I was blamed for all these deaths in the village, wrapped up in fishing nets, and beaten up severely.” So recounted star Indian javelin thrower Debjani Bora, recent target of a witch hunt in the northeastern Indian state of Assam. The accusation and attack were spearheaded by a woman village elder later arrested for inciting the violence. According to BBC News India, police in Assam report that over the last five years nearly ninety people, mostly women, have been “beheaded, burnt alive or stabbed to death” as a result of witch accusations.1

Such incidents occur incessantly and in various locations, as articles here indicate. Indeed, challenges presented by witchcraft and witch accusations have long been urgent concerns of countless Christian communities worldwide. Even so, the reality of witchcraft has escaped the notice of most missiologists and mission studies. This issue of the IBMR seeks to help rectify this discrepancy.

We human beings notice what is important to us, but we routinely miss other realities that have little impact on our values or the daily cares of our lives. Thus, for example, over the last decade Internet connectivity has become a daily and conscious need for millions of us worldwide. In contrast, people in tropical settings live unconcerned about winter clothing, the polar vortex, or ice hockey.

As for specifically Christian examples, consider patristic theologians. More intensely than had been required of their Jewish and apostolic forefathers, Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyril

Martha Corey and seven others were convicted of witchcraft and hanged, Salem, Massachusetts, September 22, 1692.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martha_Corey-Longfellow.jpg

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of Alexander, Nestorius, and others formulated answers to questions arising from their Greco-Roman contexts, that is, to their contemporaries’ pointed philosophical questions about God and Jesus the Lord. A few centuries later and further east, Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad defended Christian teaching to Islamic authorities, under whose rule he administered extensive ecclesiastical and missionary structures.

For modern Western missionaries, Jesuits in China and Protestants in Africa alike have had to deal with beliefs and practices involving active and influential ancestors. The European heritage of Western missionaries has typically come to terms with ancestors either through sanctity or by “scientifically” explaining them away. The unexpected encounter with both benevolent and malevolent powers regularly consulted by powerful chiefs and priests has presented an ongoing and vexing reality to expatriate missionaries unprepared for such interactions.

The same has been true with witchcraft. Contemporary Europeans and North Americans may blush at the early modern witch trials in Europe and in Europe’s North American colonies. Accordingly, modern Western theologians and missiologists have for generations conveniently turned a blind eye to such phenomena, which have been rumored to take place elsewhere. In actuality, however, witchcraft-related activities—including violent witch hunts directed toward women and children—stubbornly plague Christian communities all around the world. Missiologists must catch up with these acute, long-neglected spiritual and pastoral issues.

Today, we as Christians and as human beings are more globally interconnected than ever before. This statement becomes more than platitude as we note recent worldwide reactions to the West African Ebola epidemic or to the religio-military conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Today’s requisite missiological response to the realities of witchcraft must be honest, active engagement—even if my colleagues and I might not think that witches are cursing our own families or congregations. Missiologists as well as theologians—contextually bound as both are—must finally become fully engaged with the issues of spiritual agents, sociological dynamics, and people’s assumed universes.

Multidisciplinary analyses are needed, including Evans-Pritchardesque anthropological examinations of relational dynamics involved in perceived witchcraft activities. We also need Paul Hiebert-type critical realist approaches that are self-aware of Western “excluded middle” assumptions (that rule out spiritual realities within a middle tier between God and this-worldly, scientifically observable phenomena). Related biblical studies must wrestle with the medium, sometimes translated witch, of Endor (1 Sam. 28) and related topics. The articles about witchcraft in this IBMR issue, which consider biblical, theological, anthropological, sociological, historical, and pastoral aspects of the subject, beckon us to accept the challenge and stride ahead.

Thankfully, we can rest assured that God graciously deals with us in our particular settings. That is, God does not dismiss but takes seriously Christians who experience witchcraft realities, even while some expatriate critics might haughtily act otherwise. God’s gracious particular dealings also take seriously Christians who honestly do not sense or believe in witchcraft matters—but are genuinely open to being instructed otherwise. May we all heed this urgent missiological call that for most of us has gone largely unnoticed for too long.

