Church.

Here is a list of the people and places the men and women in need of help go to:

- For medical treatment, in order to get *muti* (the general Bemba term for remedy against illness), they go to:
    - hospitals and dispensaries, to the professionals of the medical corps
    - the *nghanga* or village diviner-medicine men

  - T.H.P. or Traditional Health Practitioners, called “African doctors” by the T.H.P. Association of Zambia to which they belong

- For ferreting out witches and witchdoctors hidden inside the social fabric, they call in:
  - *bamucapi*, also known under the names of *nghanga* or *mcapi*
  - members of the *Mutumwa Nchimi*, known as herbalists, also called *batumikizi*
  - “African doctors”, i.e., approved members of the T.H.P. Association
- For healing through prayer, they are going for help to:
  - the Pentecostals, who are also advising beside holding public prayer meetings
  - the Born Again, who are holding public prayer meetings
  - the Charismatics, some groups of which belong to the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church as an organised and visible body is—gloriously?—absent, except from the hospitals and dispensaries. In the past the *bashinghanga* were also giving *muti* as we do in the hospitals and dispensaries, but they were giving more, a sort of moral security that is absent from modern medicine. The Catholic Church must come to realise—and fast!—that the people in Zambia who are in need of medical and psychiatric help expect more than simple technical treatment.

Part II

HISTORICAL RESEARCH & CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVENTS

Chapter 1
EVENTS LEADING TO THE FOUNDATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

To understand the present and to be able to face the future we must question the past. The White Fathers reached what is now the Northern Province of Zambia in 1891. The first mission station they opened was Mambwe, which was situated on the border of what is nowadays Zambia and Tanzania. From Mambwe the missionaries moved into Bembaland and opened the mission station of Kayambi (1895), then Chilubula (1898), which Bishop Dupont made his residence. From Chilubula the missionary movement went in a southerly direction, towards what is now Malawi.

It was the time when British, Germans and Belgians were extending their zones of influence in the region between the three lakes: Lake Nyasa, Lake Tanganyika, and Lake Mweru. Agents, claiming that they were representing their countries (Great Britain, Germany, or Belgium) kept crisscrossing this region at the head of armed escorts recruited among the Africans. There were also explorers, adventurers and elephant hunters combing the area in search of what they had set out to find. There were even journalists out for stories (Stanley is the most illustrious of them all).

Traders had been busy in the area for quite a while and they had opened a trade route between Lake Nyasa and Lake Tanganyika.

Last but not least, missionaries came on the heels of the traders and explorers to bring the Good News to the African populations. The Protestants were the first to penetrate and eventually settle in this region.

SLAVERY AND SLAVE TRADE

The Arabs who had been installed on the East Coast for centuries and the African tribes who had been converted to Islam were roving all over East Africa for slaves and for trading purposes. Slave raiding was reaching a peak when the first Europeans began to appear on the scene. Slave raiders and traditional African chiefs had in fact the monopoly of trade inland. Slavery was institutional in all the African tribes of East Africa.

Slavery was in fact closely linked to what we call witchcraft. When a person was convicted of witchcraft, he or she was put to death, or more frequently simply reduced to slavery on the spot or eventually sold into slavery to passing caravans of Islamic traders. Slaves had become a greatly appreciated trading commodity.

THE TRADITIONAL CHIEFS

Slave-trade involvement was made possible by the fact that African chiefs held sway over their subjects, with power of life and death. The Bemba formed by far the most strongly structured tribe, with a highly centralised power around the Paramount Chief Chitimukulu and the three Senior Chiefs Makasa, Mwamba and Nkula. These Bemba Chiefs adamantly opposed for a long time every attempt made by Europeans to meddle in the running of their fiefdoms.

Catholic missionaries were the first foreigners to defy the Bemba Chiefs, penetrate into Bembaland and eventually open mission stations in the heart of the country. Did the fact that they were French make it easier for them to challenge the Bemba Chiefs? It is difficult to say. One thing is certain: the pragmatic British, although they resented the presence of Catholic missionaries—and French to boot—in what they considered their zone of influence, took full advantage of their advance into places they had not dared to move into yet and backed them up.

MAMBWE: 1891–1895

The missionaries presented themselves as men of prayer

One thing the historian must bear in mind when he studies the part played by the White Fathers (Society of the Missionaries of Africa) in the history of East Africa: *their founder, Cardinal Lavigerie, had sent them out as MEN OF GOD, and nothing else!* The White Fathers who eventually landed in this part of Africa had lived their first missionary experience in Tanganyika and in the Congo. Their instructions were to fit as much as possible into the political situation they found wherever they made a foundation. All the work they did as soon as they arrived at a place they had chosen as a foundation (houses, schools, gardens, etc.) was not to be interpreted by the local people as another attempt by white men to exploit the land. In the very first days they were at Mambwe, they summoned the people to come and pray with them. Very quickly the missionaries began to teach catechism. Soon there was a group of people coming to pray with the missionaries every day. Br Antoine, who was coming from a mission station where the missionaries had been totally ignored in spite of the fact that they stayed there for a full year, was amazed to see that at Mambwe the missionaries met with an immediate response on the part of the local population to their invitation for prayer and religious instruction.

The people who prayed with the missionaries, and the people who became dependants of the missionaries

At the very beginning a quick distinction appeared among the people who were seen around the missionaries. Some came to pray regularly. Most of them were in fact slaves the missionaries had bought from the Arab traders or their henchmen. They were usually children, whom the missionaries referred to as “our children”.

Those who became dependants were grownup people who left the authority of their traditional chiefs for some reason or other and who put themselves under the authority of the missionaries. Others were people who had found themselves cut off from their own tribal background and who were all too happy to place themselves under the authority of the missionaries. We must not be surprised: this was all according to the traditions of the time. To these must be added the refugees, i.e., persons who had run away from their traditional chiefs to escape trial by poison, in other words victims of witchcraft accusations. Finally another small group of dependants were the women and children who had been offered as presents to the missionaries by the chiefs on occasions of audiences.

What about the slaves bought by the missionaries?

Buying slaves from slave raiders and slave merchants became an important part of the missionary activity of the White Fathers. This action was pursued up to 1898 at Kayambi. The Catholics supporting the missionary efforts of the White Fathers in Europe considered their most important contribution the provision of funds for “redeeming slaves”, as the saying went, i.e., buying them from the Arab traders and looking after them until they could settle down and look after themselves.

Protestants and Catholics followed different policies in this regard. The Protestant missionaries bought only the slaves they needed as workers. The Catholic missionaries on principle bought all the slaves they could, keeping them on their mission compound until they could look after themselves. Of course, they made them work in their fields since they were feeding them. By so doing, they were open to the accusation of buying slaves in order to make them work for the mission. True, they did not sell them, but they kept them as their labourers. In other words the missionaries were suspected of being pro-slavers of a new type. Chief Makasa used to say: “The missionaries do not even marry the women we give them, they just make slaves of them!”

Thus it was that the “mission village” became a feature of the first mission stations. It was a strange agglomeration made up of two kinds of inhabitants. Most of them were slaves

bought from the slave raiders and maintained in a state of servitude at the service of the mission. Another important section was made up of political refugees: they were the men and women accused of witchcraft who had run away from their chiefs to escape trial by poison, or who had run away to escape mutilation. The local traditional chief had no authority whatsoever in the mission village. The nominal headman was chosen by Father Superior, and Father Superior was the real authority among the inhabitants. That was to be the case for all "mission villages" up to 1925, when the Colonial Administration in London took over the administration of the colony from the British South Africa Company (BSAC).

The Christian village: Orphanage and school

The missionaries bought children preferably, both boys and girls, and looked after them in an orphanage. The idea was to bring them up in the orphanage and then pair them as husbands and wives once they were grown up. Then they were to live in a village of their own according to the traditions of the land. The education they received was remarkable for the time, for they were taught the Three R's: Reading, wRiting, and Reckoning. A lot of time and energy was spent on teaching them Christian doctrine, Christian morals and the Christian way of life. The missionaries naturally insisted on hard work on the land, for every morsel of food had to be grown on the spot. Their formation was very strict, for the Fathers had to maintain order and discipline among them. Even after they had been married and installed in a "Christian village", they still submitted to a regular life in which prayer and religious instruction occupied a great place. They were still closely supervised and controlled by the missionaries**,** who saw to it that they did not indulge in pagan practices.

A very important remark to make at his point: the children of the orphanage may not have been given a very liberal formation according to our modern ideas, but baptism was not compulsory for those living in this village. If they wanted to be baptised, they had to follow the normal catechumenate, which lasted four years. *The missionaries aimed at individual conversions, not at mass conversion*. There was something there that did not fit with the mentality of the time: the Africans of the time found it quite normal to be forced to adopt the religion of the person on whom they depended. The Africans captured by the Arabs were forcefully turned into Moslems, and those Islamic Africans in their turn turned their own children and dependants into Moslems. Liberal education is a dream of the Western world based on the Christian doctrine of personal freedom; it is the nightmare of Islam.

One thing, however, which the missionaries had in mind in founding those "Christian villages": they hoped they could find among the population good men to be trained as catechists, for they were convinced that the conversion of local populations to Christianity

could be achieved only through zealous catechists. An “apostolic school” was opened for this purpose at Mambwe, with a contribution of candidates from Karema (Tanganyika).

A.M.D.G.

The local population

This does not mean that the missionaries ignored the original inhabitants of the country where they had come to open their mission station. The local people were totally free from the mission, of course. For these villagers, the missionaries were strangers who had come to live among them with a whole retinue of men, women and children they had collected on the way, and whom they still bought or welcomed in their midst. But the foreigners were good employers. They needed significant manpower for their projects, gardens, fields, and constructions. They paid their workers with calico cloth, a commodity that was highly appreciated. The village headmen and the chiefs were delighted with the bonanza.

This is the way the missionaries first came into contact with the local people. Soon after, the missionaries invited the people they employed to join them in prayer at the end of the day, and to attend religious instruction. After a short time the villages in the neighbouring countryside began to move close to the mission, for reasons of security. The missionaries had guns for hunting and for protection against wild animals. The natives thought in terms of guns against eventual human predators. In any case they felt much more secure in the immediate neighbourhood of the BaBwana. They even began to ask permission to settle on what was regarded as the mission compound under the direct authority of Bwana Mukubwa (Father Superior). Gradually individuals began to approach the missionaries to express their desire “to pray”, meaning to pray as the missionaries did. This was the occasion for the missionaries to engage in direct apostolic activity: they started sending the children of the “apostolic school” to the villages to teach villagers the prayers they themselves knew by heart, to act as prayer leaders. The first lay apostles were children.

Kayambi: 1895–1898

Care of the sick

When the missionaries came to Kayambi, they found a population of proud men and women who had never bent their knee to anyone. As we pointed out earlier, no European had managed yet to settle down anywhere in Bembaland. Chief Mwamba, for one, made no bones about it: he would kill any European who tried to settle down in his country, and

Bishop Dupont certainly took risks when he went to see him in 1896. The White Fathers were not encouraged to settle down even at Kayambi. When the Fathers asked local people to come and build a fence around their compound, the men came with one stake each, drove it into the ground and left.

Fr Guillé was an eyewitness of the beginnings at Kayambi. "We are dealing here," he wrote, "with a tribe of domineering people, used to imposing their views on all those that approach them**…** Father Superior thought it wiser to approach the people in a way that differs from what had been done in Karema, and from what was done at Mambwe. He did not explain to the people that he had come to teach them a better way of praying. He simply got down to treating the people who were ill or who had wounds" (Letter, 4 December 1896, Archives 108326-330). The diary of the mission clearly shows that the Fathers were spending most of their time during the day caring for the sick in the makeshift hospital they had put up on arrival. That is what made the greatest impression on the people. Fr Joseph Dupont, the founder and Superior of Kayambi, who was to become the first Vicar Apostolic of the Nyasa Vicariate in 1898, was a medic from his time in the French army, and in the eyes of the people he was as good as a fully-fledged doctor. To the medical treatments he added the use of ritual prayers and exorcisms found in the Roman Ritual, and this is something some of his confreres did not agree with on the ground that he was making an abusive use of those special prayers in season and out of season (see following chapter).

A.M.D.G.

Spreading the gospel by means of local youth

In 1897 Fr Dupont came to realise that the missionaries could not continue indefinitely to rely on the orphanage as the main alternative for spreading the Good News among the local people. This method was ambiguous, to say the least: it gave the impression that the new religion was the monopoly of children, the slaves, and of men and women who were running away from their chief's wrath. Fr Dupont brought pressure to bear on his fellow missionaries to make them understand that the time had come for them to change their tack, *to announce the Gospel DIRECTLY to the local (indigenous) populations in their own language*. It was even more urgent since slavery and the slave trade were quickly becoming things of the past, as the presence of Europeans was quickly putting the Arabs and their henchmen out of business. The country was now open to penetration by the Europeans, especially by the missionaries who had in fact been the first to brave the wrath of the Bemba Chiefs.

Fr Dupont also realised that the time had come to change the orphanage into a real school for the youth of the country. He began to get into contact with the villages, some of them even very far from Kayambi, in order to get acquainted with the local populations, the headmen of their villages, and even the chiefs, and to recruit young men of good will for the school. The orphanage became a boarding school, and even the chiefs began to send some of their own sons to college. In 1901 Kayambi Boarding School became the first Catechists Training Centre dealing only with adults in the country. Here is a testimony from Fr Guille: "We have 150 boarders," he writes in a letter, "belonging to the best families in the land. As those children were all born free, we expect better results from them (for the work of evangelisation) than from the freed slaves." (See op.cit., page 5).

The work of the pioneers

Praying and teaching

At Mambwe the missionaries were leading the local people into praying in the Christian way and they were teaching them catechism, i.e., the rudiments of the Christian doctrine. At Kayambi praying and teaching also occupied an important place in the life of the group of neophytes who had accompanied the missionaries to the new foundation, and the local people were soon joining them quite spontaneously. Fr Guille testifies to this fact in the letter we have already quoted twice.

In fact, right from the start, who were the White Fathers in the eyes of the skeleton administration set up by the BSAC—and later the more sophisticated Colonial Administration? *They were French priests from Algiers (*at least in the very first years) *who lived in the middle of the native populations, spoke and taught in their language, prayed along with them, celebrated Mass in their presence and performed other religious ceremonies, and ran confessional schools*. That is how the British agents of the BSAC and the officers of the Colonial Administration saw the White Fathers. For them the "real schools", given their British background, were run by the Protestants, because in their schools the Protestants taught English and secular subjects, and they taught in English.

In a sense they were perfectly right, for the policy of the Catholic missionaries was simple and straightforward at first: a village that was earmarked to become a "Catholic village" had to have its own house of prayer. Needless to say the main activities in those places were prayer and religious education. The prayer leaders, however, knew how to read and write and reckon, and it was an integral part of their work to teach the Three-R's. In fact the houses of prayer were rudimentary schools.

Later, when the White Fathers opened “rural schools” outside their residence, they registered them with the Colonial Administration as “chapel-cum-schools”. They were run by trained catechists who taught the Three-R’s as well as catechism. The weak point in all these schools run by the White Fathers was for many years the absence of English language on the syllabus. There is no doubt that, for many years, anybody who wanted to join the colonial civil service had to go to a *Protestant* school to pick up at least some rudiments of English. The White Fathers were using Bemba in school. The teaching was, no doubt, excellent, for the readers they made for the purpose were masterpieces and were used also in government schools. All their “rural schools” were well run and had an excellent reputation, but the weak point was the ignorance of English. In any case the Colonial Administration recognised those “chapel-cum-schools” as real schools, but not the houses of prayer, even though the prayer leaders continued to teach the Three R’s. This distinction between “house of prayer” and “school” lasted till 1925. After that date, there were only schools, and schools could not be subsidized with public money anywhere if they were not officially recognised by the government. They had to be run by trained teachers and follow the official syllabus. Any other institution run by the White Fathers were not subsidized and were not recognised as schools, and that was the case of many “houses of prayer”.

To be near the people

The early missionaries, for many years, spent most of their time in pastoral activities, which were twofold: to make the people pray and to teach the people the truths of the Catholic faith. They also spent a lot of time in the dispensary, looking after the sick and distributing remedies. But all these activities were possible because the missionaries were close to the people, welcoming them to the mission station at all times when they called on the BaBwana, often for no other reason than *kupuma iliashi* = to have a chat. What is most striking in the early diaries was this **permanent contact** the missionaries maintained with the local populations. It was almost an obsession with them. The first residences the missionaries built had all a ***barza*** or **veranda** where the missionaries could sit down with the people and chat with them. In the directives Bishop Dupont gave to his missionaries—the famous “cahiers d’ordres”—he insisted on the necessity for all the missionaries to spend each one of them in turn at least one hour every day on the *barza* with the people, preferably in the middle of the day. The missionaries were under strict orders to visit the villages. As the periods of religious instruction and the care of the sick in the dispensary took much time, one Father was appointed for those regular visits to the nearby villages.

The time soon came when the missionaries organised the *systematic touring of the mission station*s. The Fathers left for a week or a fortnight with a whole caravan of porters to carry their baggage. They went from village to village, and in each village they gave a period of

religious instruction and they chatted with the people. Once they knew the country well enough, they would visit more than one village in a day and spend the night in the last village they came to. Visiting each village according to a pre-established plan became the trademark of the White Fathers' apostolate in this part of Africa.

Later the missionaries realised they were spending too much time on the roads and were repeating the same instruction in every village. Why not choose villages that were at the geographical centre of areas and ask the people of the neighbouring villages to come to this central village for instruction and, later for Mass and the sacraments? *Thus was born a new method of apostolate*: *the system of "succursales" in French, of "centres" or "outstations" in English*. In each centre a church and a house for the visiting priests were to be built. The priests would henceforward leave the mission station and go straight to one centre or outstation, where he would stay the whole duration of the pastoral visitation. The people would converge on the church for instruction and the sacraments from the neighbouring villages belonging to this outstation. The missionaries were then able to conduct periods of religious instruction that could last as long as a month, more usually two weeks, teaching a large number of people. The long and short of it is that the missionaries were able to instruct the people systematically by age groups. When they were thus "on tour", the missionaries would spend their afternoons visiting the villages of the centre, meeting with the people, checking and updating the data in their tour books, and solving local problems. This changeover from visitation of every individual village to the touring of outstations was not universally accepted with enthusiasm by all the personnel. As late as the 1960s there were veterans unwilling to abandon the system of village-to-village visitations and they clashed with the partisans of the outstation system only.

Both systems, however, were possible only because the White Fathers were close to the people, spoke their language fluently, and mixed with them freely. This is also the basic, characteristic trademark of the White Father apostolate in this part of Africa.

Baptism

As we pointed out earlier in this booklet, the White Fathers working in this area faithfully followed the policy that had been suggested by Cardinal Lavigerie. The people were to be left completely free to apply for baptism. Then they were to follow a catechumenate of at least four years. In fact it was common practice among the missionaries, at least at the beginning, to baptise people only after six years: two years as postulants, then four years as catechumens. The normal policy, however, was baptism after four years of catechumenate.

The missionaries, however, were in the habit of baptising all children in danger of death, at least when the parents did not hide them away on the ground that baptism killed them off. They also baptised all adults in danger of death who did not openly refuse baptism. It was an important part of their apostolate and of the apostolate of the catechists and prayer leaders. Even simple Christians, after some time, became very keen on baptising people in danger of death. According to Fr Guille, Father Superior had been successful in his missionary approach since "for the last eight months, only one woman refused to be baptised at the hour of death" (Letter, op. cit.).

It is worth mentioning that the diary of Kayambi-Mambwe Mission stressed the ambiguity of such a practice. The danger was real that the people would be tempted to look at baptism as the immediate cause of death of the patients, that baptism killed off those in danger of death. In spite of this, administering baptism to the dying became very popular. The practice roused much opposition and criticism among the Catholics as well as among the Protestants. Would the people not be tempted to wait purposefully to be at death's door to ask for baptism instead of submitting to the stringent way of life expected from baptised Christians?

How did the local people look at the missionaries and their ministry?

We must first of all bear in mind that the Bemba, more perhaps than any other tribe, were hospitable people, who welcomed among them strangers with special gifts and allowed them to play an active part in public life. A stranger, i.e., a man who was not a Bemba, could be a *shimapepo* or minister of religion. A man or a woman who was not of the tribe could be accepted as a *kasesema*, i.e., a prophet/prophetess or spokesman/spokeswoman of the spirits. A man from another tribe could well become a *nghanga*, a medicine-man-diviner-healer-witch hunter who was in a sense the most important figure in the village. In the countries they had conquered, the Bemba showed themselves very respectful of the local cults. When it came to intertribal cults in the country they occupied, the Bemba were wont to hire the services of members of other tribes, or even of complete strangers, as ministers for the performance of the rites. The Bemba Chiefs had their own accredited *bakasesema*, but they were not loath to accept oracles from strangers known to have their contacts with the world of the higher spirits. In Bemba society the important functions, religious as well as social, were entrusted to strangers, for strangers were fully integrated in the religious and political system of the Bemba; they were fully-fledged members of the Bemba tribe.

No wonder that the Bemba welcomed the foreign missionaries, especially the first White Fathers, who came to them as ministers of a new cult, the more so since they were ready to adopt and speak their language. Communication with them was made much easier by the

fact that the first missionaries went all out for establishing permanent contact with the local populations, as we explained earlier in this thesis. The chroniclers of the diary took evident pleasure in describing how the people were eager to meet with the missionaries and come to their prayer sessions and their periods of religious instruction. Chief Makasa and his elders as well as the common folks came to the religious ceremonies of all types conducted by the missionaries, because, as the diary points out, they felt quite at home in the cult as performed by these foreigners. There were enough common points between the Christian cult and the traditional cult of the Bemba for the Bemba to feel at home in the assemblies of prayer of the White Fathers. The entry of September 11, 1895, in the Kayambi Diary is very revealing: "*Where have they learnt all this?*" the chronicler wonders. In other words the people fitted quite naturally into the cult brought to them by the White Fathers.