—J. Nelson Jennings

Note

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Putting Witch Accusations on the Missiological Agenda:
A Case from Northern Peru

Robert J. Priest

As I write this article, I am in Kinshasa at a conference on child witchcraft (August 21–23, 2014) with fifty Congolese pastors and three other speakers (Andy Alo, Opoku Onyinah, and Timothy Stabell) who are part of an emerging network of theologians and missiologists focused on witch accusations today. Thousands of Kinshasa’s orphans have been accused of causing the death of their own parents through witchcraft, the accusations frequently endorsed by pastors, and the accused children often abandoned to the streets. But the pastors at this conference, as part of the organization Equipe Pastorale auprès des Enfants en Détresse, led by Pastor Abel Ngolo, focus on the well-being of accused children as they struggle to make sense of theological and pastoral issues involved, and as they strategize and work to turn the tide on the mistreatment of accused children.

From the street children in Kinshasa to the killing of male witches in Peru or of elderly female widows in Tanzania, to the witch villages of Ghana or the witch burnings of New Guinea, it would be difficult to come up with a missiological topic that is more timely, or a topic that missionaries, pastors, and theologians in general are less prepared to engage. Much is at stake in wise contextual engagement. In this article I introduce the topic, not in the abstract, but through ethnographic case material from northern Peru. As should become evident, however, similar patterns and issues are present around the world wherever witch ideologies and accusatory practices exist.

A Brief Case

Shajian (a pseudonym), a brilliant leader of bilingual education in Peru, was known among Aguaruna Christians for his opposition to the church. Yet as he told me his life story, Shajian momentarily grew wistful and nostalgic as he described early experiences as a young Christian with answered prayers and Gospel witness. I asked him what the turning point for him had been, and he told me the following story about prayer and witchcraft.

My daughter, at four months, was sitting up and crawling. She would smile in recognition of me and hold out her arms to be picked up. She was healthy and intelligent. I was proud of her.

One day an uncle of mine, suspected of being a tunchi [witch], came to my house for a visit. I glanced up from [reading] a paper and caught him looking at my daughter with a contorted face, with malevolence. It shocked me. Then he asked, “How come you have such an intelligent, good-looking, healthy daughter while my children are sickly and not intelligent?” That night my daughter came down with a fever. At the time I was studying in Lima and had only a fifteen-day break. I didn’t want to leave my sick daughter behind, so I took her and my wife with me. In Lima the gringos [with the Summer Institute of Linguistics] helped me much and put her in the children’s hospital. They diagnosed her as having meningitis. All the gringos prayed for my daughter—as did many pastors.

I used to be very faithful with “religion.” My wife was not so faithful. She always had doubts. But I said, “If I have faith, she’ll get better.” So I believed God for healing. The meningitis did get better, but stomach problems developed that the doctor could not explain. My wife wished to take her back to the rain forest to be treated by an iwishin [shaman]. I refused. She predicted our daughter would die and I would be to blame. That night I dreamed my clothes were floating away down river. In the morning I told my wife about the dream, and she said, “Yes, it’s our daughter. She’s going to die.” We arrived at the hospital only to learn she had died in the night.

When I returned to my community, my uncle did not come to greet me. I didn’t say anything to anyone about my suspicions. Later my uncle got drunk and fought with his own son. Then he took the poison barbasco and died alone. He was a womanizer and dedicated himself to the use of tsunamik and pusanga [love magic]. The old men said it was doubtless his use of such strong pusanga and constant thoughts of women that caused him to be so disoriented as to commit suicide.

After this I said, “I prayed much to God, and he didn’t hear me.” So I distanced myself from God.

Assessing the theological and pastoral issues posed by this account requires us to consider pre-Christian cultural patterns, new dynamics introduced by Christianity, and broader patterns present in both older and more recent Aguaruna witch narratives.

Pre-Christian Cultural Patterns

Anthropologists find that people within any given society tend to share with each other cultural assumptions about what causes prosperity or misfortune. Depending on what those assumptions are in a given society, there will also tend to be characteristic response patterns—something that is certainly true for the Aguaruna.

Cultural assumptions. In every society bad things happen to people—material setbacks, infertility, illness, and death. For the Aguaruna bad things also include high rates of snakebite, drownings in rivers, and injuries while felling trees, as well as illnesses such as dysentery, influenza, hepatitis, infections, intestinal parasites, leishmaniasis, malaria, measles, meningitis, tuberculosis, and whooping cough. In most societies, practices exist that treat afflictions as material events calling for medicinal remedies. The Aguaruna are no exception; they possess complex understandings of and numerous biomedical remedies for all sorts of medical conditions. But when material interventions fail to achieve success, people in many societies often appeal to other causal ontologies to account for and address misfortune. In the culture of Job’s comforters, unresolved misfortunes were attributed to the sin of the sufferer. One reaps what one sows. A variety of cultures around the world operate with such karmic
moral causal ontologies. But if Job had been Aguaruna, wise local counselors would never have attributed his misfortunes to his own sin, but rather to the agency of a third party, an envious, malign neighbor or relative thought to have caused harm through occult powers. Worldwide, such a witch causal ontology is much more common than the moral causal ontology evident in the Book of Job.4