Let us sum up the whole situation in a few words. For the Bemba the most important man in the village after the headman was the *nghanga* or *shinghanga:* he was diviner-medicine man-witch hunter rolled into one. How did the first White Fathers appear to them right from the start? Quite simply the White Fathers were strangers-medicine men-healers, since their first contacts with the people were through the care of the sick. Then, when they started gathering the people for prayer meetings, they became strangers-ministers of cult. The White Fathers fitted quite snugly into the tribal, social and religious background of the Bemba, hence their success.

Moreover, the superior of the mission station—the priest in charge of the post—to whom the other missionaries owed submission and obedience, was quickly looked to as the chief of a new society, growing in parallel to the old traditional society with its traditional chiefs and customs. The ordinary villagers began to leave their traditional chiefs to come and live on the mission compound and to place themselves under the authority of Father Superior. What was the motivation behind this move? We have already mentioned the men and women that ran away from the tyranny of the local chiefs or simply from the consequences of an accusation of witchcraft (trial by poison, mutilation, servitude, etc.). Far more people were simply looking for greater security and justice, and a better life, because they would no longer be systematically exploited. Chief Makasa, who had been the first to open his country to the White Fathers, took offense at the popularity of the missionaries and in 1898 moved his capital 40 kilometres away from Kayambi. Two years after his arrival at Kayambi, Fr Dupont was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Nyasa Vicariate and received the episcopal consecration at Kayambi from the hands of Bishop Lechaptois. This stranger the people had come to nickname Bwana Motomoto was no longer only a *shimapepo* and *a shinghanga* like all the other missionaries, he was now also a *mfumu*, a chief on his own right. This certainly played in his favour when he was finally given an opportunity to move into the *ituna*, the fiefdom of Chief Mwamba, in the heart of Bembaland. It explained why Chief Mwamba on

his deathbed asked BaShikofu Motomoto Joseph Dupont to take up the task of protecting his own people from the vengeance of other Bemba Chiefs, in other words to exercise a traditional Bemba Senior Chief's prerogative and responsibility.

Those three titles (stranger-religious minister, stranger-medicine man-healer, and stranger-chief) had a profound impact on the history of the Catholic Church in Bembaland up to our present day, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Chapter 2
THE DUPONT MYTH

Among the events that marked the foundation of the Catholic Mission in Bembaland in the years 1895–1898, one stands out more significantly than all the others. It took place only two weeks after Fr Dupont's arrival in Kayambi.

The event of August 1895 pregnant with meaning for the future

On August 11, 1895, Fr Joseph Dupont, Superior of the new foundation, and another White Father on the staff went to pay a visit to Chief Makasa at his court. The chief was surrounded by a large crowd of people. One of the onlookers was being accused of witchcraft practices and was demanding to be submitted to trial by poison to have a chance to prove his innocence. Only Chief Makasa could order such an ordeal, and in this case he simply refused to comply with the request on the ground that he had no intention to poison any of his subjects. Fr Dupont jumped on this occasion to condemn witchcraft in whatever form it may have been practised as a belief that had no foundation. Then he challenged all the magicians, witches and witchdoctors present to gouge out one of his eyes, since that was what they had publicly threatened to do sometime before, simply by means of witchcraft. If they managed to deprive him of one eye by magic means involving the action of spirits, he added**,** he was prepared to give them a fat reward. Nothing happened, of course, and all those that were present had a good laugh at the expense of the witchdoctors. As for Chief Makasa, he sat gawping at Fr Dupont and praising the God of the Whites. This laughter of the people was deeply significant, but must be correctly interpreted. The people were still convinced of the existence of witchcraft and of the reality of the magic powers possessed by the witches and witchdoctors present, but they drew the only logical conclusion: ***that these white foreigners were truly*** **bashinghanga** ***or diviners-magicians, and that they were more powerful witchdoctors than their own*** **bashinghanga**.

The proof of it is that, in the evening of the same day, around 17:00 hrs according to the entry in the diary, Chief Makasa and two junior chiefs came to ask the missionaries for a remedy that would ward off all dangers of witchcraft from their persons. Fr Dupont told them to kneel down, then he read the prologue of St John's Gospel (the first chapter) in Latin over their bowed heads, and sprinkled them with holy water. Let me quote the words of the diary literally: "Makasa and his fellow chiefs knelt at the foot of Fr Dupont with great respect and made a deep, low bow as they were sprinkled with holy water. Then they stood up full of joy and feeling strong because, they said, they had no fear of the witchdoctors any longer." Fr Dupont gave a medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary to each one of them.

This apparently insignificant event had far-reaching consequences. The news went around that the White Fathers were redoubtable witchdoctors, and this reputation stuck to their persons for a long time. One year later, on July 30, 1896, Fr Dupont was touring the country when one man yelled at him from a distance that "he and his priests were redoubtable witchdoctors". Half a century later, in the 1950s, Lenshina Mulenga, the foundress of the Lumpa Church as we explained earlier in this booklet, and her adherents, did not invent anything when they said and chanted in their hymns that the priests of the Catholic Church were *baloshi*, i.e., evil men using witchcraft for evil ends. They were simply expressing loudly what most people thought secretly, and what generations of people had believed ever since August 1895: the Catholic priests had magical powers at their disposal.

The context of this event

What happened on August 11, 1895, at the court of Makasa must be seen in the context of the time: the missionaries were still buying slaves from the caravans of slave raiders going through Mambwe, and this "redeeming of slaves" lasted till 1898. The registers we still possess listing the names of the slaves show that most of them were coming from Bembaland or at least from countries controlled by the Bemba. Let the readers be reminded that *witchcraft was the main reason behind reducing men and women into slavery and/or handing them over to the caravans of Islamic slave merchants*. We shall never proclaim it loud enough: the persons that had been convicted of witchcraft were sold to the Arab slave merchants or were condemned to work as slaves for local families. As a consequence Mambwe Village and later Kayambi Village were villages peopled by former slaves, and therefore *by people who had the reputation of having been involved in witchcraft*. Soon refugees came to join their ranks, and they were people running away from the punishments inflicted *on those accused of witchcraft*. **The Catholic missions of the White Fathers**, at least at the beginning, **had the reputation of being the refuge of *baloshi*, i.e., of people suspected of using witchcraft for evil intentions and regarded as enemies of society**.

Lenshina Mulenga did not invent anything when she proclaimed loud and clear that *all the Catholic Missions* were places of refuge for *baloshi*, and that the Catholic missionaries were protecting the *baloshi*. That is about the worst that could be said about us in the local mentality.

Other significant events at the very beginning of the Catholic Church in Bembaland

The first diaries make captivating reading. The first missionaries saw witchcraft everywhere. They did not make any distinction between the performance of religious rituals, healing sessions, funeral rites and dances, and simple public rejoicing on the occasion of recurring feasts and anniversaries.

Moreover the first missionaries were suspected of giving remedies against witchcraft whenever they gave medals and used holy water, because all was interpreted, after August 1895, as distribution of talismans against magic spells.

Many other events followed in quick succession, which were given a similar interpretation. On February 19, 1896—it was Ash Wednesday—the missionaries blessed the ashes and distributed them in the traditional way to the neophytes and even to the pagans; Chief Makasa was there with his whole retinue. On December 26, 1896, the Fathers held a special ceremony for the blessing of the seeds, in the presence of Chief Makasa and all his people. The celebrant used a small branch with leaves as sprinkler for the blessing with holy water. Several leaves fell off and the people rushed to pick them up, shared them among themselves and cut them into small bits and pieces to mingle with their seeds. On March 21, 1897, swarms of locusts fell upon the whole countryside. Fr Dupont got hold of his Roman Ritual and went through the special prayers foreseen for such occasions. “In less than a quarter of an hour,” Fr Dupont wrote in the diary, “our fields were rid of the pest… Heaven has been decidedly all out to protect us from the plague of the locusts for the last few months, for swarms of those destructive insects have been flying all around the mission station without ever landing in our fields and gardens. The people came to inform us that the seeds they had brought to the mission on December 26 for the blessing have sprouted into good crops that were also spared by the locusts.” Fr Dupont concluded with these words: “The people are completely nonplussed!” They had good reasons to be: this was pure magic, pure witchcraft!

Dupont’s brand of faith and how the people interpreted it

On August 11, 1895, Fr Dupont gave audience to Chief Makasa and his companions who had come to ask for a remedy against witchcraft. In answer to the request, Fr Dupont went through a whole ritual, including the reading of the first chapter of St John’s Gospel in a mysterious language (Latin). What Fr Dupont had in mind was to underline the power of

faith in Christ. Unfortunately the people had not come to the knowledge of Christ yet and they were not in a position to grasp the nature of Christ's power. They saw *power*, yes, *but in the person of Fr Dupont and in his actions, in his gestures, and in his words.* The episode of Simon the Magician in the Acts of the Apostles 8:9–25 can throw light on what we mean. The Samaritans believed that Simon the Magician was somehow a sort of "emanation of the Supreme God" who was bound "to put supernatural powers at his disposal", according to the explanation given in the Jerusalem Bible. As for Simon, he was looking at Philip, whose reputation as a miracle-monger had reached his ears, as a man also endowed with special super-natural power, but of a kind he did not have. That is why he approached Philip with what he thought was an alluring offer of money "to buy" this power. Fr Foulon, who was one of the pioneers, wrote in 1907: "The people believe that all we have to do is to crave or yearn or simply long for something and we have it."

Indeed this was the vision the people had of the early missionaries: *they were men endowed with a superior power*. The conclusion was obvious: they could deal face to face with witchdoctors, witches and magicians and cast spells left, right and centre as they did, and still continue to live in peace, without fear. The people believed that the early missionaries could even turned *baloshi* or witchdoctors into "men of God" like themselves, and that is how they looked at the catechists and other helpers of the mission in their work of evangelisation. Another conclusion was obvious for the people: the means to share in this superior power of the missionaries was to embrace the religion they were preaching, exactly as they were presenting it to them. Hence the people who decided to join the new religion were determined to learn the catechism *by heart*, to recite the prayers they were taught *by heart and by rote*, and to submit *blindly* to the new *taboos*, to the new religious *rites* and *rituals* without asking questions. It had never entered their minds to question anything the traditional *bashimapepo* and *bashinghanga* did, they simply complied blindly with what they said and did, and that was the only way for them of not falling foul with them and the world of the spirits they were in contact with. That was the only way for them to "capture the superior power" of the missionaries. The future was to corroborate the first impressions they had and the first opinion they formed of the missionaries.

The first missionaries were making ample use of the Roman Ritual: they added the religious approach to intensive care for the sick and the dying. The diary waxes lyrical on the liturgical ceremonies and the religious feasts, which the people attended faithfully and in large numbers. In both cases the missionaries appeared as ministers of a new cult. In the eyes of the people, whose only benchmark was their traditional vision of the world, the ministers of the new cult or *bashimapepo* enjoyed a form of superior power that was going hand in glove with the other powers known in Bemba society. When the missionaries had a big tree cut down for their needs in spite of the fact that this tree was—evidently—inhabited by a

spirit (one of the lords-and-masters of the land dwelling in waterfalls, big trees and other natural marvels), they showed that they were more powerful than the local spirits (entry in the diary, dated 28-04-1896). The missionaries could go hunting for game whenever they liked without wearing amulets because they did not fear the wrath of the spirits-lords-and-masters of the land, nor did they need their help for tracking the game (entry in the diary, 25-04-1896*).* When the missionaries managed to find a child that had been reported lost in the bush, they showed that they were *bashinangha* or diviners, since no ordinary human being could trace a child lost in the bush (entry in the diary, 30-04-1896). The missionaries were to be feared, for they could cause death through the administration of what they called "baptism" (entry in the diary, 23-04-1896), or by simple contact (entry in the diary, 01-05-1896). On 30-07-1896, as indicated earlier, one man could yell in public that the missionaries were all *baloshi*, that they were all able to cast evil spells, and that they were dangerous people by all African standards. Fr Dupont had successfully created a myth.

In 1990, almost one hundred years after the event of August 11, 1895, and of all those that followed, Mr Alex Dominique Chimwanse could write a book in Chibemba, the title of which was a question: *"Bukristyani: Bushe ciba ndoshi?"* (Is Christianity a haven of witchcraft?). A very revealing title one hundred years after the beginning of evangelisation! The myth of the missionary-witchdoctor created by the approach of Fr Dupont and the first missionaries was still very much alive.

The last historical event that left a lasting mark on the implantation of Christianity: The Dupont legend

In 1898 Joseph Dupont, who was then Bishop, Vicar Apostolic of the Nyasa Vicariate, became a chief in accordance with Bemba tradition. That is the historical event that has made of him a legendary figure in the history of the land as well as of the local church. He was summoned to the deathbed of the most powerful Senior Bemba Chief of the time, Chief Mwamba. Bishop Dupont was not able to save his life in spite of his reputation and knowledge as a medicine man, because the Chief was already too far gone. Then the dying Mwamba asked him to take care of his family and people and save them from the wholesale slaughter that used to follow the demise of a Mwamba Chief at that time. That is exactly what Bishop Dupont did: as soon as Chief Mwamba had breathed his last, all the people made a beeline for the camp Bishop Dupont had established six kilometres outside the capital and hastily built huts within the perimeter. The Bemba Chiefs who were ready to move in on the capital for an orgy of killing and plundering did not dare to attack Bwana Motomoto. Soon the elders gathered together and confirmed the choice made by the late

Mwamba of Motomoto as their ruler. Bishop Dupont accepted the task, pending the appointment of a new chief according to the traditions of the Bemba.

Bishop Joseph Dupont was, for the Bemba, the incarnation of the authority and power of a chief as they understood it. He was a strong, fine-looking man, capable of taking the initiative. He was a fine shot with a gun, capable of killing a bird in flight. He boasted that he had never sat twice on the same spot. That may be the reason behind the nickname he got from the people: Bwana Motomoto, best translated as "Lord Crackling Fire". Bishop Dupont was certainly a man always on the move. He was universally known as a priest (*shimapepo*), as a medicine man (*nghanga*), and as a chief (*mfumu*). The people did not resent his power over the invisible world of the spirits, because he used it only for their good.

Dupont hailed from Vendee Province in France, famous for its farms with many hedges, trees and small fields and its population of hard-working farmers fanatically attached to their land and to the Catholic faith of their ancestors. Dupont shared the religious convictions of those ordinary folks, very attached to all the rites and rituals of their church. As Fr Guille suggested in a letter quoted in the preceding chapter, Bishop Dupont took the local African people as they were: tribesmen with their own traditions and customs, and above all very fond of the rites and rituals of their traditional religion. He saw at once he could take advantage of this predilection of the people for rites and rituals by making good use of the Roman Ritual, of the para-liturgical ceremonies so popular in the Catholic Church, of the medals and crosses, of all the blessings for every occasion, etc. Bishop Dupont the Vendee man felt, in a sense, at home among the inhabitants of Bembaland.

Last but not least, Bishop Dupont was naturally generous—too generous, some used to grumble, for he could easily at times give away to a chief a bale of cloth, which cost a small fortune. But he had noticed that the people expected a chief to be generous, to give away freely as if it did not cost him anything.

That is how Bishop Dupont became a legend among the Bemba. The Archbishop of Kasama is still nowadays considered as the successor of this Bishop-King, and it is probably his greatest title in the eyes of the local people, even if they are no longer as attached to the past as formerly. As far as the Bemba are concerned, they still speak with feeling of Bwana Shikofu Dupont Motomoto, i.e. the Lord Bishop Dupont the Crackling Fire, and they will still call him their father (*Shifwe*). At first I thought only the elders would still remember Bwana Shikofu Motomoto as one of their respected ancestors, a member of the Nghandu Dynasty. Recently, however, when I was in the Val d'Oise, near Paris, I was told a fact that revealed to me that Motomoto was still a legend even among the young Zambians as well as some outside the country among people in the know.

An attempt at analysing the events

I am fully aware that some people would gladly put aside the Dupont Legend as being one of the picturesque sidelines of history. I do not look at the Dupont Legend and at the events that marked the beginnings of evangelisation in Bembaland with the eyes of the general historian aiming only for general outlines. I see those events *as history lived by the common folks,* revealing to us *what their true mentality is*, and that it is essential for us to know their true mentality *if we are to get the Gospel Message across to them.*

The Dupont Myth has considerably changed in the course of the first century up to our present time. The attitude and mentality of the missionaries has changed along with the years, as they began to look at African traditional religion and beliefs with new eyes, and as the mentality of the Africans was also changing fast. The Local Church as we know it today is different from what the Mission Church was. Christian teaching and morals, even if they remain basically identical with what the first missionaries were holding as the truth, are now seen against the background of African culture. The book mentioned above—*Bukristyani: Bushe ciba ndoshi?*—is very revealing. The author, Mr Alex Dominique Chimwanse, answers his own question by making an orthodox presentation of the Catholic doctrine and practices. The Bemba word *Bukristyani* has a twofold meaning: it can mean *Christendom* or the Christian world, and it can mean *Christianity* or Christian religion and belief. The more usual meaning is the second. According to Chimwanse, witchcraft is still an integral part of the Christian message. The early generations of Africans saw witchcraft as they knew it reflected in the behaviour and general comportment of Bishop Dupont and the first missionaries. Then, later, the people were confronted with the Church as a powerful, visible institution, in which they *felt*, as it were, the occult presence of witchcraft, since the Church was openly wielding power of *spiritual* life and death over their heads. How far COULD the people see in this *Bukristyani* a RELIGION OF LOVE, since its teaching was centred on sin and retribution? Nowadays the people do not see witchcraft as incompatible with their Christian faith, as if witchcraft has now reached a status of credibility.

The time has come for us to revise our knowledge and notion of witchcraft. The first conclusion we must draw from what we said above is that *witchcraft is an INTERGAL part of the people's life,* it is not a marginal phenomenon they can easily ignore. The vision they had of the missionaries, of the society in which they lived, of the philosophy of life and death they professed, were basically identical to the vision they had of their own people and society, and their own philosophy of life and death. In other words WITCHCRAFT WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF BOTH SYSTEMS. They could not see why the missionaries were so

adamant in rejecting witchcraft when witchcraft was for them a part of Christianity as well as of traditional religion.

As regards the nature and mechanism of witchcraft, the historian is not in a position to pass judgement. The facts, however, throw much light on what witchcraft is and how witchcraft works. In my humble opinion, witchcraft was—and still is—for the people, *possession of an inborn power*. In white people, and more particularly in missionaries like Bishop Dupont, this power was far superior to anything an African could possess of the same nature. We shall see further in this study on witchcraft that this power could be exercised for a good or for an evil purpose. The people lived in fear because they were always at the mercy of *baloshi* hiding among them, i.e., of people who were ready to use this inborn power of theirs to harm their neighbours for some obscure reasons, most of the time out of jealousy, revenge and hatred. Hence the use of the word “redoubtable” by this pagan who saw witchcraft in the raw in Bishop Dupont and the missionaries in 1896.

Chapter 3
FROM THE AFTERMATH OF THE DUPONT LEGEND TO THE PRESENT DAY

Bishop Dupont was forced to go back to Europe in 1899 for heath reasons. The management of the Vicariate was entrusted to Fr Guillemé, a very capable and far-sighted man who later became Vicar Apostolic of a vicariate in Tanganyika. Bishop Dupont was absent for four years, for he was back at Chilubula only in 1904. While he was in Europe, he got wind of the criticisms that were levelled at his administration and policy, and he had to take them into consideration when he resumed his seat as Vicar Apostolic of the Nyasa Vicariate.

"All this is something of the past"

We have ample evidence that all Bishop Dupont had achieved between 1895 and 1899 did not meet with the approval of all his missionaries. He was bitterly criticised for his methods and he was accused of having been "odious enough" (quotation) to tell others to follow his ideas and examples. (*N.B., his approach to the problem of witchcraft in particular was bitterly resented by those that saw sin in anything African, because anything African was pagan, and therefore sinful*). That is at least what he wrote in a letter dated October 16, 1904 (Nr 106126 in the Archives at Rome), which he sent to the Superior General of the White Fathers at Maison-Carree. He was told that his novel approach to paganism had come to nothing and had been abandoned.

His critics were blaming him for trying to be popular. That was certainly one way of looking at his open-handedness and generosity, for he was always very happy to give things away, which was the prerogative of a chief. He was certainly a man who lived in permanent contact with the people, more particularly the chiefs. He never hid his admiration for the Bemba. He was criticised for going round the villages to urge the people to come to prayer. The list of grievances ends here with an "etc." We can easily add more by crosschecking other documents. To give only one example. In the course of the pastoral visitation he made of Kayambi Mission in June 1905, he had to put down his foot to force the staff to be more careful with the liturgical rules in the performance of the religious ceremonies. The Fathers' carelessness must have been bad enough for him to feel obliged to write to the Superior General: "You see, I am doing my job as a Bishop!" It is evident that he had been openly criticised for not fulfilling his episcopal duties. The reference he made to the liturgy is a clear indication where his main interest was still focussed: the religious cult. He was still convinced that the missionaries could more easily meet with the people on questions of rites and rituals. We are back to the ample use he made right at the start of the rites, blessings and exorcisms in the Roman Ritual.

That was in fact where the shoe was pinching: the missionaries did not agree with the indiscriminate use of the Roman Ritual to counterbalance, as it were, the rites and rituals of the traditional religion. In 1908 the Diocesan Council meeting at Chilubula codified the conduct to be followed in this respect and stipulated quite clearly that only the solemn blessing of the ashes on Ash Wednesday and the solemn blessing of the palms on Palm Sunday were allowed in the vicariate. The counsellors, however, added a very significant remark: "The Council does not blame the missionaries for using the various blessings in the Roman Ritual, especially the blessing of the seeds and the blessing of houses, etc." The expression "does not blame" is very significant: there must have been some reluctance on the part of the missionaries to share the enthusiasm of Bishop Dupont for the Roman Ritual. Some missionaries must have spoken out quite strongly on the danger of causing misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of the people. The diaries of mission stations from 1899 onwards, together with the minutes of the weekly councils and the private correspondence of the missionaries ought to be carefully examined to find out how keen the missionaries had been at the beginning on using those rites and rituals of the Catholic Church.

We have an irrefutable proof that the local people had every right to believe that the missionaries were *bashinghanga* and were prepared to replace their own at a pinch for the performance of traditional rituals: it is a letter of Fr Foulon's preserved in the *Quarterly Reports, Number 91 of July 1901* (French edition pages 100–101; English Edition in the Lusaka Archives CT 33, page 86). I quote in full here below the passage concerned:

> A few days ago, we had a religious ceremony that made a great impression on the people. They are in the habit of lopping the trees at the place they have selected for their yearly garden of millet, to gather the branches into a heap and to set fire to it when it is all dry. According to tradition, a witch or a witchdoctor is called to set fire to the heap after performing some rites and incantations. Here, however, we have no witch or witchdoctor, our people were faced with an insoluble problem. They came to us to explain their predicament. "Well," we said to them, "the solution is very simple: we shall hold the place of the witchdoctor for that particular circumstance. We shall bless the fire with God's blessing." Our proposal was accepted most enthusiastically. Last Sunday, around 08.00 hrs, all the people gathered together near our kiln, and we blessed the fire according to the formulas of the Roman Ritual. Then the people all came to take some burning pieces of wood and ran to their gardens to set fire to the heaps of dry branches, in the ashes of which they will sow their seeds. That is the way we shall gradually introduce Christian customs into the country.

Such bold initiatives on the part of missionaries engaged in the apostolate "to replace pagan customs by Christian rituals" did not continue for much longer. The initial charisma that

seemed to have animated the pioneers like Fr Foulon came quickly to an end. The Catholic hierarchy was not set against the blessings of the Roman Ritual, but the situation had become dangerously ambiguous. Many must have repeatedly formulated the objection I heard in 1952 when I wanted to bless a house according to the Roman Ritual: "Let us not strengthen the belief of witchcraft in our people. For they simply and deliberately interpret our blessings as another form of magic." The missionaries came to use the Roman Ritual warily and sparingly, with the result that the way of life of the Bemba was simply, if not ignored, at least overlooked and shelved indefinitely. The traditional cult, however, with all its rites and rituals for agriculture, hunting and fishing, continued to flourish—and quite understandably, since it was their cult, and the idea behind it was very similar to the meaning of the Christian cult. The traditional cult went on unperturbed in the shadow of the mission in parallel with the Christian cult, as we explained earlier in this booklet, and nobody was the worse for it.

In 1952, when I arrived in the country as a young missionary, the priests were extremely wary of the use of ritual blessings, the blessing of houses, for example. In fact, the priests did not perform any ceremonials, rites or rituals that affected the daily life of the people, at the time of the rainy season, for example, of the sowing, of the harvesting, of a drought, of too much rain, of an epidemic, etc., as the traditional *bashimapepo* did—and were still doing on the sly. The only exception was the blessing of the seeds… and this was done in the church! Baptisms, marriages, burials were religious ceremonies that affected the life of the people, but they were performed in the church. In other words the Christians had to come to church to perform Christian acts. In their family, social and professional life, they were practically severed from the care and concern of the Church. They had the feeling that the Church was not concerned at all about the details of their daily, human life. As a result, they continued to go to the *bashimapepo* for all religious ceremonials that had a direct bearing on their daily life. They were Christians on Sundays and feast days, and they followed traditional religion and beliefs on weekdays.

The generation of missionaries that reached the mission field after World War Two began to take initiatives to bridge this gap. They did it at the level of their respective missions, but still unofficially, as experiments carried out on a private basis. Fr Tanguy, a veteran who started working in the mission field in 1913, once made this significant remark to a young missionary: "You, the young missionaries, you are lucky, you are much freer than we ever were. Had we taken one-tenth of the initiatives you are now taking, we would have been pilloried!" In the 1960s we started reacting strongly against what we could call the "conservative Mission Church". We spoke much about *adaptation*. We came to realise we had no choice, for we were being seriously challenged by the Lenshina Movement. It was high time the missionaries came to realise that there *was* a local culture, a Bemba culture,

an African culture, which could no longer be ignored, which demanded to be integrated in the Christian culture. That is when the missionaries attempted to bridge the gap between Christianity and African Culture, which they had allowed to widen through sheer negligence on their part. A ritual was published in Bemba. In the Diocese of Mbala a calendar of ceremonials to be performed at given times in the year was made, and the rituals to be performed on such occasions were codified. Unfortunately, those innovations remained a dead letter, except for the blessing of the tools on May 1 (Labour Day), which became very popular. We had at last jumped on the bandwagon of inculturation, but we were in a sense too late. We simply failed to see in time that the traditional beliefs and religious rituals, including belief in the reality of witchcraft, were *an integral part of the mentality* of the local people. The traditional chiefs retained their prerogatives and responsibilities because they were attuned to the mentality of the people. We were denied access to this aspect of their culture because we were not "in" at all.

The traditional chiefs

We must ask the question: did the traditional chiefs resent the popularity of Bishop Dupont Motomoto? We must bear in mind that Bishop Dupont retained throughout his life the prestige of a Bemba Chief. A successor was quickly elected according to customs to take the place of the late Mwamba who had asked Bishop Dupont to maintain public order after his death. Bishop Dupont remained chief of only a very small territory in a radius of ten miles around Chilubula, with permission of the colonial power. The new Mwamba assumed his full responsibilities as traditional Chief of the Ituna and *took his distance from Shikofu Motomoto.* In fact all the Bemba Chiefs made it a point thenceforward to live at a good distance from the mission stations to show that they had nothing to do with the missionaries. We saw that Chief Makasa was the first to transport his capital 40 kilometres from Kayambi just before Dupont moved to the Ituna.

The missionaries represented a new society in competition with the traditional society. At the beginning the people were tempted to come and settle down on the mission compound and to place themselves under the authority of Father Superior in the hope that they would have a better life, and the chiefs had every right to be vexed. Later, when the work of evangelisation was in full swing, the traditional chiefs came to resent bitterly the existence of this new society, which had the mission as the centre of attraction. It was a strongly structured society built around the missionaries. The chiefs resented everything regarding the mission: the authority of the priests, the discipline of the Christians within the Church, the new beliefs their subjects were adopting when they joined the Catholic Church, the distance the Christians were taking from the traditional cult of the ancestors. They resented

the fact that the missionaries were continually visiting the villages two by two with a whole retinue of attendants and servants to transport their impedimenta, like real chiefs. I still remember the royal reception we got at the entrance of a village when we came for a pastoral visit. The Lenshina Movement put an end to this "Triumphant Church".

On behalf of a theology and ethics they claimed to be valid for all peoples of all times and nations, the men holding positions of responsibility in this Church were interfering in the internal affairs of traditional tribal society: they were imposing their own views on family, marriage, divorce, cult of the spirits of the ancestors, etc. They did not interfere in the political organisation of the tribe, but they sapped the political power of the chiefs by taking over their religious role. There could be only misunderstanding, opposition and hostility between the Catholic Church and the Bemba Chiefs of the Nghandu Dynasty. We had to wait one hundred years to see the first Bemba Senior Chief asking for baptism and being accepted in the Catholic Church: Chief Mwamba in 1990 on the occasion of the centenary.

Conflict of authority between the missionaries and the traditional chiefs was inevitable. Although the chiefs' traditional power was considerably curtailed by the Colonial Government and later by the Zambian Government, they have always retained their position of "guardians of all the past religious traditions of the tribe". At Mulilansolo the Fathers went far in their attempt at using the Roman Ritual for introducing a Christian religious note into the events marking the life of the people, but by so doing they were trespassing on the religious prerogatives of the chiefs. They had, for example, got into the habit of blessing the first fruits of the harvest (a biblical custom). Once the chief sent a note to them, saying: "It is my prerogative as a chief to bless the first fruits of the harvest, not yours!" From the historical point of view, he was right! Nowadays the chiefs are permanently on a headlong collision with the civil as well as the religious authorities in the country, especially as regards *bumucapi* or witch-hunting. Usually the people ask the chief to call in the witch-hunter for "cleaning" the village. He is not in a position to refuse, but he then gets into trouble with the government because witch-hunting is illegal, and he is excluded from the sacraments if he happens to be a Catholic.

There was another cause of conflict and resentment on the part of the chiefs: the fact that the people living on a mission compound were still claiming that they did not belong to the chiefs and that they were exempted from compulsory labour levied by the chiefs. In 1956, for example, the government approved the plans for the enlargement of the school in Chief Makasa's capital. The people had to contribute labour to the project. Chief Makasa summoned the people living in Kayambi Mission to come and make their contribution. They refused on the ground that they belonged to the Fathers. They had never done anything for the Fathers for generations, but they were still claiming exemption from "mulaasa" (chief's

compulsory service) on the ground that they were “at the service of the Fathers”. Inheritance from the past dies hard. No wonder the chiefs resented their privileged position and blamed the mission for their insubordination.

Now we come to the vital question: in all that regards witchcraft, what is the authority that must be obeyed? That is the big problem nowadays.

A.M.D.G.

The Catholic trademark

It would be unfair to blame Bishop Dupont and the pioneer missionaries and the missionaries of the first generation for what we see nowadays as a regrettable misunderstanding of the true situation. They belonged to their times. Moreover the local people, who had at first flocked to the mission station for protection, were, after a while, once there was security in the country, leaving to settle down in a place of their own choice. The missionaries could no longer consider them as their dependants whose life they could control at will with all kinds of regulations. They were falling back into their traditional way of life and under the authority of the traditional chief in whose fiefdoms they had freely settled down, usually with his permission. They were back in the traditional fold and the traditional routine based on submission to, and collaboration with, the local chiefs, the village headmen, their fellowmen and women who did not necessarily share their Christian beliefs and appurtenances within the Catholic Church. They were once more rubbing shoulders with the *bashimapepo* and the *bashinghanga.* They were once more brought face to face with traditional religion, traditional religious life and customs. On the other hand they were still sincere Christians, they still remained faithful to the missionaries, whose regular visitation to their villages they expected. For *intensive and regular visitation of all the villages was the trademark of the apostolate of the White Fathers* right from the beginning of evangelisation, even after Bishop Larue had introduced the system of outstations in 1912.

The main task of the missionaries was to teach catechism and to organise the life of their adherents on a Christian pattern. Right from the start the missionaries made use of laymen, called *catechists*, to spread the Good News. Those lay helpers were taught the questions and answers of the catechism and were sent two by two around the villages for five or six weeks at one go to teach the people what they knew. As for the missionaries, they were also visiting the same villages to explain what the catechists had taught the people by rote and to instruct them for baptism. Bishop Dupont had composed a catechism book as early

as 1899 and he insisted on the necessity for the missionaries and their helpers to teach—and for the catechumens to learn—the questions and the answers word for word. This catechism was severely criticised as sheer "gobbledegook" and was replaced by another one in 1910. Bishop Dupont was still in charge and he was still hammering on "learning by rote". Even after the catechists had been given a deeper formation in the Catechists Training College, the stress was still on the obligation for the candidates to baptism to know their catechism word-for-word. The criteria for accepting a catechumen to baptism was word-for-word knowledge of the catechism, assiduous attendance at the periods of religious instructions and prayer meetings, and a decent moral life.

Evangelisation for the White Fathers of the first generation was, first and foremost, "to teach Christ and nothing else". In 1924 Bishop Larue sent White Fathers to preach the Gospel in the east of the country, in a district that had been first evangelised by the Protestants. The only directive he gave them was: "Be apostles. Do not speak of school, but only of prayer!" The first task of the missionaries was to create communities of people who prayed together. Twice a day Christians and all sympathizers got together to pray, in the morning and in the evening. They also gathered together twice on Sundays for the same purpose. The second task of the missionaries was to build Christian families. That is why, at the beginning, baptism was administered only within the family frame, as it were, i.e., adults were baptised only if several members of the same family were baptised together. "Praying together" remained for a long time the trademark of the Catholic missions.

The apostolate of the Protestants went through school education. The knowledge the pupils got in the classroom was to give them access to the Bible as well as to European civilisation and to trade activities. Hence the insistence on teaching English and in English. The Catholic missionaries were keen on teaching the people the Three R's, but only for access to religious matters. In the 1920s, the Catholic missionaries came to realise that school education as the Protestants understood it had become a must, and they made school education an important part of their ministry. But even then the Catholic missionaries did not have the same approach to school education. Some of them believed that the aim of the schools was spiritual: to save souls and to ensure that those that were baptised would persevere in their faith. They did not necessarily see the importance of English and the profane subjects, or rather they did not consider social promotion of their adherents as an integral part of the Good News. They were intent upon recruiting and forming apostles for the future. Other missionaries believed that school education aimed at developing the whole human being, as the principal of the Teacher Training School explained in a circular letter to the missionaries working on mission stations.

Belonging to the Catholic Church as a visible institution

In 1949 the Superior General of the White Fathers, Bishop Durrieu, came for an official visitation of our mission stations in Northern Rhodesia. While he was here, he promoted a systematically organised system of apostolate. He made it very clear that the visit of all the villages one after the other was something of the past, justified at the beginning of evangelisation, but a sheer waste of time and personnel in the second half of the twentieth century. He advocated the creation of more outstations at the geographical centre of a certain number of villages, with a church in each and a house for the visiting priest—a system that had been in existence for years in the Bangweolo Vicariate—and especially with a highly trained catechist in residence and a group of Catholic Action. He strongly recommended the systematic programming of all the apostolic journeys for the regular and systematic visitation of all the outstations. Every time a priest came for the visitation of an outstation, he was to look into the way the pastoral activities were conducted: the work of the residing catechist, the activities of each group of Catholic Action, the group of catechumens, the school, the prayer services, etc. Bishop Durrieu certainly did a lot in the course of his short sojourn in this part of the world for the creation of a strongly structured church.

It was just after Bishop Durrieu's visit that the Lenshina Movement began in earnest. His insistence on a strongly structured church at the local level saved the day. Many Catholics never went to Lenshina simply because, as they put it, they belonged to the Church of the Fathers. That is the point to be underlined: *they belonged to the visible Catholic Church, and they were proud of it.* The young people showed their appurtenance by wearing rosaries around their necks. The Catholics who remained faithful to their church got into the habit of *gathering together in the outstations.* There was no need for them to go to Kayambi or to Chilonga, all they had to do was to meet in the outstations in their own church, *which became the visible sign of their appurtenance to the Mother Church.* Paradoxically, the Lenshina Movement and the Emilyo Movement strengthened the Catholics in their determination to belong to their church.

The parishioners of Ilondola Parish provide us with a typical example of this determination of the faithful Catholics to preserve their appurtenance to the visible Catholic Church, even at the cost of creating a situation of conflict among the believers. For twenty years they refused to answer the call of Lenshina and her henchmen urging them to come and rid themselves of their magic paraphernalia, although she was staying at her village Kasomo, only 40 kilometres from Ilondola. For years they put up with the vilest accusation imaginable in the local mentality: to be the worst *baloshi* or evil witchdoctors in existence, and

therefore the worst enemies of human society. In 1972, however, twenty years after the first manifestations of Lenshina and her fight against witchcraft, the Christians of Ilondola finally dared to challenge the authority of the missionaries and summoned a witch-hunter ("Nshimi-Musenteka") to the mission "to cleanse" the village from all *baloshi*. This move was the more striking since those that took the decision to ignore the Fathers and send for the *mucapi* were the members of the parish council. Was this an indication that we had reached a situation of conflict of authority within the Catholic Church?

The Church and the authority

Let us face the reality as it is at present: *the Catholic Church is a strongly structured organisation, which is becoming more and more complex with the years.* We have now for some years brought our pastoral efforts to bear on handing over to the lay people more and more responsibility in the running of the Catholic Church in this country. We have set up Church councils in all the outstations, parish councils in all the parishes, and diocesan councils in all the dioceses. All these councils are staffed with laymen and laywomen who have been elected by the ordinary Christians. We have national councils for this, that and the rest, all staffed with delegates that come from the dioceses. In many parishes, at least in the diocese of Mbala, there is also a parish coordinator. In other dioceses, there is a chief catechist with responsibilities at the diocesan level.

This administrative complex of lay people has taken over much of the authority in the Catholic Church from the purely clerical administration of the past. The clergy, either belonging to the local church or to the missionary orders and societies, now know by experience that those lay people take their position of authority very seriously at the local level. Men are still the majority in all these councils, but the women are not absent. When all the councils were finally established in all the outstations of Ilondola Parish in the 1970s, the people decided that the time had come to forget about the division between Catholics and Protestants, and they started to have more and more interconfessional meetings and religious services. That was quite understandable, for the Christian population of Ilondola Parish is half Protestant and half Catholic. This initiative did not meet with the approval of the hierarchy, but there was nothing that the hierarchy could do about it: the lay people had been urged for years to take their responsibilities—they were taking their responsibilities, and that was that! The experience went on—and it is still going on. Twice the Parish Council of Ilondola Parish summoned the priests and the Sister on the staff to upbraid them for changing the pastoral policy of their predecessors without consulting the counsellors first! Other parishes report—when they do not complain—that those councils (whether local

church councils or the parish council) have, in some circumstances, assumed the right of sitting as tribunals … to judge the parish staff!

We are being challenged

We are being challenged by the organisation we have established to take responsibilities in the running of the church. We must not be surprised. We must expect it as the inevitable consequence of what we have set in motion. In the past the laity was at the beck and call of the clergy: the catechists could speak volumes on this point. We have asked laymen and laywomen to take their full share of *work* in the pastoral field and of *responsibility* in the decisions to be taken, not to be simply on the sidelines *praying* for their pastors. The laity is now told that they must *pray and act*, that prayer is a source of vitality and energy to be spent on action. At this point I am bound in conscience to ask a very awkward question: *are our lay people engaged in pastoral work and in the animation of the Church not on the way to being only conscientious administrators*, whose main task is to make sure that the "organisation" is functioning smoothly like in the past? Are they not tempted to lay down the law and to continue the Church as a mere institution? Is Christianity a mere institution?

I am personally inclined to see in this anomaly a temporary hitch, the kind of setback that is unavoidable in the growth of an institution. We must take it as such and concentrate our attention on understanding it. We must never lose sight of the fact that those laymen and laywomen playing a vital part in the running of the Church as an institution are walking a tightrope all the time, caught as they are between church life and village life. They belong to both the church and the village. It is both a privilege and an uncomfortable position. It is a privilege a priest does not have, certainly not an alien priest, and not even an African priest. We priests and religious are sheltered from the hustle and bustle of village life, there are both advantages and disadvantages in this situation. In matters of witchcraft, this position of the lay people with responsibilities in the church is very uncomfortable, but at the same time of primordial importance. In 1993 the local population of Ilondola asked for a *mucapi* to come and cleanse the village of all the *baloshi* hiding in their midst (as they explained). The priests on the staff abstained from interfering in the matter. We wanted the church council to decide what to do. The majority of the church counsellors were for the coming of the witch-hunter (they shared the feelings of their own people against *buloshi*), but the council nevertheless voted against it (they could not forget they belonged to the Church). The *mucapi* came nevertheless, for the Protestants and the pagans were not bound by a decision taken by the Catholic Church Council. When the witch-hunter was in action, all the people flocked to the "cleansing sessions", including the Catholics. The church counsellors

were duty bound to abstain from attending the “cleansing sessions”, but not duty bound to prevent their wives from going there and representing them.

Chapter Four
THE CHRIST OF THE BEMBA

If the analysis we have just given of the historical events is correct, we are now bound to ask how the man-in-the-bush perceived Christ to be, right at the beginning of evangelisation and for many years to follow. We may well ask the same question about the man-in-the-street and the man-in-the-Mercedes in our present-day world.

We must be honest and draw the obvious conclusion from what our analysis has brought to light and will further reveal as we proceed: *the ordinary folks have so far expressed their vision of Christianity in terms of magic*. Christianity here is used in the Bemba sense of *Bukristyani,* and for the Bemba the term *Bukrsityani* is a hotchpotch of notions and ideas, such as bishops, priests, the Church, the doctrine, the morals, the sacraments and the sacramentals, the laws and regulations, the interdicts, you name it, it is all *Bukrystiani*. *And Bukristyani for the Bemba is simply another form of witchcraft, or to use the term they prefer—**Bukrystiani is another form of magic**.*

The first revelation of Christ

The first revelation of Christ took place in the course of events that marked the very beginning of missionary evangelisation, in the first days and the first months the local populations came into contact with the first missionaries. In their first instruction in Swahili, the Fathers were using the Arabic word *ISA* to designate Christ. It is very curious to note that this word *ISA* never appears anywhere in the pages of the diary that cover the first months of evangelisation. The chroniclers used instead the Swahili word *Mulungu*, meaning God. In the conversations they had with the missionaries on religious questions, Chief Makasa and his people always used the Bemba word *LESA* to designate God. Only in one passage are *Lesa* and *Mulungu* associated. Gradually *Mulungu* became the God of the missionaries and *Lesa* the traditional God of the Bemba. We had to wait till the 1960s to see the word *Lesa* used by the Catholics in their official writings and preaching to designate God.

In the episode of August 11, 1895, when Fr Dupont challenged the witchdoctors to gouge out one of his eyes, Chief Makasa and his people had in mind the God of the foreigners, Mulungu. When Fr Dupont came out of the challenge with his sight intact, Chief Makasa said: “The God those White people have sent us likes us very much!” The Chief’s attention was centred on this white man who possessed such a power that he could challenge the witchdoctors and the spirits with impunity. The only explanation they could find for this extraordinary event was the one that came to them naturally: that man Dupont possessed the power of a witchdoctor. Let us remember that the word “sorcerer” used in the diary did not make any distinction between the *nghanga* (whose magic was used only for a

beneficent purpose: since he was a diviner, he provided remedies and he acted as witch-hunter) and the *muloshi* who used his magical power only for malevolent purposes (the plural is *baloshi*). Both the *nghanga* and the *muloshi* hold their power from the ancestral spirits, the *mipashi* (the spirits of the Chiefs of the Nghandu Dynasty and the spirits of the ancestors in general) and the *ngulu* (the spirits lords and masters of the land venerated before the arrival of the Nghandu Dynasty). The conclusion drawn by the natives of the land was obvious to them: ***Motomoto-Dupont was drawing his magical power from a*** **mupashi** ***he called*** **Mulungu Isa**. Their vision was correct only in so far as this power was not "magical", i.e., automatic.