The actual explanation of how witch power operates or is acquired varies from culture to culture. In some cultures this power is understood as inborn, perhaps located in the liver, the eye, or another organ of the body. For other cultures this power is socially acquired. The power may be thought of as psychic, magical (involving manipulation of substances or words), or tied to spirits of the dead. For example, the Aguaruna believe that witches (tunchi) have invisible magic darts (tsentsak) in their throat. Like the poison-tipped darts of Aguaruna blowguns, these darts can be shot into someone else in a way that is unfelt but eventually brings death. A tunchi, angry at his mother, might reply to her with sharp words, or tied to spirits of the dead. For example, the power may be thought how conscious or unconscious one is in exercising the power, the power is located in the body, how the power is acquired, how conscious or unconscious one is in exercising the power, and the exact nature of the power being exercised. They are united, however, in the belief that, when misfortune strikes an individual, another person—a third party—has maliciously caused the misfortune through a mysterious power.

Triggering event. While the Aguaruna do not associate every passing illness with witchcraft, if the affliction is particularly intractable or mysterious, and especially if it results in death, then it triggers sustained talk about who is the guilty witch. Deaths by suicide or homicide (with shotgun, spear, or poison) are not attributed to witchcraft. But almost every other death—from snakebite or drowning to malaria or hepatitis—is blamed on a third party said to be a witch. Eventually, virtually every nonviolent death will be framed with a compelling narrative about a supposed witch, just as with Shajian’s narrative.

Retaliatory impulse. Among the most primordial of human impulses is the feeling that murderers should be punished. Often, as with the Aguaruna, this demand for justice is articulated in the language of debt (diiwi). Among the Aguaruna every killing should be remembered and avenged, with masculine values of honor and family loyalty mobilized against those who kill relatives. And since all nonviolent deaths are understood as caused by witches—who in Aguaruna culture are male—each such death imposes the requirement of an additional death; someone else must die in retaliation.

Identifying the witch. Historically, when an Aguaruna is sick and approaching death, widespread whispered speculations about the identity of the witch emerge and intensify. In one respect the Aguaruna diverge from many cultures in that only men are accused. In other respects suspicions are similar to worldwide patterns where witch accusations are present. Anybody known to have exemplified envy or ill will toward the afflicted is a suspect. Any prior conflict with the afflicted is grounds for suspicion. Anyone who directly benefits from the death is suspect. But also suspected is anyone perceived in general as being envious, antisocial, angry, resentful, or unhappy. Quite naturally, the individuals most likely to exhibit envy, resentment, and unhappiness are often those who are themselves poor, blind, crippled, socially marginal, chronically ill, or mentally disturbed, and who are thus a continually resented imposition on others.

It is worth keeping in mind that usually many individuals are potential candidates for suspicion. Aguaruna village life is full of remembered slights and insults, adulterous affairs, conflicts over marriageable women, failures of reciprocity, and envy at the unfair advantages of others. Most of this is publicly known and much discussed. Thus with every death there are many people who might naturally be suspected of having desired the death. Since prior gossip triggered by prior deaths has already generated in each village a significant pool of “suspected” witches, their names quickly get recycled as suspects when the next death occurs.

Consider Shajian’s situation. When powerful foreigners selected him as a young lad to receive an education and arranged for him to enter a government salaried position, he was catapulted by his early twenties into comparative wealth and prominent leadership far beyond that of his “fathers” and “uncles” and “brothers.” When he and his “brothers” sought wives from the same small pool of eligible young women, he married the desirable one that others had hoped to marry. In a context where deficiencies in childhood nutrition and debilitating parasites and diseases are common, his daughter was unusually healthy and intelligent. Like Joseph with his coat of many colors, Shajian was surrounded by numerous deeply envious individuals, not just the one later named as a witch.