The conclusion is obvious. In 1895, at the occasion of the first encounter between two cultures, the Mambwe-Bemba culture on one side, and the European culture on the other, CHRIST APPEARED to the Bemba as a POWERFUL MUPASHI or spirit of an ancestor and as a POWERFUL MAGICIAN in the person of Motomoto-Dupont. That was how Christ appeared to the Bemba at their first serious encounter with the missionaries.

The second revelation of Christ

On August 11, 1895, we saw how Fr Dupont threw down a challenge at the witchdoctors around Chief Makasa and how he came out victorious from the confrontation in the opinion of the onlookers: the people simply concluded that Bwana Motomoto Dupont was a more powerful magician than their own. The people were further strengthened in their belief that Dupont and the missionaries were witchdoctors by the fact that they were welcoming, and giving shelter and protection to, *baloshi*, i.e., men and women who had been convicted of dabbling in witchcraft for evil purposes. This point must be clearly explained. The missionaries were taking care of redeemed slaves, most of whom were Bemba who had been sold into slavery by their own people *because the bashinghanga had convicted them of being "baloshi"*. The missionaries were, therefore, protecting *baloshi*, and therefore they must be witchdoctors themselves. Moreover quite a number of men and women residing on the mission compound and in its immediate vicinity had run away from their homes after being convicted of witchcraft and had taken refuge at the mission to escape from the ordeal by poison. In the eyes of the people, they **were** guilty of witchcraft, and by welcoming them the missionaries were laying themselves wide open to the accusation of protecting the *baloshi* and of using witchcraft for their own purposes.

Later, in October 1898, Bishop Dupont saved the family and dependants of the late Chief Mwamba from wholesale massacre. By so doing, he was again being suspected of encouraging witchcraft, since Chief Mwamba had died because—according to local belief—

his entourage had killed him by means of witchcraft and they ought to have been put to death for this crime. By saving them from this punishment, Bwana Shikofu Motomoto was condoning *buloshi* or witchcraft used for evil purposes. He could, therefore, be a dangerous *muloshi* himself!

Hence the reputation of the Catholic missions: they were—and still are—refuges of *baloshi*. The local populations, whether they are Christians or not, totally disagree with our doctrine on forgiveness when it comes to the *baloshi*. Those people are eminently undesirable on the ground that they cause deaths and disasters. They must be eliminated at all costs.

If Motomoto was welcoming those undesirable enemies of society, those public dangers, without fear, and if he could really transform them into good people, then he must be a powerful *nghanga* himself, different from the traditional *bashinghanga* operating in the villages and definitely more powerful than they were. In the popular mentality, the village *nghanga* was a good man, a benefactor of human society, because one of his main tasks was to ferret out the *baloshi* hiding in the population and to expose them to public condemnation. As for Motomoto, he was also considered a "good witchdoctor", and he was so powerful that he could neutralise the *baloshi* from a distance.

Right from the start, Dupont and the missionaries enjoyed the reputation of being ***healers***. Every day they spent hours caring for the sick by the dozens and visiting the dying who had been thrown out of the villages to die all by themselves in the bush. They were using remedies, but they also made great use of a new remedy, which the people had never heard of, and which they suspected to be magical: ***baptism***. On August 19, 1895, an old woman thanked Father Superior for giving her this remedy. The diary mentions the surprise of the Chief and the common folk for this concern of the missionaries for the sick and the dying, and they were full of praises for this incomprehensible attitude of those foreigners for people who had become burdens to their own. "The Fathers are really good men," they would say, "their God must be very good indeed!"

What about the position of the *nghanga* in native society? He is *respected*, of course, since he is there for the good of the people, for divining, for healing, for witch-hunting. But he is also *feared* for his awesome powers. Nobody can swear that a *shinghanga* will never use his powers for *buloshi*, i.e., that he will never turn into an evil magician. The missionaries were also respected and feared right from the start, for the people believed that they were vested with magic powers they were free to use for both good and bad purposes. In 1970, we held a seminar on the local customs in my parish, and one of the questions the participants were asked to answer truthfully was: "Why did you become a Christian?" The whole assembly unanimously answered "***fear***". True, at that time, we were still preaching a

lot about hell's fire as a punishment for sin, and we must admit we were sending people to hell for a yes or for a no. In fact we had added the fear of hell to the fears that the people naturally attributed to our magic powers.

The conclusion is obvious. *Seen through the missionaries, CHRIST APPEARS TO BE A BENEFACTOR OF MANKIND, since he is promising a better life for his followers, but also as an ALL-POWERFUL and REDOUBTABLE MAGICIAN.*

Conversion to Christ

The purpose of evangelisation as seen by the White Fathers right from the start was conversion to Christ. The Jesuits who moved into the southern part of the country some years later seemed to have been more concerned about showing the Tonga a better way to look after their many cattle and to cultivate the land. This may explain why the White Fathers made far more converts than the Jesuits. The beginnings, however, were slow. Even the freed slaves the missionaries were looking after did not seem to be attracted by the religion of their benefactors. They may have joined the missionaries for prayer willingly enough, they may have attended catechism classes and learnt the Christian doctrine and morals, but they were in no hurry to ask for baptism, and the missionaries were in no hurry to baptise them either. Then the local populations began to move towards the residence of the missionaries, mainly for reasons of security, and settled down on their compound or in the immediate vicinity of their residence. Once the people had begun in earnest to seek contact with the missionaries, the movement spread further and further afield and never stopped. New mission stations were opened over a wide area: Kayambi, Chilubula, Chilonga, Chilubi, Lubwe, Muwa, Buwa, and Likuni in the space of ten years. In every station, the missionaries were soon baptising hundreds of people every year, in spite of the fact that admission to baptism required a minimum of four years of catechumenate.

We must not be afraid of asking the question: what was the ***real motivation*** behind this mass movement towards Christianity? For a long time we suspected that the basic reason behind those conversions was access to the civilisation, to the power, to the knowledge and to the good life of the White Man. With hindsight, we are now convinced that the main motivation for the Africans to embrace Christianity was ***religious***, because the *secret of the success and superiority of the White Man, missionary or layman, Catholic or Protestant, was*, in their eyes, *his religion*. For the Africans the power of the White Man was of *spiritual* origin. They came to this conclusion through their own beliefs and customs. *The traditional African chief was believed to hold his power from the ancestors, and he could wield his power only by remaining in close communion with the spirits of the ancestors through the*

religious cult of the ancestors. It is worth noting that the Bemba language has no word for "religion"**;** the word that is used to convey the notion of religion is *lipepo*, which in fact means "cult", public prayer in honour of the spirits. We naturally suspect that the Africans were soon convinced that the God of the Europeans was stronger than the God of the Africans, and that it was in their interest to adopt their religious views in order to share in their power and well-being. The more so since the missionaries were also powerful *bashinghanga*.

The Africans who decided to choose the spiritual way of the missionaries—or let us say those who were prepared to swap their traditional culture for the ways and beliefs of the newcomers—were in for a shock. They had to accept a new system of values, of rights and obligations, of taboos and interdicts, without discussion. They had to accept a new cult with its own rites and rituals. More upsetting still: *they had to turn their backs to the traditional cult of the ancestors on the ground that it was sheer idolatry, superstition, totally useless and even diabolical.* It was the more shocking since they did not see much difference between the cult of the ancestors and the cult of the saints. I can't help quoting the words of St Remigius to Clovis, the king of the Franks, on the day the latter was baptised with his warriors: "Worship what you have so far destroyed, and destroy what you have so far worshipped!" The Africans were not prepared to "destroy" anything of their past because, in their view, there was no reason to. This is a point we, missionaries, must make a serious effort to understand and to accept.

What about the sincerity of those first Christians? How far had they really turned their backs to the past to embrace the new Christian cult? We have no right to doubt their sincerity. In the fifties, I met some of those early Christians, and they invariably said to me: "Father, we had really left the past behind our backs!" They did not understand all the fuss the missionaries were making about their traditional religion, but they had **a blind faith in the prestige and the authority of the first missionaries**. This authority, which was the cornerstone of the Christian faith in the first fifty years, was personified in the *Bwana Shikofu* (the Bishop), the *Bwana Mukubwa* (Father Superior / Parish priest) and the *BaShifwe-Bapatili* (the Fathers on the staff). The new society was taking the general pyramidal shape of the traditional society: the chief at the top of the pyramid and the bishop at the head of the local Catholic Church, the minor chiefs in the traditional society and the *ba-bwana mukubwa* in the local Catholic Church, the village headmen in traditional society and the Fathers in charge of the mission stations in the local Catholic Church. It all tallied very well and *the people felt quite **at home** with the hierarchical order of their new religious society*. There was even a lot of talk on the part of the Fathers about devotion to the Saints in heaven, and that did not sound so much different from the cult of the ancestors in the traditional religion.

The conclusion is obvious. *The Christ of the first Christians, Bemba and others, was a* ***Christ with laws and interdicts, who upheld acceptable ancestral customs, and who had to be obeyed under pain of sanctions***. *This Christ was seen in the mythical persons of the* **shikofu** *(bishop), of the* **mukubwa** *(father superior), and the* **bashifwe** *(the priests). The missionaries enjoyed a sort of mythical authority and prestige for the best part of 100 years*.

Through our experience as missionaries in the pastoral field among the Bemba, we know the importance of authority for our Christians: they are not people to take initiatives on their own, they do what they are told, and that is an attitude, at times, that gets on our nerves. Are we better off now that we have church councils, area councils, parish councils, diocesan councils, with laymen and laywomen in the saddle? I doubt it. *Authority is still the main driving force in today's Church*. As the chairman of a church council in a centre once pointed out to me, "*We are the authority here!*"

Another conclusion is obvious. *SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY has become the essence of daily Christian life*. *There is a sort of MAGICAL SECURITY in this submission, for security is what the people want above all*.

Today's Christianity

The success of the missionaries in the first decade of evangelisation in Bembaland was based on a myth: that the missionaries were powerful magicians intent upon giving the people a better life, if only because they were more powerful than the local witchdoctors and because they would eventually eliminate the threat of *buloshi* or evil witchcraft from their lives. There does not seem to be much doubt that the mass of the people who adhered to Christianity shared this vision. Disillusion came rather quickly, as we pointed out in the first part of this booklet. In the thirties, local "African Churches" sprang up everywhere, exposing by their mere existence the ambiguity of the situation. In the fifties, the Lumpa Church denounced the failure of the Christian Churches in eliminating witchcraft: "We were promised a better life," the Lenshina supporters argued, "and we are suffering and dying just as much as before. Catholics and Protestants failed to put an end to witchcraft in the villages. It is even worse than before. Christ is now coming on a "black cloud". His baptism was supposed to ward off the malevolence of evil magicians and heal witchdoctors and witches who have abandoned their evil trade." In the same fifties, another movement challenged the supremacy of the Christian churches, the movement started by Emilyo Mulolani who accused the Whites of having hidden from the Blacks the secret of their religion.

It took the way chosen by Lenshina and Emilyo to tell us that *the Christianity we were imposing on the people did not come up to their expectation*. Those movements showed up the Christians—and more particularly the Christians living in the immediate vicinity of the mission stations—by making them feel completely inadequate in solving the problems their people were facing, in spite of the doctrine they professed, the morals they followed, and the cultural background they had borrowed from the West. In fact they were made to feel particularly guilty by refusing to take part in the sessions of "village cleansing" conducted by experts to expose the *baloshi* or evil magicians. As for the Christians who did not see anything objectionable in going both to church for the Catholic religious services and the reception of the sacraments and to sessions of divination to ferret out the *baloshi* threatening the peace and security of the social community, they were shown up for what they were: opportunists in the eyes of the BaLenshina and BaEmilyo, hypocrites in the eyes of the Catholic Church.

The conclusion is obvious. *The CHRIST proposed to the Africans in the Zambian Church—at least in the Northern Province of Zambia—is a COMPLETE STRANGER coming from Europe and impregnated with European culture. THIS CHRIST DOES NOT COME UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF AFRICANS IMPREGNATED WITH AFRICAN CULTURE, more particularly as regards the attitude to take towards social evils*.

A practising Christian of a neighbouring parish published an article in a Bemba review in March 1993, in which he flatly said: "Let the priests speak of God to us, and of nothing else!" He was echoing the remark a charismatic woman made to the parish priest: "Do your work in the church, and I'll do mine in the villages!" In the opinion of the people, the Church proved unable to change their lives for the better, as they were promised, and therefore the Church is not competent to propose remedies for the social evils. Such attitudes are quite understandable in a situation of conflict. Let us not forget that in Bemba traditional society, the *shimapepo* or minister of cult and the *nghanga* or healer were two different men. The "minister of cult" or *shimapepo* in Bemba traditional society did not fulfil the function of the "minister of health" or *nghanga*. The ministers of the Catholic Church are denied the right of speaking against the measures taken by traditional healers and witch-hunters: they are *bashimapepo*, they are not *bashinghanga*.

Another conclusion is obvious. *The CHRIST introduced into the country by the foreign missionaries has been presented, to the Bemba and related tribes, as THE MINISTER OF A NEW CULT for the last one hundred years. It is, therefore, evident, to all Africans in every walk of life, that THE PRIESTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, who act on behalf and with the power of Christ, are only MINISTERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CULT. The priests of the Catholic*

Church are not competent to deal with what is the prerogative of the professional witch-hunters.

The attitude of the ordinary people on this question of witchcraft also shows us that witchcraft, i.e., *fear of witchcraft*, is at the heart of their way of life and thinking, of their way of looking at people and things, at the very core of their mentality, and in a sense forms the essence of their philosophy. Fear of witchcraft is definitely the main explanation for most of their behaviour in society. The Christians are no exception. All the Zambians, whether Bemba or members of other tribes, whether Christians or not, whether they live in the rural villages or go around in Mercedes-Benzes in the posh residential areas, whether they occupy the seats of power or disappear in the seething human masses of the overpopulated compounds, live under the same shadow: *the fear of witchcraft*. When they are in the grips of misfortune, whether ill luck, illness or death, the traditional way of thinking comes to the surface: "I must have been bewitched.**"** They are all honest to say: **"That is our culture!"** The sturdiest Christians share the same fear and come to the same conclusion in misfortune. Witchcraft is a sort of test-tube for Christianity in the field. Two cultures come face to face in a decisive encounter on the field of misfortune. One culture—the Christian culture—comes from outside and from above the men and women concerned: it is rather intellectual and technical. The other culture—the African culture—comes from below, from everyday life: it is a gut feeling more than intellectual knowledge. African culture has a greater chance to win the contest than Christian culture, for instinct reacts more impulsively than the mind.

A.M.D.G.

Christ today

One fact stands out like a sore thumb: Christ is not much present in homilies and in speeches, inside or outside the church, especially at such occasions as burials. A discourse on a religious subject is centred almost exclusively on *LESA*, referred to as *LESA WA MAKA*. **This is the *LESA* of traditional religion, it is not the God of Israel who has revealed His Trinitarian identity in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man**. It is a hard fact: catechists, prayer leaders, group leaders, priests, Sisters, all Africans that are called to deliver sermons and instructions in the Bemba language—I repeat whether laymen, religious or priests, whether in church or outside church—**do not choose Christ as the central figure of their addresses**. I would not dare to mention this here if others had not made the same observation. (N.B. The translator and editor of Fr Oger's booklet takes the liberty at this point to express his view on traditional church singing. It is beautiful, but it is far more

"traditional" than it is "church". Christ is unfortunately too often gloriously absent from the hymns sung in Catholic churches!). It is not so surprising. It simply shows that what we have hammered on so far is unfortunately true: **the Risen Christ—Son of God made Man, who died on the cross and rose from the dead—is NOT—most emphatically NOT—at the centre of the religious thought of the Bemba who converted to Christianity**.

The conclusion is obvious. *We must ask the following question because it is of vital importance:* **WHAT *IS THE VISION THE BEMBA ACTUALLY HAVE OF THE INCARNATION AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, WHICH ARE THE ESSENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?*** Indeed, they believe in the powerful Christ we are preaching, but I have the impression that they believe only in the **historical Christ**, **the man who lived two thousand years ago, the man who had magical powers**, as young Zambians—and not so young Zambians—say nowadays. Some of the deeds he performed are assimilated to witchcraft. Such was the case when he sent a whole herd of pigs rushing into the lake. There are many other deeds performed by Jesus of Nazareth which the Bemba think are very strange, and which they understand only against the background of witchcraft. Would Jesus not be a sort of "oversized ancestor" of ours? One hundred years ago, the Bemba were using the word *bwanga*, not the word "magic". For the Bemba of the time, a person who was very successful in life in whatever he or she did possessed a *bwanga*, i.e., a power or a magical object or a charm that was the real cause of the success. That is exactly what the Bemba living at the time of Motomoto Dupont thought of him: he had his own *bwanga,* which came from his ancestor Jesus Christ. This power flowed into whatever he was using and into his gestures, which gestures were to be copied so as to share in his *bwanga.*

That is exactly what today's Christians are still doing *unconsciously* (I emphasize the word) when they put their trust in exterior things they regard as **endowed with magical power**: the institution they call *Eklesia,* religious practices that are repeated endlessly or come back at regular intervals, the authority at all levels on which they blindly rely and which dispenses them from taking initiatives, blessed water, etc. This attitude—this *unconscious* attitude, as we have been careful to point out—is very similar to the attitude Jesus found among the Jews who wanted to make him a king and who expected to enter the kingdom of God without any effort on their part. **That is the very essence of magic: to obtain results without effort**, "as if by magic", as the saying goes. Baptism is still claimed as a due after some conditions have been fulfilled, even though in the meantime the claimant is in a situation precluding baptism altogether. Christians excluded from the sacraments, usually because they are in an irregular marriage situation, stop coming to church and praying altogether on the ground they can no longer receive the Lord. They are, in their minds, deprived of "the only means of supernatural survival". I could draw up a whole list of "religious practices" to which the people are attached for the wrong reasons to an outside

observer. They think of themselves as being good Christians, and they are sincere. In fact they are *unconsciously* attached to magical rites and rituals.

In all justice we must say that more and more people become Christians, not simply to follow the fashion, as it were, but out of personal conviction and as a result of a personal conversion to Christ and the Christian ideal. But witchcraft remains, even for them, the main stumbling block. Recently, I was again told, on several separate occasions, that a sorcerer cannot repent and cannot convert, and I think that those my interlocutors had in mind are the *baloshi*, the witchdoctors using witchcraft for malevolent purposes. Witchcraft seems to be an insurmountable obstacle even to Christ's power, at least on the cultural level. In practical terms, it means that those *baloshi* are out of reach of the power of the priests and of the Church, since the *baloshi* are out of reach of Christ's power. When I asked my interlocutors whether those *baloshi* were, in their opinion, cut off from salvation and forbidden access to Heaven, I did not get an answer. It is really puzzling, because the new African churches that proclaim their appurtenance to Christ take Christ's power seriously. This is a challenge to us.

The conclusion is obvious. *Our people have not fully grasped yet WHO CHRIST REALLY IS. We must use a new approach in our presentation of Christ. We must present Christ in the perspective of the struggle against the forces of evil. As I see it, the stress must be on CHRIST WHO SUFFERED AND DIED, and then OVERCAME SUFFERING AND DEATH through HIS RESURRECTION. Christ spent his life on earth fighting the forces of evil, but HE OVERCAME those forces only AFTER His death and resurrection.*

Tomorrow's Christ

There is no doubt that witchcraft will remain a stumbling block for, and a direct challenge to, the Christians of tomorrow as it is to the Christians of today and as it was to the Christians of yesterday. Witchcraft remains a challenge to the faith of most Christians, and the faith of many Christians, in whatever walk of life, all too easily crumbles under the impact of witchcraft. As for us, ministers of the Christian religion, we are at a loss regarding what to do. Let us be honest: witchcraft has so far defeated us. Now witchcraft throws down a new challenge to us in the light of what we have just said. Witchcraft challenges us to present Christ in a new way in our preaching and in our role as spiritual directors and counsellors.

We must find a new approach to evangelisation because we can no longer ignore the challenge of inculturation. On the other hand we must also be fully aware that inculturation

can be a serious obstacle to evangelisation. Far too many people claim respect for their own culture as the main reason to ignore, and even disfigure Christ and His message. *NO CULTURE can EVER take precedence over Christ and His Gospel.* The Africans must be made to realise that their culture, which has its roots in the past, is subject to transformations, adaptations and changes like everything human; that their culture as they see it today is already vastly different from what their forefathers knew. The Africans of today belong to the world of today, and it is high time for them to question the past in the light of the present. Today's Bemba culture is not yesterday's Bemba culture. Today's Bemba mentality is not identical to yesterday's Bemba mentality. Christ is challenging the Bemba of today, not the Bemba of yesterday. The Church is no longer evangelising the Bemba of yesterday, the Church is evangelising the Bemba of today. It is up to us to offer the seed of God's Word in such a way that it can bear fruit in the minds and souls of the Bemba of today.

Part III

MEETING WITH THE BEMBA MENTALITY ON THE GROUND OF WITCHCRAFT

CHAPTER 1
THE BEMBA LANGUAGE IN DEPTH

We are so used to hearing and speaking about the Greek-Latin civilisation that we might be inclined to think that the Greek-Latin people are the only ones that deserve the title of thinkers. True, the Greek-Latin civilisation is very rich and very important in the history of mankind, but it represents only one aspect of human thinking. There are other peoples in the world that have developed their own ways of thinking and their own civilisations, and what they brought to mankind is invaluable (according to Marcel Jousse). All those different civilisations have their own religion, in other words they have their own religious mentality. Most of those civilisations have been confronted with the Gospel message at one time or another and they all had to absorb it in their own way. The same Gospel is absorbed and "digested" differently by different civilisations, while remaining essentially identical to the *original* message of Christ. It is therefore of paramount importance for the "missionaries of the Gospel" wherever they operate to be fully aware of the local mentality if they want the people to grasp and assimilate the Good News.

The first step in this direction is knowledge of the language. One basic remark: knowledge of the grammar and the vocabulary of a language is not sufficient. One must go much deeper into the study of the language from the angle of anthropology and philosophy. One must in fact know this language in depth. Speaking of their own language, the Bemba make a distinction between the "vernacular Chibemba" used for every day communication on every possible topic for every conceivable situation in life, and the "Chibemba of the initiated" used in initiations, rites, divinations, ritual songs and dances. They make a distinction between the "homely Chibemba" and the "witchcraft Chibemba". This distinction was brought home to me in the 1950s, soon after my arrival in the country, at the time of the Lenshina Movement. Witchcraft was the talk of the day everywhere. When I was on tour, I went to sit in the *nsaka* with the men of the village in the evening, as I was used to doing, but the Chibemba I heard was suddenly very different from what had been used to in my hearing up to then. *The people were speaking about witchcraft and were using words I had never heard before, or using known words in a completely different context*. I did not know Chibemba very well at that time. I was still picking my way awkwardly through the "vernacular Bemba" and at the same time I was suddenly confronted with the "Chibemba of the initiated". It is only here at Ilondola in the Language Centre that, years later, I seriously began to burrow my way into this "Chibemba of the initiated". The time has now come for the missionaries—and this includes the veterans of the mission field with years of mission work behind them—to get initiated to this "new language" and eventually make use of it in their apostolate.

The Bemba language

What follows is only an exemplification of what we are trying to do in the field. The topic of this particular section is only a summary of a detailed semantic study of the verb "to be = *ukuba*". This study had been made for the students of the Ilondola Language Centre and for the missionaries who knew Chibemba as a vernacular of everyday use. It was destined to show all those concerned what could be done to know Bemba culture better, from the inside, as it were. There is no doubt that the language spoken by a nation, by a tribe, by any human group of whatever size, reveals the vision those people have of the world, in other words of their philosophy. I shall give here only the **anthropological conclusions** of this study of the verb "*ukuba*" to spare the reader all technical details.

The person who is speaking is the centre of the world. The world as conceived by the Bemba is essentially *relational,* i.e., it is based on *human relationships existing between individual human beings, me, you, him or her, etc*. The person who is speaking, therefore, is necessarily the centre of the world. If I am the one that speaks, I am the centre of the world, for the world exists only in as far as there is a relation between me, you and the next. In Chibemba the speaker mentions himself or herself *first* in a list of persons ("*ine, imwe, na Kampanda*"). The person who is spoken to has a name and an identity, and can be called by name without referring to anything he or she is, without any allusion to his or her activities and achievements**;** the *person* is important in the Bemba mentality, not his or her activities and achievements. *The human person is at the centre of everything,* literally at the centre of world.

One IS what one HAS BECOME. To describe a person the verb "*ukuba* = to be" is used. The first meaning of the Bemba verb "*ukuba*"—or rather of its very root—is both "to become" and "to be". Depending on what is added to the verb "*ukuba*" or depending on the tense that is used, "*ukuba*" can mean "to exist", "to be present", or "to be alive". The verb "*ukuba*", therefore, gives us a whole vision of the world, which is "to become", "to be on the move forward". The world of the Bemba is existentialist, but with a dynamic of its own. This world is not static, it is on the move. Every human being is in a perpetual state of gradual development and change. The most privileged instant in this continuous flux is birth: that is when the human person is given an individual identity (an identity as an individual). This new being is now an individual man or an individual woman, for better or for worse as far as the welfare of the group is concerned. That is when this individual man or woman is marked out as the incarnation of a good spirit or a bad spirit**;** in the latter case, he or she will be a sorcerer. But a person born into the world with his or her individual identity is always presumed to be a normal human being**;** his or her basic identity will be gradually

revealed in the process of development, until he or she IS what he or she HAS finally BECOME.

What one HAS BECOME is IRREVERSIBLE. There can be only forward motion, never backward motion. This is the whole dynamic behind the conjugation tenses of the verb "*ukuba*—to be" and of all the Bemba verbs. The tenses in the verbal conjugation of the Bemba verbs express the movement from the past to the present, and from the past to the future. The present is the important moment in existence. The present exists in relation with the person who is speaking. *I am speaking, therefore I am*. We cannot help thinking of the famous formula that is the corner stone of Cartesianism and much of Western civilisation: **"*Cogito, ergo sum*** = I think, therefore I am." This is the dynamic, the logic of life. In other words the relationships between the individual human beings are not static, they are in perpetual motion towards the future, from the past to the future. Life is a success only in as far as it is movement from the past to the future.

The human being is SITUATED in a given position in time and space. An existence must be geographically localised. If a suffix is added to the root of the verb "*ukuba*" to indicate a precise location in time or space, the verb means "to exist". Depending on the tense in use, the verb may mean "to be present", "to be alive", i.e., "to be in a visible world", to be among the living, literally "to be there".

The human being is LOCALISED in the social fabric. If the geographical position is one single place, the idea that is conveyed is "at the same place", "with others", i.e., togetherness in human society, in the social fabric of the group. As this verbal construction is never used to associate people and things, it indicates essentially *interpersonal human relationships*. The geographical position, which is usually the one of the ancestor, the village, the district, becomes the privileged location of such relationships in an ethnic group. Nobody can live isolated , outside this group. If we substitute the indication of a place with a particle that expresses exclusivity, finality—such as the particle "*fye*"—the sentence is turned into an expression of anguish sounding like "I exist, that is about all = *naaba fye*". In other words, that is no longer a human life since I am isolated, lonely, abandoned, without a home, without human relationships.

The human being is INSERTED in a family group. It is not any group, but a group of people bound together by blood relationships or by alliances. "*Ukuba na* = to be with" usually expresses special relationships between certain persons. Such persons have, each one of them, a place in this family milieu. Hence the importance of the words in Chibemba expressing blood relationships and situating every person at his or her right place in the

family hierarchy. Hence also the extraordinary complexity of the terminology expressing blood and family relationships in Chibemba: it reflects the complexity of life.

The Founding Father of the family and the ancestors: They are all people who have successfully completed their gradual development in the past. The verb "*ukuba*" does not say anything on them, except in the context of "*ukuba na*". It simply means that relationships in that case extend into the invisible world of the spirits. A person may have a spirit worthy of his or her ancestors—this person "is with = *ukuba na*" the spirit of this ancestor. This spirit can be a good spirit, a protecting spirit, or it can be a "fallen spirit", a bad spirit. In the latter case we are at the heart of witchcraft. When people say of a person "*taaba bwino* = he or she is not good", they do not refer to that person's moral conduct, but rather to his or her deep personality inherited from his or her ancestor and manifested in his or her relationships with his or her fellowmen and women. This person may well be suspected even "*ukuba na* = to be with = to have" a magic power and therefore "to be" a sorcerer, and to hide "*bwanga*" anywhere to be eventually used for malevolent purposes. In this case the *normal* relations of this person with the family and society are broken, he or she becomes an enemy of society, a corrupting element in the social fabric.

Let us not go any further in this analysis of the verb "*ukuba*" and the anthropological conclusions that can be drawn. What we have just said is enough to show that we must not think that Africans, whatever ethnic group they belong to, share the same metaphysical concepts and ideas that we do. It is extremely important to remember that it is exactly what the missionaries did right from the start of the work of evangelisation. We must not be surprised, therefore, if the Africans who convert to Christianity do not understand the tenets of the Christian faith in the same way that we do. ***We use the same words, but we do not speak the same language***. We simply forget that the Bemba "*muntu*" (plural "*bantu*") we apply our metaphysical concepts to is NOT the "human being" we are used to in our Western world. That is what I mean when I write that we use the same words but we do not speak the same language.

In conclusion let us say that the study of the Bemba verb "*ukuba* = to be" is only one example of the importance of semantics in expressing the Christian truths in any given language under the sun, including Chibemba, of course. The Bemba vision of the world and human existence obeys a logic of its own, **the logic of life**. Every human life, is, first and foremost, the life of one particular individual. It is not static but in a constant state of flux, and this forward motion is irreversible. Every human life is situated in place and time, in the social fabric of one given group, and it is part of a whole clan lineage. Every human life expresses a certain duration in time and is therefore a manifestation of vitality. Every human life, therefore, must be seen as *the continuity in time and space of the previous*

existence of an ancestor. Those ancestors were the first to arrive at the place where we are. The ancestors were part and parcel of the social fabric that is still binding us together in the group. The ancestors were the source of the family milieu to which we still belong. The ancestors are those that structured the family and social frame of our group. The ancestors are still there in the group, and the living cannot overlook them. If the relationships between the living and their ancestors are based on mutual respect and appreciation (cult of the spirits of the ancestors), if the relationships among the living are impregnated with mutual respect and understanding, the situation is *normal*: the living within this human group are *normal* human beings. If the members of one human group are at loggerheads with one another, they are no longer behaving like *normal human beings*. It means that some in the group have turned into *baloshi* who are all out to harm the others with the magic powers they have discovered in themselves. Those *baloshi* are no longer considered as human persons. *Baloshi* are most emphatically NOT HUMAN PERSONS and they must be pitilessly, remorselessly ELIMINATED. The Christian notions of *charity, love* and *forgiveness* simply do not hold water in the Bemba language and in the Bemba mentality when we apply them to *baloshi*.

We must not be afraid of rethinking the Bemba vocabulary used to express Christian truths, ideas and notions

The first missionaries were, for a very long time, afraid of Bemba words with a pagan connotation, and this fear has not died yet among the younger generations. Here is a good example of it. The Catholic Church has always used—and is still using—the word *mutakatifu,* plural *batakatifu,* to express the notion of "sacredness", of "saint". The Protestants adopted right from the start the word *mushilo* (no plural), a traditional Bemba word susceptible of different interpretations. *Mushilo* can mean a way of acting and behaving that is unusual (the Saints are unusual people!), but which all too often refers to bad behaviour (and this has nothing to do with sacredness and sanctity!). It can also mean a taboo, a prohibition imposed upon a person to abstain from eating or drinking certain things. It can also mean a charm to prevent wild animals from devastating the gardens. Basically the word *mushilo* implies the notion of separation, of prohibition, of the unusual and uncommon.

In the 1970s, Fr Albert Kacuka was a member of the committee for the translation of the ecumenical bible into Chibemba. The choice had to be made between *mutakatifu* and *mushilo*. Fr Kacuka wrote a detailed report on the traditional usage of the word *mushilo*, he listed all sorts of expressions and formulas in which the word was used, and described circumstances in which the word *mushilo* would be traditionally used. The word *mushilo* sounded so "pagan", as Fr Kacuka pointed out, that he foresaw that it would certainly rejected by the committee.

It is exactly the opposite that took place. The Protestant exegete on the committee was delighted to find a Bemba word that rendered so perfectly the idea of sanctity in the Bible. By this he meant that *mushilo*, not only truly expressed the notion of sacredness as opposed to the profane, but also that it conveyed most adequately God's own mystery, i.e., the revelation that God is "all different", standing completely apart, but who can at the same time communicate Himself. In His Son Jesus Christ, He introduces us into the sphere that is by nature reserved to Him. That is what the Bemba word *mushilo* really suggests: sphere, initiation circle. Christians are people who, like Christ, after Him and because of Him, have been "anointed", i.e., consecrated, who have been made to enter the "sphere of God" and who are called to be perfect.

The word *mushilo* was, therefore, adopted to express the notion of "sacredness" and "sanctity". The Catholics, however, continued to use the Swahili word *takatifu* to express the same notion, a foreign word with no root in the Bemba language and mentality, without any connotation in Bemba culture, which has come to mean in the language of the Christians "pure", "without reproach", "perfect". As a consequence, the Liturgical Committee was not able to give an appropriate translation for the word "sanctify", they had to use an approximate word meaning to make good, to make better, to clean, i.e., the verb *kuwamya or kuwamisha.* (*N.B. The translator and editor of Fr Oger's booklet wishes to point out to the reader that the verb "*kushilikila*" has not been given an entry of its own in the White Fathers' Bemba Dictionary; it is simply mentioned under the word "*mushilo*", with the suggestion that it would mean "to make something taboo", which is very near the idea of "making something sacred". "*Ukushilikila*" would seem to be more appropriate than "*kuwamya*" and "*kuwamisha*" to express the idea of "to sanctify", but it has no room in the dictionary.)*

To make greater use of those Bemba words that are in the popular parlance so pregnant with meaning

I have more particularly in mind two Bemba words that are pregnant with meaning, but which we do not often use in the proper context. One is the word *MUSANA*, meaning "the loins", and the other is the word *MUTIMA*, which means "the heart". On the day the parish celebrated my forty years of pastoral work among them, I used, in my homely, a daring Bemba expression to convey to the audience the reason why I stuck it out so long. I said: "I would never have come here and I would never have managed to remain faithful to my call for forty years if faith in Jesus Christ and the love of God had not caught me by the loins." I said this in Chibemba, of course, and I used the word *musana.* The women welcomed my statement with enthusiastic ululating because I had struck the right note and I had used the

right Bemba expression. French has a very similar expression: faith seizes God's messengers around the waist and keeps them on the job, whatever happens.

"The loins and the heart": those are two expressions right out of the Bible. The loins in the Bible are the seat of human feelings. God communicates with Man through the loins and heart and reads his feelings in his loins. Those expressions sound very strange to Westerners, for whom ideas are in the intelligence and the feelings in the heart. But the Bible is very clear: God fathoms Man's loins and heart to know his feelings, his mind, his intentions. Man's strength is in the loins. To overcome the enemy, Man must untie his loins. Last but not least, it is from the loins that Man's descent issues. For the Bemba the "*musana*" or loins and the "*mutima*" or heart are also at the centre of Man's personality. The Bemba have no difficulty in understanding this biblical language: it is theirs! Why is the Church so reluctant of making use of those words when speaking of matters relating to faith?

We can make the same remarks for love, for charity. We use the word *citemwiko* as a kind of skeleton key opening all the doors. The words *citemwiko* and *kutemwa* are so much used in religious parlance that they appear as the Christian answer to all the problems and all the circumstances likely to be encountered in everyday life. *Citemwiko* seems to be—literally—the last word in Christian thought. One day a Bemba Sister advised me to use the word *icisence.* A daring word, of course, since "icisence" is a love philtre, a magic charm often placed in the foundations of a house to attract lovers. I am honest to say that I did not dare at that time to use this word in religious instructions and sermons, because of its "sexy" connotation, since it conveys the idea of man's attraction towards the woman. Here again, let us have a good look at the Bemba culture and think twice before rejecting a so-called daring word. In Bemba culture, the loins ("*musana*") and the sides of the human body ("*lubafu*") are the seat of matrimonial engagement and conjugal faithfulness. Would there not be a way of exploiting this vein? "*Musana*", "*lubafu*", "*icisense*", those words are an opening into the world of marriage love and life, and the symbolism of marriage is very biblical: it is the symbol of the love of God for Israel, of the union of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5, 21–32). Christ himself used the image of the spouses ("*shibwinga*" and "*nabwinga*"*)* several times in his teaching.

To rethink the presentation of the faith

In this booklet my intention is simply to prepare the ground for reflection and discussion. I believe it is high time we rethink the presentation of the Christian faith and teaching. The Creed is a string of abstract ideas, no more. The Africans do not **feel** what they are supposed

to believe in, or what it is all about, in the Creed. It is striking that in Chibemba the verb *kuumfwa* means to know as well as to feel. In other words the Bemba really get to the knowledge of something only if they feel what this something is all about. I remember vividly what a headmaster said to me on the occasion of a Holy Week when we had earnestly tried to involve the people in the ceremonies: "Father, it is really the first time I had a feeling for my religion!" It has been pointed out more than once that the Europeans think and the Africans feel their way through life, and therefore through religion. Let me say it again because it is the key to everything: the Bemba verb *kuumfwa* reveals the true vision the Bemba have of life. Its first meaning is to perceive something through the senses: through smelling, through tasting, through savouring, though listening, through hearing, through feeling (pain, cold, hunger, etc.), but never through sight. It also means to come to the perception of something through intuition and to understand what it is; in other words it means intellectual perception. But in this second meaning of the word, the Bemba do not perceive through the brain ("*amano*"), but through the heart ("*mutima*"). To sum it up, a Bemba man or woman says: "I feel it in my belly ("*ifumo*"), in my bowels ("*mala*"), in my stomach ("*nda*"), in my heart ("*mutima*")." From the same root as the verb *ukuumfwana* comes the substantive *icuumfwano*, which means—and this is also very significant—good understanding, agreement, arrangement.

Let us be bold enough to make use of words that have been "taboo" so far

The Bemba words *ngulu* and *mwela* (plural *myela*) are related to spirit possession, a phenomenon that is rejected outright and condemned without appeal by the Catholic Church. Nowadays this phenomenon of spirit possession is also linked somehow with witchcraft. That is the reason why it is so difficult to make use of those words without a lot of raised eyebrows. It is very doubtful that the Christians would tolerate it. In my humble opinion this negative reaction of the Christians, this instinctive reluctance of theirs to hear this subject being mentioned at all, would simply show that we are broaching one of their fundamental traditional beliefs. They do not like to admit that this belief in spirit possession is still very much alive deep down in their hearts in spite of their appurtenance to Christianity and that it is not without its effects on their emotional and religious lives. The root of the word *mwela* suggests the notion of wind, to be carried away by the wind. In the initial stage of spirit possession, as long as the spirit has not been identified, this enterprising spirit is called simply *mwela.* As for the word *ngulu*, it blends together the two notions of "wind" and of "spirit". Hence the question: why not use those words to designate the Holy Spirit? *Ngulu ya Mushilo? Mwela wa Mushilo?* It would take quite a bit of time to get used to, but eventually the idea of the Spirit of God taking possession of a soul might be more forcefully conveyed.

What about the notion of "spirit" in the Bible? In the Old Testament, the word expressing the idea of "spirit" as we understand it in the present context meant "morning or evening breeze", "wind", "breath of life", "breathe and blow through the nostrils". This wind or breath carried life. This wind carried away the prophets, at times even physically, or sent them on a mission. Prophetic action and action of the spirit were bound together in the same notion. There were also "winds blowing in the right direction" and "winds blowing in the wrong direction", in other words good prophets and false prophets. On Pentecost Day, a strong wind and tongues of fire heralded the presence of some mysterious invisible power coming from God, the Spirit of God, and the Apostles were driven out of the upper room and urged by this mysterious force to proclaim the Good News of Christ. Some of the people who witnessed this event drew the unflattering conclusion that those men were inebriated. As for the authors of the books of the New Testament, they had no difficulty in accepting this "breath from God" as being the Holy Spirit ("*Mweo wa Mushilo, Mwela wa Mushilo*"). Jesus himself had compared the Spirit to the wind in John 3. The Latin word for spirit—"spiritus"—also means breath. This breath carried along the Apostles and urged them forward as it had Christ in the course of his life (Mat 4:1–13). In the New Testament—since the coming of Christ and His return to His Father—like in the time of the Old Covenant—false prophets competed with true prophets to capture the attention and the loyalty of God's people. The Gospel message has been time and gain distorted and the allegiance of the faithful to Christ exploited for wrong purposes. "*Nihil novi sub sole*" as the Latin saying puts it so aptly, "There is nothing new under the sun".

What about this notion of spirit in Chibemba? The idea of a spirit suddenly taking possession of a human person seems to obsess us. Yet it is only a part of the phenomenon. Oracles or prophets, the spokesmen and spokeswomen of the spirits of the ancestors and of the land had an important role to play in traditional society. The spirit that takes possession of a human being, the *ngulu,* changes him or her—and "her" is more frequent than "him"—into an oracle first and foremost. The Bemba seem to make a distinction between persons that are *inhabited* by a spirit, and persons that are *suddenly taken possession of* by a spirit. In Chibemba we say "*ukuba na ngulu* = to be inhabited by a spirit" and "*ukuwilwa ngulu* or *ukuwilwa imfumu ya mipashi* = to be possessed by spirits" (*ukuwilwa Mulenga* = to be possessed by the *ngulu* Mulenga). Both spirits are called *ngulu* in Chibemba. In fact every man or woman able to create a dance, a song or a poem is a *ngulu*, every man considered as a particularly eloquent and inspired preacher is a *ngulu*. Is it too risky to conclude that the *ngulu*, whether it inhabits a person or has suddenly and visibly taken possession of the same person, is the spokesman or spokeswoman of the inhabitant of the invisible world? I don't think so if we take into serious consideration the striking similarity between the prophetic and religious experiences in the Old Testament and the prophetic and religious experiences

of the Bemba traditional religion. That is probably the reason why our Christians feel perfectly at ease in both worlds. The Old Testament sound familiar to them. That is also the reason why our Africans feel so much attracted by all those small sects of Pentecostal inspiration. Our task is not to sit down and criticise all those movements but to understand what is behind this phenomenon and try our level best to turn it to our advantage. Please note that I do not say we ought to recover what belongs to us, because this thirst for the spiritual in the prophetic and religious order is not a monopoly of the Christian Church, it is a human need deeply rooted in human nature. Our task is to graft it on Christ. The attachment of the Bemba for the *ngulu* is a clear sign of what the Bemba mentality is and of the depth and extent of their moral feelings, and it is this mentality and those moral feelings that must be *to turned to Christ without being uprooted from their past.* This can be done by using the vocabulary the Bemba are familiar with. Describing Pentecost Sunday in Jerusalem, for example, why don't we say that the Apostles were suddenly possessed by Christ's *ngulu?* Then we are in a position to say that all those that have ever since continued the work of evangelisation all over the world were—and still are—people inhabited by Christ's *ngulu.* Why not teach the people that, on the day a person is being baptised "in water and the Holy Spirit", this person is, to all intents and purposes, *seized and taken possession of by Christ's* ngulu, and this person is henceforward expected to be *inhabited by Christ's* ngulu *for the rest of his or her life?* If this is the case, then this person *must be initiated* just as a person possessed by a *ngulu* is initiated to lead a new life. The whole initiation to the Christian faith and to baptism (catechumenate, religious instruction, baptismal promises, etc.) would be seen in a new light.