Traditionally, the stakes are high in terms of who is identified as the witch, since this person will likely be killed. Therefore when someone is sick and approaching death, anxiety builds, and gossip attempts to fix blame. The very people who naturally might be suspected because of their own prior grievances or sinful sentiments toward the afflicted will deny any witchlike sentiments in themselves and often dramaturgically proclaim their own righteous indignation, moral solidarity with the afflicted, and willingness to help avenge the death. They contribute stories designed to deflect suspicion from themselves and fix it onto another. People kill witches for the very traits exemplified in their own lives. In such a climate few are prepared to defend another from suspicion, lest suspicion be redirected onto them. But many are prepared to immediately endorse and provide testimony against another party upon whom suspicion is coalescing, and to announce themselves willing to join in killing the witch. Dying adults, as a last act at the point of death, will often whisper to a close male relative the name of someone they suspect of killing them and will ask for a promise that their death will be avenged.

When an illness does not yield to medical remedies, a shaman may be called to diagnose the problem, to counteract it, and sometimes to identify the witch. Aguaruna shamans have a single
diagnosis: “Somebody did this to you.” They work to remove the tsentsak and cure the afflicted. Especially if there have been several deaths, a shaman is asked to name the witch. Usually he names a person that the community already suspects, thus professionally endorsing community suspicions.

Killing the witch. Aguaruna males are socialized to participate in homicides. As long as the ambush of a witch is organized by a relative of the deceased victim who himself initiates the violence, the accompanying group can with moral solidarity righteously join in the killing, with each person shooting into, or spearing, the body. Historically, only by participating in such a homicide could an Aguaruna male achieve the full adult status necessary for marriage, and only through such homicides could one acquire the coveted status of kakajam, “powerful one.” Every death then triggered great pressure toward identifying and killing the witch, with the relative of the deceased responsible to mobilize a group (ipamamu) that was usually disposed to respond with alacrity (asum) to the invitation to kill the accused. Since Aguaruna culture constructed fully respected masculine identity around participation in revenge homicides, making such participation essential to male status, homicide rates were high. According to Michael Brown’s study, undertaken after Christianity was already beginning to have an impact, 37 percent of Aguaruna adult male deaths were due to homicide, a figure he believes would have been higher in the past. Men like Shajian are less likely to kill a suspected witch these days, although they may still suspect that every death constitutes a murder.

New Dynamics under Christianity

Evangelism brought with it a message against retaliatory violence and with a promise of peace and goodwill. Widespread conversions to evangelical Christianity from the 1950s to the 1970s sometimes involved almost utopian expectations of peace and harmony, with a belief that sickness and death would be removed. The earlier ritual complex associated with spirit visions and retaliatory violence as the route to prestige and influence was displaced by bilingual education, with pastors and salaried schoolteachers the new influential leaders in the community. Shamans, with their single professional diagnosis (“somebody did this to you”), were less frequently consulted, and Western medicine became increasingly relied upon. But witch ideologies continued to present many pastoral challenges.

Prohibition against violent retribution. Today even non-Christian Aguaruna identify evangelical Christianity as having created a profound shift in moral consensus, to the effect that it is wrong to kill other people in “revenge.” Older men sometimes complain that “pastors control our community”—meaning that the moral suasion of pastors works against their own desires to mobilize retaliatory violence. A new folk belief has emerged that, if one’s death is avenged, one will not go to heaven—a reflection of the assumption that revenge killings are ultimately at the express wish of dying persons. Just as some Christians have wondered whether suicides go to heaven, Aguaruna Christians wonder whether a person whose dying act is to ask for retaliation will go to heaven. Christians take care as they die to forbid anyone to avenge their deaths, although they still sometimes name the person they think responsible. Both Christians and non-Christians continue to attribute many deaths to the agency of human neighbors and relatives acting through witch powers. Christians then find themselves living next to relatives or other neighbors who they continue to believe have committed murder by means of witchcraft, but against whom their only recourse is to trust God and endure. When repeated deaths occur, pressure often builds to avenge the deaths (and get rid of the person thought to be waging destruction in the community). Male relatives of the deceased who are reluctant to lead the witch killing are condemned for not having loved the deceased, for not being real men, and for not defending family honor. The result is that even church leaders sometimes cave in to social pressure and participate in a homicide. More frequently, the retaliatory violence is perpetrated by those not in good standing at church. Thus retaliatory violence against supposed tunchi continues, although at reduced rates.