Conclusion

We have analysed in detail only a few of the Bemba terms used to express the religious beliefs of the Bemba, especially in connection with the world of the spirits. It is enough to make the reader understand that those Bemba terms are pregnant with meaning, that they are just as adequate to express Christ's mysteries as the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, and as the Greek and Aramaic languages of the New Testament. Those Bemba religious words coming from the Bemba traditional religion are, in my opinion, much more expressive than the foreign terms in use in Catholic terminology, and even than the Bemba vocabulary in use in daily life. If we were to accept and use them in our preaching and teaching, we would take a giant step forward towards a better knowledge of the Bemba mentality, and we would be in a much better position to undertake what is of vital importance: evangelisation in depth of the Bemba-speaking people.

Chapter 2
A NEW APPROACH TO OLD CUSTOMS

This study from a historical point of view of one particular custom, which the missionaries classified and labelled long ago, once and for all, as being good, bad or indifferent from Christian dogmatic and ethnic angles, can reveal new interesting aspects, the existence of which we did not even suspect. It is the case of spirit possession, of which we have spoken at length in the preceding chapter. Up till very recently, the customs relating to spirit possession were taken into consideration by the missionaries only in as far as they entailed theological and ethnic problems demanding dogmatic and moral pronouncements on the part of the Catholic hierarchy. I became aware of a new aspect in spirit possession in August 1987, and that is what I am going to write about in this Chapter Two.

How I came upon the existence of two cults of the spirits

In August 1987 I was talking with Mr Stephen Chipalo, who was at that time aged 74 and who was the official keeper of the relics of the great Bemba Chief Nkula. In the course of the conversation, he said: "The members of the royal clan of the Bena-Nghandu are not liable to be spirit possessed." He was using the technical term *ukuwilwa ngulu,* a phenomenon of spirit possession that was repeatedly described by observers in the past. The reason he gave for his statement: "I have never seen a great Bemba Chief being suddenly taken possession of by a spirit." I insisted that this was not a sufficient reason to assert that the great Bemba Chiefs of the Nghandu Dynasty were not likely to be taken possession of by a spirit. Then he added the true reason: "The great Bemba Chiefs of the Nghandu Dynasty are inhabited by their own spirits." In fact Stephen Chipalo was using the word *imfumu* (*ya mipashi*) to designate the spirits of their ancestors, who were already in possession of the chiefs—they had made their dwelling in the chiefs—and there was no place in them for *ngulu*. On hearing this, I began to suspect that the phenomenon of the *kuwilwa ngulu*, which is very common among the Bemba, would be only *one particular aspect* of spirit possession, not the only manifestation of it.

Sometime later, this question of the privileged position of the members of the royal clan as regards spirit possession was brought up in a conversation I had with the gardener working for the White Fathers stationed at Lwitikila, 150 km from Ilondola. I asked him point-blank whether the great Bemba Chiefs could be possessed by spirits, and his answer was spontaneous and unequivocal: they are already possessed by the spirits of their ancestors in the royal clan. At Lwitikila at that time I came across a woman belonging to the royal clan and who was known to be a *ngulu*, to be possessed by a spirit. She explained to me that her *ngulu* was a Bemba Chief who had died in 1914 and who revealed his presence in her in a

dream. In other words she was not suddenly taken possession of by a *ngulu,* she was inhabited by a *mupashi*, the spirit of a chief long dead.

The two cults of the spirits of the ancestors

It became obvious to me that we are facing two different phenomena of spirit possession: the spirit possession of the members of the royal clan and the spirit possession of the ordinary folks. In both cases the spirit that comes to visit and inhabit a human person is called *mfumu* or *shamfumu*, meaning "chief". But the procedure whereby a spirit takes possession of a member of the royal clan or of a simple commoner and the ceremonial that is followed (for the initiation) are different. The commoner falls into a trance and the onlookers give the royal salute (*ukutotela ngulu*), i.e., they lie flat on the ground and clap their hands together, as they would do for the coming of a chief. Then they dance (*ukucindila ngulu*) and offer gifts. Once the spirit has been named, once the phenomenon of taking possession is over and the initiation has been completed, the person is looked upon as a *mfumu* (as belonging to the royal clan), and therefore moves up in the social ladder and will henceforward enjoy great consideration and respect among the people. This person now inhabited by a spirit is different from what she was in the past, she is no longer a simple commoner, she is above the ordinary humanity around her.

We are, therefore, facing two groups of spirits, which bear the same name in the phenomenon of spirit possession, i.e., they are all called *imfumu* or *shamfumu*. One group is made up of the spirits of the royal ancestors of the Bena-Nghandu. As for the other group, it remains for us to determine who those spirits of the ancestors are. The cult of the spirits that is typically Bemba is the worship of the royal ancestors or of the family ancestors. It is the *cult of the mipashi*, and the *mipashi* are simply the ancestors of the Bemba. They are the spirits of the founders and the guardians of the clan on which rests their whole political and religious system. But above the cult of the "*mipashi*"—and different from the *cult of the* "*mipashi*"—there is the *cult of the ngulu*, and the *ngulu* are *spirits of the land* existing from time immemorial and dwelling in water falls, in rocks, in grottoes, in big trees, in anything natural that has a striking shape or size, or simply in the bush, for the bush is impressive by its limitless expanse.

We are, therefore, facing two cults: the royal cult (the cult of the mipashi of the royal and family ancestors) **and** the cult of the land (the cult of the ngulu that dwell all over the country in the marvels of nature). **There are, therefore, two religious systems and two rituals**. **It is safe to assert that the cult of the *ngulu* was the traditional religious system of the populations dwelling on the High Plateau of Central East Africa before the arrival of**

the Bemba invaders and conquerors under the leadership of the Nghandu Dynasty. It was only natural that their cult of the royal ancestors or cult of the *mipashi* was gradually imposed upon the native populations, but without doing away with the native cult of the *ngulu*. The spirit possession in the case of the *ngulu* is different, it is only an episode, it does not seem to have the permanency of the possession by a *mupashi*.

How these two cults came to live side by side among the Bemba

There is absolutely no doubt that the Bemba immigrants who were migrating from the West came face to face with native populations, i.e., with tribes that had been established in the land for generations, and which had their own languages, religious cults and customs. They had their own ancestors, who had spent their lives in various parts of the Plateau, and whom they venerated on the ground that, now they were in the world of the spirits, they cared enough for the living to ensure the fertility of the land and success in hunting expeditions in the bush and fishing expeditions on the rivers and lakes. The Bemba invaders found places of worship all over the plateau, with priests and priestesses having the obvious task of performing religious rites and rituals according to the local traditions and beliefs. These places of worship were, as a rule, linked with natural phenomena, as explained above. The Bemba did not interfere with these local religious cults and ceremonials. As for the priests and priestesses, they were maintained in their religious functions. As we explained earlier in this booklet, the Bemba are quite used to seeing strangers, foreigners, aliens fulfilling religious functions in their midst. It is part of their history.

In his book *The Bemba and the Neighbouring Tribes*, Fr Etienne points out that the term *ngulu* was in use in this part of the world long before the arrival of the Bemba. The two anthropologists, I. Cunisson and Audrey Richards, are just as explicit on this point as Fr Etienne, and even more so. Douglas Werner made a careful study of all the sources and documents available in 1972, including the dictionaries. He was able to draw up a map showing the geographical distribution of the terms *Lesa* (god), *mipashi* (Bemba ancestors), and *ngulu* (spirits of the land). He drew the conclusion that in the Bemba milieu, the term *ngulu* was of more recent origin and use than the words *mipashi* and *Lesa.* (See his article "Some developments in Bemba Religious History" in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume IV, 1971–1972, page 3).

What is still to be investigated

A great deal of research work is still to be done on the impact of the worship of the *mipashi* on the cult of the *ngulu*. The cult of the *mipashi* was centred—almost exaggeratedly so—on the cult of the ancestors of the Bena Nghandu Dynasty—the Crocodile Clan. This is a point that escaped the attention of the experts for a long time. We are inclined to think that the *ngulu* are spirits that are superior to the *mipashi*. In fact *ngulu* and *mipashi* do not belong to the same system of world spirits. They are spirits belonging to two different and separate systems, which reflect the belief of two different human groups.

That is at least the conclusion that can be inferred from the earthly dwelling places of those spirits and the geographical locations of the places of worship. The *mipashi* or spirits of the royal ancestors of the Bena-Nghandu Dynasty are believed to live in the hut that is used for storing away the relics of those chiefs of the past (*babenye*), the place of burial called *musumba* (translated by the word "capital" in English). They may also dwell in the hut erected as a memorial or *imfuba.* This memorial can be a permanent building erected on the very place the ancestor died. Those huts set aside as the dwelling places of the spirits of the ancestors are important in the lives of the Bemba, for all rites of public worship and all rituals to placate the spirits recurring regularly every year are performed in their immediate vicinity. This is the case, for example, of the ritual asking for rain and the ritual for the harvest.

The other spirits, the *ngulu*, who are the tutelary spirits of the land, dwell in natural sites or are linked to natural phenomena with a special place of worship. As we said above, the conquering Bemba respected those places of worship, and created others to honour their own *mipashi*. The two systems, therefore, have been functioning side by side since the beginning. That is what we discovered at Ilondola after many years. There are two independent clergies, as it were, for the traditional religion. There is the *shimapepo wa kupelela no kusalikila icalo*, the priest that performs the rites and rituals for the prosperity of the land and of the country; we could call it "the territorial worship or cult for the good of the local district". This is in fact the cult of the *ngulu* or *spirits-lords-and-masters-of-the-land.* There is also the *shimapepo wa kuposela,* the priest that performs all the ceremonies concerning the affairs of daily life, like the harvest; we could call it "the tribal worship, the worship that is concerned with the survival and welfare of the tribe". This is the cult of the *mipashi,* the spirits of the Founding Fathers of the Nghandu Dynasty, the spirits of the royal ancestors, the spirits of the family ancestors in the Bemba tradition.

If we want to know whether the cult of the *ngulu* has been really integrated in the cult of the *mipashi*, we would have to interrogate all the "territorial or local priests" in order to find out what their position is with regards to the tribal chiefs. At this point, we might well ask ourselves whether the cult of the *ngulu* was secondary, peripheral, marginal—therefore officially recognised by the Bemba as a true cult, but of secondary importance—or whether it was simply tolerated by the Bemba Chiefs.

Spirit possession

A report written at the beginning of the twentieth century and published in 1911 (see *The Great Plateau of Northern Rhodesia,* by Cullen Gouldsbury and Hubert Sheane) makes the distinction between temporary spirit possession and permanent spirit possession. The first—temporary—possession was a woman's prerogative, and the women possessed by spirits were referred to as *milungu* (gods) or *mfumu ya mipashi* (chiefs of the royal spirits). The report by Gouldsbury and Sheane states on page 83 that those women were believed to be the interpreters of the will of the spirits of the Bemba Chiefs of the past, long dead but still concerned with the fate of the tribe. This is confirmed by a report of the first missionaries dated 1897 and published in the *Quarterly Reports of the White Fathers* (October 1898, Number 78, page 248). The chronicler speaks at length of those spokeswomen of the spirits and mentions a very interesting detail: there was one such spirit-possessed woman in every village. The authors of *The Great Plateau* (page 87 in the same book) make the distinction between the *milungu* and the *ngulu.* We can safely infer that, in the mind of the ordinary folks, the *ngulu* were ordinary spirits, commoners, as it were, in the world of the spirits. As we said elsewhere, the *ngulu* were the ancestors of the people who lived on the Plateau at the time of the Bemba invasion, and they were considered as the lords-and-masters of the land. They were spirits living in the marvels of nature, like waterfalls. They did not belong to the royal clan of the Bena-Nghandu like the *mipashi*. When the *mipashi* of the Bena-Nghandu came into the limelight, the *ngulu* of the conquered people became strangers in the land of their birth, but they were never totally forgotten.

In a conference I gave at Lusaka on the occasion of a "Seminar on the History of African Religions" in 1972, I quoted the testimony of one of our oldest catechists, Alphonsio Sokoni, who died in 1982 at the age of 95. He repeatedly asserted to me that, in his youth in the last decade of the nineteenth century, there were very few cases of *ngulu possessions.* It is strange—and at the same time it is very revealing—that what Alphonsio Sokoni testifies to, is nowhere mentioned in the reports of the White Fathers at that time, although those reports are crammed with remarks, facts and comments on witchcraft. It is revealing,

because Sokoni was born before the arrival of the Whites in the country and lived in the heart of Bembaland. We must, therefore, believe this ancient witness, the more so since he was a catechist for the greatest part of his life and he knew what he was talking about.

How can we explain that the *ngulu* phenomenon became a rarity in the villages after the occupation of the land by the Bemba? Must we infer that the religious system of the *mipashi*, which was institutionalised by the Bemba Chiefs with the arrival of the *milungu* on the religious scene (women possessed by the royal spirits of the Bena-Nghandu), came up to all the expectations of the people, in health and in sickness? That is very doubtful. There is plenty of room for research in that area. The persons possessed by *ngulu*—those that were popularly called *ngulu*—had been properly initiated and they were going round the villages in groups whenever an epidemic was causing harm to the people, or for invoking the spirit lords and masters of the land and distributing charms for fertility. This cult of the *ngulu* was being carried out side by side with the official cult of the *mipashi*, and it was tolerated on the ground it was "specialised", i.e., it was answering a special need. But this cult of the *ngulu* also demonstrates that belief in the tutelary spirits of the land—the lords and masters of the land dwelling in the marvels of nature—not only had survived the Bemba occupation and conquest, but was still very lively and in full operation.

In 1907, as Old Sokoni explained to me, the cases of spirit possession attributed to *ngulu* began to multiply alarmingly, and this was a sign that all was not for the best in the best of worlds. It was the time when the prestige and authority of the Bemba Chiefs began to erode owing to the action of the agents of the British South Africa Company, intent upon limiting the arbitrary power of the chiefs, especially as regards their right of life and death over their subjects (banishing trials by poison and mutilation as a punishment for so-called crimes of lese-majesty). The missionaries were also indirectly sapping the power of the chiefs by speaking against the cult of the spirits and against all the rituals and rites of traditional religion, branded indiscriminately as "pagan" and therefore "diabolical". The periodical rites and rituals that were landmarks in the lives of the people were no longer carried out openly for fear of incurring the suspicion of the colonial power or the disapproval of the missionaries. Those rituals were still performed, but on the sly and in all haste. The chiefs were losing their traditional control over witchcraft. The people were still labouring under fear of witchcraft—fear of *buloshi* (witchcraft) and of the *baloshi* (witchdoctors and sorcerers intent upon harming their fellowmen and women through witchcraft). The *bashinghanga* or sorcerer-diviners were still busy consulting the spirits to ferret out the *baloshi* hiding among the innocent populations. Punishment of the *baloshi*, however, was no longer controlled by the chiefs. Those *baloshi* could no longer be sold into slavery and got rid of for good. They could no longer be submitted to trial by poison or by boiling water,

whereby they had a chance of proving their innocence. They were now branded as enemies of society for the rest of their lives and outlawed, when they were not simply murdered.

Another cause of the decline of the authority of the Bemba Chiefs: mass migration of the male population towards the towns, the mines and the plantations. A poll tax was imposed by the BSAC on all males as early as 1904. The only way for them to find the money was to go away from their home villages—and the authority of the local chiefs—and find work for a salary in the new mines at Wankie and in South Africa.

Another major change in tribal life, also gnawing at the traditional authority and prerogatives of the chiefs: the interdiction issued by the BSAC to continue with the *fitemene system of agriculture*: the villagers were forbidden to lop trees and burn the branches in a different place every year as they had done in the past. The Company saw that this system was terribly wasteful and precluded all attempts at imposing better means of agriculture. Moreover the people spent much time outside their villages, scattered all over the bush, out of reach, and they had to move their villages every four or five years. The missionaries were not averse to this BSAC policy, on the contrary, for the continuous flux of the local population did not make regular religious instruction easy. But the immediate result of this law of the BSAC was famine all over the country. This was to be expected, for you do not change a centuries-old system of cultivation at a stroke of the pen. The people were forbidden to lop trees, and therefore they did not lop trees, and therefore they did not cultivate, and therefore they had nothing to eat. In their adversity and in the state of confusion into which their society was plunged, the people turned to the spirits of their ancestors for advice and support, hence a spate of spirit possessions involving women. It was a way for them to express their feeling of insecurity in a society that was being rocked to its foundations by the consequences of European colonisation and in a sense by the implantation of Christianity. It was a way for common folks—and more particularly for women—to win respect and consideration. Spirit possession was then put down by experts as “worship in time of distress”, to which common folks naturally turned when they were living under continuous strain.

Spirit possession has ever since been a social phenomenon that spread through all social classes at all social levels every time the people faced a widespread situation of insecurity for the present as well as for the immediate future. It was the case just before independence in the 1960s. I have personally come across whole villages of women possessed by spirits. Spirit possession could be called “private worship of the *ngulu*”, and it has become a means of acquiring prestige and power in the African society, for the better or for the worse. Spirit possession is more and more sliding into witchcraft.

What was—and what is—the position of the churches towards the phenomenon of spirit possession?

Let us put it bluntly: the cult of the ancestors (*mipashi*) and the phenomenon of spirit possession by *ngulu* were the objects of outright condemnation by the Catholic Church. The mention of the ancestors (*mipashi*) in the liturgy and the official prayers of the Church was made for the first time—and very timidly—around the 1960s, and only in the litanies of the saints and in the administration of the sacrament of bptism. As for the *ngulu*, not only were they never granted room in the religious ceremonies of the Church, but they were also irrevocably condemned as pagan and diabolical notions forbidden to the Christians. All the Church saw in the cult of the *ngulu* was possession, and possession in the mind of the Church is usually diabolical, or at best superstitious and immoral, in any case totally unacceptable. Direct or indirect participation by Christians in the rites of initiation of the *ngulu* was automatically sanctioned by excommunication, i.e., exclusion of those Christians from the sacraments. This intransigent position adopted by the Church was the more regrettable since spirit possessions were always the hallmark of difficult times and economic insecurity for the common folks. It looked as if the Church could not care less about the social problems and the hard economic times the people were going through. The women resented this intransigence even more than the men, for they were more directly concerned by the spirit possessions and because it is usually the women that bear the brunt of hard economic times, not the men.

In Bemba society, with its strong structure and with the stress on the cult of the ancestors (*mipashi*), spirit possession by the *ngulu* was a peripheral cult, but maintained under a certain control and widely used for the good of the people. When this Bemba society began to fall apart under the onslaught of the changes brought about by European colonisation and the spread of the new religion, Christianity, spirit possession became really marginalised. For the African élite that no longer had strong links with their own traditional culture, it was a remnant of the past and they were tempted to shrug it off as unworthy of "educated people". As for the Christian Africans, they were taught to disregard what was only a survival of their pagan past, and if they didn't, they were severely punished, they became castaways. What the Church did not realise was that many of those African Christians who were still strongly attached to the cult of the ancestors and took spirit possession very seriously, became alienated from the institution to which they belonged through baptism and stopped all religious practices *out of hatred and frustration*. They rejected the Church that was marginalising them. They took a hostile attitude towards the Church that did not make the slightest effort to understand their position. Not only did they keep away from the sacraments, but they also prevented others from receiving them. Once

in 1955 I was in a village where a woman was dying. When I proposed to go and give her the last sacraments, those around me protested vehemently: “She is a *ngulu*, she cannot receive the sacraments!” When I disregarded their objection on the ground that any person in danger of death has the right to the priest’s assistance whatever his or her life had been, they were properly scandalised!

What about nowadays? What attitude ought we to take as regards spirit possession? It is very extremely difficult to answer this question, for the simple reason that *spirit possession is no longer a serious affair, it has turned into a racket*. In the seventies, the committee for the study of local customs in the Archdiocese of Kasama warned all church personnel that most of the cases of spirit possession were fakes. Spirit possession has become a means (for women) of winning the attention and consideration of the people, of carving out a place for themselves in the sun, and of being influential in local affairs. The members of the Legion of Mary at Ilondola explained to me that spirit possession had lost its former prestige for a very simple reason: nowadays any person that is ill from an illness that cannot be easily explained is declared possessed by a *ngulu*.

Conclusion

What I have written above on spirit possession is the result of my own researches and observations, and the conclusions to which I came in all objectivity. It is a process we ought to follow in order to come to a better—and more objective—knowledge of the Bemba mentality. We ought in conscience to re-examine the Bemba customs in the light of Bemba history. This would certainly bring us to qualify our judgements. Any custom, any rite in any religion is so intrinsically woven with the life of a group that it does not make any sense outside the life context and the life dynamic of this group. As far as spirit possession is concerned, we ought to have looked at the psychological and psychic angles of this phenomenon right from the start. We would have noticed at once that those persons are not to be condemned but to be helped.

What we said above about spirit possession remains a topic within the scope of this booklet on witchcraft. For the cult of the spirits, whether they are the *mipashi* or the *ngulu*, goes hand in glove with witchcraft. Witchcraft is, after all, dealing with the world of the spirits. The frontier between witchcraft and spirit possession is all too often so blurred as to be indistinguishable. The Milingo Affair clearly demonstrated witchcraft and spirit possession are most of the time intrinsically imbricated. Witchcraft cannot be studied and discussed as an academic subject. Witchcraft must be seen against the background of a human group to be understood and evaluated.

Chapter 3
TO ACCEPT OURSELVES AS THE PEOPLE SEE US

The reputation the missionaries "enjoyed" right from the beginning of being *witchdoctors-sorcerers* makes some of us, when confronted with it, still fly off the handle, or on the contrary leaves us as cool as cucumbers. Neither attitude is reasonable. There is no reason to be angry with the people because they look at everything concerning us with their own eyes, their own mentality, and against the background of their own experience. Our way of living, our attitudes, our comportment in times of health and illness, prosperity and trial, everything is subject to interpretation in the light of their own understanding. There is no reason for us to lose our temper over it. On the other hand we must not simply shrug our shoulders and ignore their comments completely. *We have a lot to learn from their vision of things and people and we have a lot to gain by coming to a sound understanding of their mentality. We must be ever prepared to make use of this knowledge acquired through experience and daily contact with the people. At the same time we must never hesitate to go beyond their vision of things, events and people.* I take the liberty, in the following pages, to communicate the results of my personal experience on this matter.

A personal experience

First episode

In the 1970s I began to suffer from ill health, dizzy spells and bouts of vomiting. The doctors diagnosed that those troubles were all caused by the bad state of my ears. (*N.B. Fr Oger explained to the translator and editor of this booklet that his hearing had been seriously damaged during the Battle of Casino, which he fought in the artillery: the booming of the guns for days and nights on end had caused irreparable damage to the auditory nerves and cochlea in his ears. The specialists had warned him that this would affect his equilibrium and his general state of health for the rest of his life.)* This affected my general comportment very seriously. My character became somewhat unpredictable, like the crises that were wrecking my health every now and then without warning. The people would say to me: "If you were an African, we would take you to our *nghanga* (our expert in spirit possession)." For, in their minds, there was not the least doubt: *I was possessed by a spirit.* Deep down in my mind I came to the conclusion that I was being offered a golden opportunity to learn more about spirit possession, simply by listening to what the people were saying and by analysing my own condition from their point of view, by trying to see myself as really possessed by a spirit in order to understand better what they were talking about. That is how I began to jot down notes on my state of health, my feelings, my comportment and my

dreams, as well as the remarks the people were freely making in my hearing on my condition and behaviour.

My first conclusion was that spirit possession is always linked with a form of physiological illness, definitely not lethal, but leading to queer reactions and comportment coming over the person suddenly, without warning, and recurring every now and then. In their eagerness to help me, the people offered their services: they would, they say, take me through their traditional therapeutic treatment. I was not too keen on it, and my Superiors decided, anyway, to pack me off to France to receive proper medical attention and care.

Second episode

The people never stopped talking about the "spirits that were holding me in their possession". The more so since I was becoming harder and harder of hearing with the passing of the years. One day in 1984 I found myself in a psychiatric institution in Lusaka, and I never managed to remember how I landed there to start with. The truth was appallingly obvious: I had simply cracked up! Whatever the reasons behind this breakdown, the point that concerns us here is my attitude and my comportment throughout the crisis, which lasted five days. I was told afterwards that I gave free rein to the outpouring of all the grievances I had accumulated in the course of my existence, including those of my childhood and youth. When I came back to Ilondola in good health once more, the children were queuing up the whole day to have a good look at me, staring at me with big eyes. I was finally told the reason. "You were dead, and you have come back to life." In the eyes of the people, *I was now possessed by a spirit for good!* Since that time, the people never stopped making allusions at the spirits that were inhabiting my precious person! To get used to it takes some doing, believe me!

My second conclusion was as follows: what the people call "spirit possession" takes place at the very moment a person suffers a psychic breakdown as a result of psychological pressure being brought to bear on him or her. When this happens, the patient may well give free rein to his or her grievances, to his or her most intimate feelings, without anybody being offended or shocked. This person may well slide into unconsciousness in the course of this outpouring.

My third conclusion was that all spirit possession, *whether real or faked,* is an outward sign of deep inner suffering and a desperate call for help.

Third episode

This third episode in my personal experience in relation with spirit possession covers all the years from 1984 onwards. I did not go through any special experience, I led a very normal life. But the people had not changed their minds: I was still a man possessed by spirits since I had mood swings, of course, but as far as I could judge no more than anybody else, certainly nothing compared to the beginnings in the 1970s. For the people, however, those mood swings were the signs of the presence of spirits in my personality. The people were confirmed in their belief that the spirits who had taken possession of me in the 1970s were there to stay. In 1993, I suffered once from a severe bout of malaria. Among the visitors who came to see me was a woman, and as I was explaining to her that I was spending sleepless nights because of the fever, she asked me which people I had seen in the course of my insomnia. As I looked at her with questions in my eyes, she explained what she meant: insomnia is usually the time *ngulu* make themselves known to the persons they inhabit and have talks with them. In her mind, I must have had "ghostly visitors" during those sleepless nights. I was really at pains to give her a satisfactory answer (you do not want to hurt people's feelings in a case like this by giving them the impression that they are talking gibberish), and she probably thought I did not trust her enough to share with her the secrets my visitors from the other world had revealed to me. This is to show the readers that, once you are ranked among the élite of those possessed by spirits, everything that happens to you, everything you say or do, is likely to be seen and interpreted in this context.

My fourth conclusion is that we all go through the same experiences in life, whether we are Africans or non-Africans, but we live them differently. I certainly had nightmares during the nights I was wracked with fever, but it never occurred to me to attach any importance, any *reality,* to those dreams. Psychologists and psychiatrists have long explained that this fantasy world is the product of the subconscious. For my lady visitor, however, all those dreams were as real as you and me, and the actors in those nightmares were real persons, and I was supposed to be in a position to name them. The vision the Africans have of the world does not make distinction between the visible world and the invisible world. The two worlds communicate and react on each other. That is one of the main causes of misunderstanding between Africans and non-Africans, and the source of endless mix-ups and mistaken identities.

We are to accept this African vision of the world

What is the important step I took in the present context? *I accepted to be considered as possessed by a spirit or by spirits.* The people are as a rule ashamed to express openly their

traditional beliefs, to admit that they still believe in the world of the spirits and in the action of the spirits in the life of the people here on earth, for better or for worse. They are ashamed because their forefathers and they themselves were taught that traditional beliefs are lies, and that they are diabolical, and that Christians are forbidden to believe in them anymore, and that Christians are committing a serious sin if they indulge in pagan practices, and that Christians are to be severely punished if they are convicted of pagan practices, mainly by being deprived of the sacraments. This teaching has been going on for the best part of a century, and it has created in the people a deep-seated sense of guilt towards their own traditions. When they realised that I accepted the vision they had of my situation, that I was not condemning them for this vision, that I was not passing judgement on their vision, they felt relieved and they began to speak freely about their ideas on the world of the spirits and spirit possession. They realised that they could speak their language on such occasions and that I was in a position to use the same language myself without shocking anybody.

Eventually, when I thought the time was ripe, I went even further to meet the Africans on their own ground. In 1987 a White Sister, who was following the Language Course at Ilondola Language Centre, had got into the habit of going and visiting regularly an old man in the village and speaking with him and listening to him (the best way of learning a language anytime!). One day this old man said to her: “Truly, Sister, Bwana Mukubwa (Fr Oger) is a *ngulu* (i.e. he is inhabited by a spirit). He was in pain in the past (in 1886), but now he is all right. The only trouble is that we do not know the name of the spirit in him!” This started me thinking. Finally in 1991, when I was in Europe on home leave, I took the bold step of writing a letter to the chairman of the Local Christian Community at Ilondola, informing him that the spirit who was in possession of me was *Kankumba*, “he-that-is-gathering”. I do not know whether I did the right thing or not, but I did not see any point in dilly-dallying any longer. I had at last come full circle.

We are to make use of the African vision of the world

The experience I described above was not to be, in my mind, a simple incident in a person’s life, I was determined to make use of it in my work as a priest and a missionary. The first occasion that was offered to me to explain my position in public was a conference I was asked to give religious Sisters, the majority of whom were Zambian, in the diocese of Mbaala on spirit possession. I felt like the man asked to speak to the Chinese about Chinese customs. I knew that the Zambians in my audience, even though they were religious Sisters, felt very strongly about the existence of the spirits and their activities among the living. They knew everything about *ukuwilwa ngulu* = to be possessed by a spirit, or *ukuba ne ngulu* = to be inhabited by a spirit, and they took it very seriously. They were certainly not prepared to

hear a stranger—even if he was a priest—speaking of spirit possession disrespectfully. That is when I decided to take the plunge for the first time. I explained to them in detail my personal experience, my encounter with a serious breakdown (a distant aftermath of a war wound), how the people interpreted it, how I had tried to look at my condition with the eyes of the people and to understand it against their own background, and how I had lived through it as if I had really been possessed by a *ngulu.* I was using a vocabulary they understood perfectly. The result was extraordinary, beyond anything I had expected. Two Sisters stood up, one to say: "Father, thank you so much, I have up to now been scared of *ngulu*. That is now over!" She simply meant that the *ngulu* were part of her own traditional background and that she did not see any incompatibility between her belief in the *ngulu* and her Christian Faith and religious vows. The other Sister was even more explicit: "I am a *ngulu*", she said, to the bewilderment of more than one person in the audience, "I was a shamed of it, but I no longer am!" She simply meant that she did believe she was a *ngulu*, that she did not see any incompatibility between being a *ngulu* and becoming a Sister, but that she had always been very careful to hide the reality for fear of being misunderstood and even thrown out of the congregation. For her, it was now "take it or leave", she was a *ngulu* AND she was a religious Sister in the Catholic Church, full stop.

In this conference, after explaining how I had got over the crisis thanks to the friendly assistance of some and to the comprehension of everybody, I had asked the audience to reflect seriously on the therapeutic value of the treatment given by the traditional expert. I then suggested to them to find out whether this traditional expert would not be in a position to solve some of the problems they come across in their religious communities. Since the Sisters seemed to be aware of the methods those traditional experts were using, I also suggested that it might be worth their while to study a way of making use of them, or at least pick up ideas from them, for they undeniably got results.

In the same conference, we spent some time towards the end on the psychological aspect of the spirit possession. We compared the vision we had of those spirits, theirs and mine. Those spirits, of which I spoke in great detail for the occasion, were a part of myself, they did not come from the clouds, they were not pure figments of my imagination, and they were certainly not of diabolical origin. There was a whole psychological aspect to the problem of spirit possession, which we had never bothered to examine. I was by then conscious that I was possessed by what the local people call "spirits". By dint of listening to the people and reflecting on my state of mind, those spirits had become real entities for me, and they must have been realities of a psychological order.

We must also go *beyond* the African vision of the world

The Bishop of the Diocese of Mbaala encouraged me to pursue my research and experimentation in the direction I had resolutely taken. He was pleased to see that non-Africans could look at the phenomenon of spirit possession in an objective way, without preconceived ideas, and speak of it in a sensible way. The psychological aspect of the phenomenon is certainly of paramount importance, it must be studied carefully, and fully exploited. But we must be careful not to confine our research on spirit possession to the purely psychological aspect of it if we are to find a real answer to the problem. I repeat: the psychological aspect is far from being negligible, and we ought to have expert psychologists willing to spend time and mental effort on the phenomenon. But we must also go much further.

In my opinion, leaning on the personal experience I had in the matter, we shall never be able to be objective in our attitude towards spirit possession if we do not start with *having a good look at our interior being, at our own soul, our own mind and our own mentality*. "The Kingdom of God is within you", we read in Luke 17:21. That is how I, for one, read and understand this text, even if the exegetes warn us that it could also be translated "among you". In my view *the individual person comes first*. The Kingdom of God must take root first *in* the individual person. *Once the individual persons are possessed by the Kingdom of God,* then the Kingdom of God can be said to be also *among* them. There is a whole part of our own inner being that is partly mysterious, which escapes all logical analysis, and which is not under the direct control of our reason. We are wary of this mysterious part of our own selves. I have a strong feeling that this is the part of our personality that Christ chooses to identify himself with. Christ has come to liberate us and I think that this liberation aims, first and foremost, at bringing to light our innermost self, what we really are and the potentialities of our personality. After all, in psychology, we speak of the sub-conscience. Is it so strange to suppose that there is a whole part of our spiritual being that is shrouded in mystery? Reference to Christ is of crucial importance in this connection, because it is this part of our spiritual being that the crucified Christ risen from the dead chooses as the abode of his Holy Spirit, as Paul points out in Romans 5:5 and John in 6:63, the Holy Spirit that gathers and unites those he takes possession of. We are here at the heart of Christian "Spirit possession" ("Spirit" with a capital S), the Holy Spirit taking possession of Christ's faithful. We are way ahead of spirit possession as the Africans understand it against the background of their traditional religion. But in both cases, it is a question of *spirit possession.* There is no reason to be shocked because I seem to put the Holy Spirit on the same level as the *ngulu.*

The leitmotiv of the missionaries at this point in time ought to be “to assume in order to go beyond”. This reminds me of an incident that occurred at the beginning of my ministry in Kayambi, at the time when Lenshina was the talk of the land. I was staying in a village for two weeks when Lenshina’s local deaconess died. The children came to report to me that the rumour was going around the countryside that I had killed her, that I was directly responsible for her death. Without thinking further, I retorted: “I must, therefore, be stronger than Lenshina!” The children applauded, of course, because it was exactly what they were thinking. I was giving the impression that I was indeed responsible for her death, that she had not been able to resist my magic power. That was running with the hare instead of heading it off. We must assume the reality of spirit possession as understood by the people, but we must look beyond their limited notion of it. We must go much further than they do and lead them to Christ.

Chapter 4
TO ASSUME IN ORDER TO GO BEYOND

The situation in Ilondola Parish in the 1990s

In 1990 a combination of circumstances gave us the occasion of freeing the Christians of Ilondola from the shackles of witchcraft. The injustices and the frustrations the Ilondola people were suffering from at that time were shockingly flagrant. They had appealed to a woman-*mucapi*, a woman who had the reputation of exposing the *baloshi* or witchdoctors and sorcerers with evil intentions who were hiding among the local population. The idea was to lower the tensions that existed between villages, between families and among the villagers. The woman-*mucapi,* however, failed to clarify the situation. Another woman, a Christian belonging to a charismatic group, came from the Lwapula with a view to bringing the people together again and easing the tension. She went around the villages, calling the people to prayer meetings and to healing sessions.

By that time, the missionaries on the Ilondola staff were getting seriously concerned. They had been worrying about the situation for months. They often met together to discuss witchcraft and the power of healing, because around them there was only talk of *buloshi* (witchcraft), *baloshi* (sorcerers only intent upon harming their fellowmen and women with magical means hiding among the local population and carrying out their evil schemes on the sly), and of *bamucapi* (expert witch hunters). Now we had to take into consideration the presence of two women on the territory of the parish who were going around the villages for the avowed purpose of alleviating the sufferings of the people while we were sitting pat at Ilondola. One of them was a *mucapi* or witch huntress operating in the traditional way. The other was trying to convince the people that their salvation was to be found in Christ. *Both of them were ignoring the priests completely because the priests were "*Basungu*", they were aliens, totally unable to understand the people and their plea.* We could no longer stay put, for we were, after all, ministers of the Word of God, and the Word of God is by definition efficacious in every situation. We had to enter the fray, for it was all for a good cause: to re-establish peace and harmony in the villages of Ilondola Parish. We could not leave this service of reconciliation and of healing to unbelievers, and certainly not to believers who regarded their priests as aliens living on the margin of the native society. What were we to do, because we were fully conscious of being—indeed!—strangers?

At last we came across the opportunity of entering the fray against witchcraft

Stealing and pilfering had been going on for months at Ilondola. Nobody was spared the unpleasant visit of burglars. The local bank was “visited” as well as the cooperative, the dispensary, the teachers, and the villagers, especially those that had poultry and gardens. The thieves belonged to the same gang, and the worst of it was that *they were known, they were openly harassing the whole population, and nobody could really do anything about it BECAUSE THEY WERE OPENLY HIDING BEHIND WITCHCRAFT.*

The culprits had been repeatedly denounced to the police, brought to court, but they were never condemned and imprisoned. The culprits were openly laughing at all those that tried to stop them, because, they said, they did not fear anything and anybody since they were under the protection of charms and disposed of powerful magic gadgets to harm their eventual opponents. Moreover, they felt protected by members of their families who were threatening to cast magic spells on all those that dare to denounce their relatives and take them to court. That is a type of argument very few Africans can resist. Thus it was that the whole of Ilondola was living in an atmosphere of fear and suspicion, and therefore in a state of total paralysis. We decided in council to use Lent to wage war against witchcraft at Ilondola. Lent 1990 will remain a landmark in the history of Ilondola Mission and of the fight against witchcraft.

Lent 1990: A time of penance out of the ordinary in Ilondola Parish

First Sunday of Lent

A robbery had just taken place, which shocked public opinion. That is when the Fathers decided to take the situation in hand. At the end of Mass we made our opposition official in the pulpit: we informed the people that we were entering the fray against the gang of robbers operating in Ilondola and *against witchcraft, which they were using as a shield.* We informed the people that the case was being brought to the police and to the knowledge of the chief.

In the Mass of this first Sunday of Lent, I decided to open the hostilities in the homily I had been appointed to preach. It was the Gospel of the Transfiguration and I spoke of the Cross. We are suffering along with Christ, I reminded my hearers, in order to be transformed with Him in the Resurrection. But, I said, there were sufferings that had no redemptive value,

they were only alienating us and paralysing our efforts towards this transformation in Christ. Then I listed all the evils the Ilondola people had been suffering from for months at the hands of unscrupulous gangsters. I emphasised the suffering of the poor, industrious people who were losing the little they had through robbery, and who had nobody to turn to with their plea. Then I came to the central idea in my homily: *I hammered on the fact that the source of all those evils was witchcraft, behind which the gangsters and their supporters—especially those who were protecting them—were hiding.* I pointed out to my audience that they were in the grip of fear of witchcraft and were therefore powerless to do anything to help themselves. Then I went over to the next passage in the Gospel, where Jesus warned his Apostles that "this type of devil could be chased only through prayer and penance". That was the ultimate aim of my sermon: *to invite the people to come and pray in the church every day in the coming week at 17:00 hours.* The conclusion was obvious to the people: we must pray hard if we are to overcome the devil of witchcraft in our ranks.

In the following week, a dozen of people came to pray at 17:00 hours, they knew for which intention. The reaction may not have been overwhelming, but it was positive. Those that came knew that the "the gang" were keeping an eye on them. For us it was the golden opportunity we had been looking for to get involved in the fight against witchcraft. The commentaries the people were making around us were an encouragement for us to continue along the same line. We had certainly hit the nail right on its head, for there were people trying to find out who had been informing the Fathers about the robbery that had aroused their anger.

Second Sunday of Lent

The Gospel of this Sunday was the episode of the Samaritan woman, and the remark made by Jesus about "the worshippers in spirit and in truth". I explained to the people that I had been in the country for 38 years and that I knew a lot about the country, the people and the customs. Witchcraft is not as secret and mysterious as it is usually believed, I pointed out to my audience, and I showed photos of magic objects exposed in a museum at Ndola, which were part of the paraphernalia used in witchcraft, by *baloshi* as well as by professional sorcerers. "Why not burn all those gadgets in the Easter fire?" I suddenly burst out. My audience knew very well that I was fully aware that many of them did have such gadgets hidden in their houses, and my sudden outburst froze them on the spot. Why is it necessary for the Ilondola people, I forged ahead in my homily, to call outsiders to come and cleanse their villages from *baloshi*? We, Christians, had the power of Christ at our disposal to free ourselves from the slavery of witchcraft, and we had the priest, Christ's minister, to act in Christ's name. Christ called us in this Sunday Gospel *to worship in spirit and in truth.* How can we pretend to sing *Alleluia* with gusto on Easter Sunday as long as we hide those magic

gadgets in our granaries or under our beds? “Burn everything and cleanse Ilondola”, I shouted in conclusion at the top of my voice. My outburst was welcomed with thunderous applause and the strident ululating of the women. This time we were deeply engaged in the battle against witchcraft, there was no going back on our decision.

The immediate result of this sermon was that the people continued to come to pray every day at 17:00 hours, in increasing numbers, and the challenge I had thrown down at the Ilondola people from the pulpit in the church had become the talk of the gatherings around the beer pots and around the fire in the evening in all the villages of the parish. But there were some who grumbled that the *Musungu* (that was me!) was taking them all for *baloshi*, for evil-intentioned sorcerers!

Third Sunday

Gospel of the man born blind. We are all born blind, I told the congregation gathered in the church for the Sunday service. There is witchcraft all over the world, in every human society under the sun, but we do not see it. Everywhere in the world—and not only at Ilondola—the normal explanation of the people for all evil that is not explainable is witchcraft, i.e., there are people around us that are working on the sly to harm us. That is the reason why many people live in fear and suspicion, not only at Ilondola, but all over the world. I gave them as an example the frightful stories my grandmother, living in my home village in France, used to tell us about people casting horrible spells on their neighbours and the terrible fate of those cursed by “les sorcières”, the French word for witches. I explained to them that even in France there were men and women cunning enough to exploit this natural fear of the common folks for mysterious forces they had no means of controlling. I pointed out that the *Bena-Ilondola* (the people living at Ilondola) were very much in the same situation, and that they were not to be cowed into submission and silenced by those people—more particularly the gangsters—who were exploiting their traditional fear of witchcraft. To get rid of that pest, they were to stand up against the gangsters instead of running away under cover. They would not run away from a dog with rabies, would they? They would corner it and kill it. I then suggested that they should have plenty of palms solemnly blessed in church on Palm Sunday and place them everywhere in their homes and granaries, in their hen houses and gardens. This was a challenge thrown down at this gang of thieves who boasted that they had magic charms and gadgets that made them invincible. It was a way of warning them that the Christians were not impressed by their reliance on witchcraft. It was a way of making a public act of faith in Christ, who had come here on earth to overcome evil.

In fact the main purpose behind my homily on the man born blind was to bring out the fact that he was miraculously cured by Jesus, but that nobody was prepared to accept the reality

of the miracle. He had to explain what had happened to him time and again for the benefit of his neighbours, of his parents and especially of the Jewish leaders. It never occurred to him to change his story, because his faith in Jesus was unshakable. The *Bena-Ilondola*, I explained, were in exactly the same position. They believed in Christ, but there were people around them that were trying to turn them away from Christ by casting doubt on His power to protect them. They could plunder their goods at will, and nothing happened to them, because Christ was powerless to do anything against their magic. They knew perfectly well that Christ was the one they had to fear. I concluded that our faith in Christ was to grow stronger and stronger in our present difficulties, exactly the opposite of what our enemies expected.

The Chairman of the Church Council at Ilondola thanked me in public at the end of Mass for having clarified the situation. We now understand, he said in substance, that Bwana Mukubwa does not look at us as *baloshi* in disguise, but that he is convinced that we are all the victims of fear of witchcraft, and that it is this fear of witchcraft we ought to eliminate from our lives. As a result, the prayer meetings at 17:00 hours every day continued as in past weeks, and they were attended by more and more people.

Fourth Sunday

Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb: that is the gospel of the day. How did He raise Lazarus? With only one short command: "Come out of the tomb." The theme of my homely was belief in the power of God's Word. I asked my audience time and again the crucial question: "*Do you really believe in the Word of God and its infinite power?*" The implication was obvious and underlined the whole sermon*: if you believe that the Word of God is so powerful, why do you rely on your charms and magic gadgets for protection?* Even I had never put it anywhere so bluntly! I was content with reminding them of the reality of their daily life. I pointed out that they were sometimes tempted to expect God to free them from the evils that assailed them without effort on their part. Another temptation was for them to suspect God of asking them to do things beyond their capacity and strength, and they were tempted to give up the fight. I told them the parable of a man drowning in a river: three canoes floated past him, but he did not make the slightest effort to heave himself out of the water into the safety of one of them. I told them also the parable of another man carried away by the current in a river and who had managed to grab the branch of a tree leaning over the water; a canoe came to his rescue, but he refused to let go of the branch to get into the canoe. Then I could hurl the vital question at them: *why do you hang on to your fetishes, amulets and charms, made by human hands, instead of throwing them away when God asks you to grab His hand and rely on His providence?*

This sermon with the parable of the drowning man refusing the help offered to him touched my audience to the quick. I did not blast away at people who were casting spells on their neighbours. I had simply alluded to people who had charms and amulets to protect themselves from witchcraft and I had called into question whether this was the best protection they could afford for themselves *when Christ was there extending a helping hand to them.* I had tried to make them realise that amulets and charms for protection against *buloshi* had only one result: *to keep alive fear and suspicion of witchcraft.* Everybody in the church felt concerned by what I was saying and in fact they felt *they were guilty* without my having pointed an accusing finger at them. The people continued to come to the prayer meeting at 17:00 hours, but the tone was gradually changing: *they were now freely expressing repentance and asking forgiveness for looking for assistance against evil in the wrong direction.* The people had gradually passed from "That is not me, it is the other" to "I have my share of guilt in the evil around us".

The reader will easily understand now what I was driving at: I wanted to make our faithful realise that the guilt of evil through witchcraft was NOT to be projected on somebody else, on a scapegoat called "*muloshi-baloshi*", as the *mucapi* was doing. **The *Bena-Ilondola* had now got into the habit of debating the question of guilt in witchcraft openly, and the discussions were getting more and more animated**. **The Parish Council finally proposed that every Christian, man and woman, should collect a handful of grass and, in the secret of his and her home, bury in it, completely out of sight, all the charms and amulets he or she had**. **This would be the symbol of collective repentance, an indisputable sign of good will**. **Some went as far as to propose that a hole be dug in front of the church, into which all the bundles of grass with their loads of amulets and charms would ostentatiously be dropped on the evening of Good Friday and officially set fire to on Holy Saturday**.

Paschal Feast of 1990 at Ilondola

At the beginning of the Paschal Vigil, a big fire was lit in front of the church. At 19:00 complete silence fell on the square in front of the church, usually so full of life and noise and movement. There was nobody nearby, except for the altar boys, the Sisters, a few members of the Legion of Mary and a few Tertiaries of St Francis in their garb. At 18:15 hours, a canticle was intoned and sung by the handful of people who were present. Then the people began to make their way quietly, almost unobtrusively, onto the square in the vicinity of the fire. When they were all there, the celebrant stepped forward and blessed the fire according to the formula of the Ritual for Holy Saturday. Then the passage of the Bible on the scapegoat was read aloud in the hearing of the assembly. There was absolutely no noise, you could have heard a pin drop. The celebrant made a brief homily on the ceremony of the fire. Christ, he pointed out, took upon Himself human evil, all our sins. This fire was the

symbol of His resurrection, of His power to purify us and of His light to free us from the darkness of evil and sin.

Then each of the two priests who were presiding over the Paschal Vigil threw into the fire, very ostentatiously, a bundle of grass, which at once burst into flame. This was the signal the people had been waiting for. They all stepped forward in complete silence, each one tossing into the fire the bundle of grass containing his or her amulets and charms. The Easter fire was soon turned into a blaze casting a brilliant light over the whole plaza. Then we formed into a procession and we all entered into the church behind the paschal candle to perform the rest of the ceremonies of the Paschal Vigil. I had been in Ilondola Parish for 22 years, but I had never attended a religious ceremony in such an atmosphere of total recollection.

Sometime later, a group of women came to Ilondola for a meeting and they gave unreserved approval to all that had been done during Lent and at the Paschal Vigil. “The priests,” they said in substance, “spoke of our problems in a language we understood.” This was made possible by the fact that everybody was going through the same sufferings, feeling the same apprehension and fear, and sharing the same suspicion. Everybody was suffering from the evil of witchcraft without daring to break away from its tentacles. The women concluded that all tensions between families ought henceforward to be tackled within the Small Christian Communities. They seemed to imply that the problem of witchcraft could be ultimately solved only by the people themselves among themselves within the framework of the Small Christians Communities.

Symbolic gestures of great efficacy

When the people threw into the open Easter fire burning in front of the church the bundles of grass into which they had packed their charms and amulets, they had accomplished a gesture pregnant with meaning. In fact they had renewed contact with one of their traditional customs, known in Chibemba as *kuisosela pa conto,* literally “to speak for oneself around the fire”. To settle a difficult case, it was the custom in the past—and still now in the rural areas, I suppose—to summon all the villagers, old and young, around a big open fire lit for the purpose on the village square. The case was then exposed in great detail, and all those present were free to express their opinion openly. Then the case was settled, and there was a general ceremony of reconciliation round the fire. As regards witchcraft, the case was properly exposed in the Sunday Masses, the people discussed it at length in their villages around the beer pot or the fireplace in the evening. Then they all accepted what the Parish Council had proposed: to hold a general ceremony of reconciliation around the newly

blessed fire of Holy Saturday. What we had done in the night of the Paschal Vigil was pregnant with meaning for the people, for it fitted snugly into their own culture.

A dramatic conclusion: the *Bena-Ilondola* were, to their own astonishment, freed from the fear of the thieves, who disappeared from the scene.

The power of the spoken word

We are inclined to underestimate the power of the spoken word, which forms the essence of African culture. At Ilondola we used a forceful language to convince them they had to get rid of their fetishes, charms and amulets. We had apparently chosen the right way of conveying our thought through the spoken word, because the people ultimately did what they had been told. I was told of the case of a woman who upbraided her neighbour because she had not got rid of all her witchcraft accessories. When the latter asked why she should have done it, she was simply told: “The priest told us to throw all this away.” For this woman the word of the priest was enough. That is one thing we ought never to lose sight of: the human word has a density of meaning, an irresistible force of persuasion when spoken with authority, especially in connection with evil. The human word directed against evil is liberation.

I believe that we missionaries have a prophetic role to play by looking at everything we are called upon to deal with *in the light of the Gospel*, not against the background of the Western civilisation we have been brought up in. This is particularly evident as regards witchcraft. We proposed to our Christians of Ilondola to perform symbolic actions pregnant with meaning with a view to freeing them from fear of witchcraft, which was reducing them to a state of complete paralysis. *This ought to be our policy in the future*. Unfortunately our whole formation as priests in the Catholic Church, torn between the ideas and prejudices of the Council of Trent that were still impregnating the whole theological formation of the clergy in Europe fifty years ago and the more liberal ideas in vogue throughout the countries of the West since 1945, did not prepare us to face an entirely different culture with its own values and its own vision of the world. We were not prepared to understand the Africans because nothing in our formation prepared us to understand them. But understand them we must, if our work and our presence here are to make any sense at all. We must look with the Africans for symbolic actions that are able to show them the way of freeing themselves from the fear of witchcraft that is still paralysing them. We shall speak of this problem further on in this booklet.

What we must remember from this experiment carried out in Ilondola Parish during Lent of 1990 is that reconciliation was made possible because the priest spoke a language the people could understand and because they all took part in a symbolic action they understood. We missionaries have still a role to play in the work of evangelisation in depth, as I have shown above. In the Ilondola experiment of Lent 1990, the priest played an essential part. It is not an easy role to hold, because we are in danger of being accused of meddling in things we know nothing about. If we give the impression that we do believe in witchcraft, in the existence of *baloshi* (people inhabited by evil spirits), there is the added risk of confirming the traditional belief that all misfortune, illness and death are the results of interference in the affairs of this visible world by the spirits of the invisible world. There is the great risk of creating confusion in the minds of our Christians and of all people in general. There is a great risk, but nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Chapter Five
TO GO OUT OF MY WAY TO MEET THE OTHER AS JESUS DID

Jesus never forced anybody to share his views. Only one thing was he required from his followers: *a personal faith in his Person.* He was prepared to welcome a follower whose faith was imperfect, even ambiguous, who saw in him the performer of magical tricks. Jesus did not even ask for a personal commitment to his doctrine. "If that is your wish"… was his usual answer to a request. His words were an appeal and his deeds were signs, which the ordinary folks could easily understand. He constantly referred himself and his listeners to his Father. The ordinary folks did not make any mistake about him. "Here is a new teaching," they were wont to say, "He speaks with authority. He orders about even the impure spirits, and they obey him (Mark 1,27)." Jesus took the people as they were, with their mentality, and invited them to go beyond the appearances, beyond the traditions of their forefathers, never to take anything for granted when it came to the knowledge of his Father in heaven. "All power has been given to me by my Father in Heaven."

No wonder that Jesus got into conflict with the Jewish authorities: He never tried to compromise with them and their ideas in order to win over their allegiance and support. "He is blaspheming," they would grumble in his hearing, "He is chasing the devils by the power of Beelzebub… Give us a sign, similar to the manna whereby Moses justified his authority and leadership over Israel… He is happy only in the company of sinners… of the collaborators of the Roman occupants… We know for sure that he is a sinner…" As for Jesus, he accused them openly of having stolen the key of knowledge to prevent the ordinary folks and the poor from entering into the Kingdom of God (Luke 12,52).

In this last chapter of the third part of the booklet, I am inviting the reader to meet the Bemba on the ground of their own mentality, to share their vision of the world and then to go further beyond what they see. We have to ask ourselves questions on the experiments we have carried out at Ilondola, for example, and look at them with a critical mind.

The questions we must ask ourselves

In the preceding chapter, I related in detail the Lent of 1990 at Ilondola, a Lent out of the ordinary, in the course of which we shared with the people the belief that witchcraft was the cause of all the tension among the people and of the success of the gang of thieves. We shared the mentality of the people on witchcraft, but at the same time we were preparing their minds to see beyond the traditional horizon. Then, one Sunday, I made an explicit reference to the power of Christ as a much better alternative to save us from the shackles of witchcraft. On that day, I hit the nail right on its head. The women welcomed my suggestion with ululating. Speaking on behalf of the Risen Christ, the priest was shouting in the church:

“Come out of the tomb that is witchcraft. Get rid of all your charms and amulets! Seek the protection of the Risen Christ!”

How did the Christian community of Ilondola understand my invitation? We must look at what took place during and after Lent, and in the course of the Paschal Vigil, with a critical mind, to find the answer to this question. Did the people not approach the fire lit in front of the church for the Paschal Vigil with hesitation? Did they not toss into the fire the bundle of grass in which they had packed their amulets and charms with visible apprehension? How can we explain the reverential silence that loomed over the whole ceremony and the procession into the church behind the paschal candle? Had we not replaced fear of witchcraft by another fear? Were the people not under the impression that they may have betrayed the spirits of the ancestors and aroused their anger? Was the congregation truly recollected or simply reduced to silence by fear? Did we have the right to go to such extremes in the name of Christ? Remember what a woman said to one of her neighbours: “Why haven’t you thrown away all your paraphernalia of witchcraft, as the priest ordered us?” Was this not symptomatic of a new fear replacing the old one? The people were definitely referring to the word and the authority of the priest to justify their new attitude towards witchcraft. We must now analyse the facts that took place at Ilondola after this memorable scene of the Paschal Fire, which had been programmed as a landmark for a new start in the parish.

Easter week of 1990 at Ilondola: Very much the same as before

I had proclaimed in the pulpit: “Witchcraft is like a dog with rabies: you must not run away from it, you must face it and find the way of neutralising it.” I was taken at my word. The leader of the gangsters made fools of us missionaries by raiding our pantry and dining hall on Easter Sunday and having a copious meal in our house while we were in church for the Paschal Vigil. Then he broke into our neighbour’s house and stole his hens and eggs. He was openly and scornfully laughing at us. He was in fact taunting us to see what our reaction would be. Our neighbour’s reaction was totally out of tune with what we had done during Lent, the Holy Week, and the Paschal Vigil: he threatened to employ the most vicious magical means offered by witchcraft to teach this lout a lesson he would remember for the rest of his life. He came to us to boast about his achievement. We were swimming in ambiguity and contradiction. Our neighbour was thinking in terms of self-defence with the same weapon as the aggressor. He had not understood the full implications of what had taken place during the Paschal Vigil. On the other hand, we had to do something, to take up the gauntlet

In the following month, a change for the better

In the week that followed the challenge of the gangster, four or five small children died in Ilondola. At the burial of one of them, a man said: "BaFather Mukubwa told us to throw into the fire all our amulets and charms. This shows that he believes in *buloshi* since he was certain that there were *baloshi* among us. We are, therefore, perfectly entitled to find out who killed this child." Dead silence in the crowd. This was the *traditional* reaction before the coffin of a young child, for a child is supposed to live, not to die, and therefore its death can only be the result of witchcraft. Another man came forward and said with a touch of irony: "I must correct a small error my friend here has just made: As far as I am concerned, there is only one kind of death, which strikes the young and the old, and that is the death God has incorporated in his plan for mankind. This child died because it was in God's plan that he should not go any further in his pilgrimage here below." All the people around the grave clapped their hands enthusiastically, whether they were Catholics or Protestants. In other words those Ilondola people showed that day the *Christian* reaction before the open grave of a child: they were sad that it had died so young, but this was all in God's plan, there was no question of reading into this death malevolence on the part of a sorcerer. Traditional belief, Christian faith: they clashed that day over the coffin of a young child. Belief of the traditional Africans, faith of the Christian Africans: they were face to face that day around the grave of a young child. The word of the priest was bearing fruit even if he was not in the graveyard on that day. The priest was not there to tell the people what to think about the death of that child. Their Christian faith propelled them way beyond the traditional vision of suffering and death as the evident results of witchcraft. As the Bishop of Mbaala pointed out later: "That is what we are badly in need of: public testimonies of this type showing that our Christians our turning their backs to the past as regards witchcraft and taking a Christian view of things!"

One year later: Faith and reconciliation

The theme for Lent in 1991 was reconciliation at the level of village life. The rite of the bundle of grass hiding amulets and charms and to be thrown into the paschal fire at the beginning of the Paschal Vigil was retained as an optional symbolic gesture for those who wanted to go through the ritual for their own personal benefit. In fact very few chose it. On Maundy Thursday at the end of the penitential ceremony preparing the people directly for the reception of the sacrament of penance, the congregation was told to go back to the village. The sacrament of penance would be given only on Good Friday. They were first instructed to get together in the families to put order in their private affairs. Then they were

to meet in their Small Christian Communities. They were told to put an end to all that had been causing tension among families and individuals in the course of the past year since Easter 1990. In other words they were to talk things over openly and truthfully in their Small Christian Communities and shake hands over what they had decided upon in a common accord. This task was taken very seriously indeed. Private confession on Good Friday made sense, for the Christians had already reconciled themselves with one another. On Holy Saturday, while we were preparing the New Fire for the Paschal Vigil, we were brought the news that two blood sisters who had not been in speaking terms for ten years because of witchcraft were in the process of patching up their differences and resuming normal relations. They expressed the desire to do their reconciliation in public. We sent word that they would be welcomed to go about this reconciliation in the parish church on Easter Sunday. That is exactly what they did. After the homily the two women came forward to the communion rail with their children and grandchildren. There they read a prayer of reconciliation they had composed themselves. This public act of reconciliation putting an end to years of hatred because of witchcraft made a tremendous impression on the congregation and became the talk of the whole parish.

Three years later: A case of spirit possession in the church

What we thought would never happen took place three years later in the church at Ilondola. A Sister of the Child Jesus who was a member of the parish team brought us a woman who was in great trouble. After giving birth to her child, she noticed she had no milk to feed the baby, and she was at once accused of all sorts of evil. The Sister asked us to pray over her one of the healing prayers in the ritual in the course of the morning Mass. We had hardly concluded the prayer and given her a blessing when she began giving free rein to the grievances she had against her village community. It was, in the eyes of the people, a case of spirit possession taking place inside the church in sight of everybody. The priests who happened to be there felt rather embarrassed, but not in a position to interfere directly. The best they could do was to sit back and see how the elders would handle the situation. The reactions of the congregation, some thirty people in all, were most interesting. Some ladies got up and simply walked out of the church with their heads held up and their noses twisting in disgust, scandalised that this could happen in their church! Another group of women, on the contrary, approached this woman who was in a sort of trance and stood around her to protect her: they were known to be—or at least to have been—*ngulu* themselves at one time or another. The men responsible for discipline in the church grabbed the woman and dragged her outside the church in spite of the protest of other men who thought that the church belonged to everybody, even *ngulu.* The long and short of it is that this incident created a lot of scandal in the parish. Witchcraft and spirit possession had

obtained right of admission inside the church. The group of conservatives in the parish was upset, wondering with dismay what the Church of Christ was heading to. On the other hand there was quite a good group of Christians who felt deep down in their souls that Christians in a state of distress, as this woman evidently was, had every right to speak their minds inside the church and to be shown the sympathy they deserve as suffering members of the Body of Christ.

Four years later: Faith and culture

In spite of the headway we have made in curbing witchcraft in Ilondola Parish, there are still diehard traditionalists who call the *mucapi* or witch-hunter regularly to cleanse their villages. We shall speak more in detail about this practice in the fourth part of this booklet on witchcraft. Let me simply say here that we have tried hard to be as close as we could to the people when they were going through this harrowing experience. Many Christians fear those sessions of village cleansing because they know very well that they are faked and that they may be pointed out as *baloshi* even though they do not believe in witchcraft. They are anxious about the moment they will be branded as *baloshi* and delivered to the vindictiveness of the crowds. They are imbricated in the system and they cannot get away from it. For others the sincerity of their Christian faith is put through a hard time. Our whole work as pastors is seriously jeopardized. Formerly, whenever we expressed our strong disapproval of village cleansing by the *mucapi*, the people who willingly took part in the cleansing or tacitly approved those who went there, rebuked us with the same terse comment: “It is our culture!” Nowadays the same persons are shocked to see us at a session of village cleansing and their usual comment is: “A priest is not supposed to be there.” In the course of an annual meeting of the Pastoral Diocesan Council, the Bishop of Mbaala informed the members of the committee that a session of village cleansing on the model of those conducted by *bamucapi* was held in the church at Ilondola, but of course along Christian lines and using Christian rites. This piece of news did not please all those that were present, and one member bluntly said: “It is simply not done!”

Conclusion

As a fitting conclusion to what we have said so far, can we suggest sharing some thoughts about traditional faith and Christian faith? In fact there is no such thing as traditional faith, for the Africans have only a system of religious rites: they “follow” them, they do not “believe” in them. Christian faith is something that stands completely apart: *it is the personal commitment of a human being to Christ and to God.* Christian faith is *a gift of God,*

it is not some form of intellectual power acquired and developed forcefully by dint of thinking and analysis. We do not bring faith to the people, we bring Christ to them. We simply explain to them that they have to welcome Christ in their lives and commit themselves to His service. Our presence as Christ's ministers and our attitude as Christ's witnesses constitute an appeal to the people to welcome Christ into their lives, an appeal that is far more effective than our preaching.

On the other hand, Christian faith relates to a whole system of Christian beliefs and rites. How far does this system fit into the religious and social context of village life as African villagers live it? According to what we have related so far in this booklet, it does not. Africans show a sort of reluctance in questioning the value of traditional religion in the light of their Christian beliefs. Africans do not seem to like their priests to cast doubt on the wisdom of the traditional vision of the world they inherited from their ancestors—especially if those priests are not Africans. Africans are likely to tell their priests to stay in the sacristy and abstain from making a show of themselves on the village square. Africans are likely to advise their priests to leave alone the social problems harassing their faithful and concentrate their attention on the teaching of Christian doctrine and morals. Can we agree to this limited vision of Christian pastoral work? I don't think we can. I firmly believe that we must find ways of using Christian rites within the frame of traditional religion and beliefs, wisely and judiciously. I firmly believe that we must, if necessary, create new Christian rites to meet the challenge thrown down to us by traditional religion in the context of traditional village life. That is what we are going to talk about in the fourth part of this booklet.

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