Prohibition on recourse to shamans. Aguaruna evangelical churches have insisted that Christians not consult ivishin when sick. Herbal remedies, Western medicine, and prayer are employed. Since the single diagnosis of Aguaruna shamans is the socially destructive message that some neighbor or family member is to blame for each illness or death,7 the ban on consulting shamans has worked against shamanic influence, which converted every death into the need for a revenge killing. That is, the churches’ ban has mitigated the frequency of confident assertions that witches are at work.

Some Christians do, however, in moments of life-crisis, when prayer and medicine appear not to work, consult a shaman—and are disciplined by their church for doing so. When a village has several deaths sequentially, pressure builds to consult a shaman to determine the identity of the witch. If a majority in a village are Christians, a shaman will not be called. If a minority of villagers are Christians, a shaman may be called. Since every villager is expected to pay part of the cost, this step creates a crisis for Christians on whether to pay, with some thrown into village jails for not paying. When the shaman arrives, everyone is expected to line up and allow the shaman to determine if they are the witch. Christians typically refuse, retreating to their own church for prayer and singing, with the shaman (whose influence is being challenged) declaring, not surprisingly, that the witch is among the Christians. Non-Christians thus repeat the refrain that pastors and churches are protectors of witches, which they bitterly resent.

Many shamans have converted to Christianity, but they are continually pressured to carry out shamanic healing. Since they are thought to have the same power as the witch, while no longer employing it to combat witchcraft, they are often the first to be suspected of killing through witchcraft. A high proportion of such converts are subsequently killed as witches, as happened with Sanchum, a locally famous former shaman, shortly after I collected his life story—despite his faithful church attendance and the fact that his son was a pastor.

Widespread conversions to evangelical Christianity from the 1950s to the 1970s sometimes involved almost utopian expectations of peace and harmony.
Crisis of faith and new metanarratives. While Aguaruna Christians sometimes robustly claim the power of God against their fear of witches and the illness and deaths they cause, Christians and non-Christians alike still get sick and die. On old assumptions, each such illness or death is credited to witches. While converts often tell striking stories of divine healing understood as God’s power over witchcraft, the same individuals later inevitably encounter illness and death that do not yield to medical or prayer. These subsequent experiences regularly provoke profound crises of faith, as they did with Shajian. As long as one assumes that witches are the cause of all intractable affliction—with witches now being understood as doing the work of Satan, with the presence or removal of affliction being what is at stake in the battle between good and evil—then every illness and death that does not yield to prayers of faith creates a crisis. The witch has won.

The biblical message itself, as expounded by Aguaruna pastors, involves new metanarratives of evil. In place of the notion of shamans and witches as having a kind of psychic or magical power, Christians vacillate between two poles, either stalwartly denying their supposed powers or admitting that their powers are real but reframing them as satanic. In contrast to the iwischin, whose narrative of sickness and death features the diagnosis that “somebody did this to you,” pastors stress a metanarrative of death and suffering as a result of general human sinfulness. They teach that, just as Jesus underwent suffering and death, so we too must undergo suffering, and that a complete reversal of illness and death will occur only in heaven. They preach that God, who is muun (big or great), “holds our lives in his hand” and that nothing can touch us apart from his control.8

While traditional Aguaruna culture directed moral judgment away from self and onto others as the presumed repository of evil, conversion to Christianity profoundly shifted moral discourse so as to require a recognition of self as sinner on the part of all converts.9 Instead of a community self-righteously projecting all evil onto a single person to be killed, the new Christian message requires an endorsement that each of us has sinful (and witchlike) sentiments that must be acknowledged and repented of. This new element, I would argue, also undercuts the scapegoating tendencies present in witch accusations.

Summary

The overall effect of Christianity among the Aguaruna has been a reduced reliance on the socially divisive professional diagnosis of Aguaruna shamans, a reduced tendency to attribute every death to witchcraft, an increased willingness to confess sinful sentiments in one’s self and not just in others, and a reduced tendency to take violent action toward individuals thought to have caused misfortune.

But whenever deaths occur under conditions that paradigmatically suggest witchcraft (a sudden or mysterious death occurring after a social conflict or expression of envy or anger, for example), Aguaruna Christians often do suspect that witches are to blame. While few Christians support the killing of suspected witches, most do avoid them as dangerous. Since the accused are often the individuals with the greatest social needs, this social avoidance has adverse consequences for the accused. In a world where illnesses and deaths are both frequent and associated with neighbors thought to be acting through evil occult means, every affliction triggers deep anxieties about the dangers represented by secretly evil neighbors, relatives, or church members. Furthermore, each affliction understood as caused by a witch triggers a spiritual crisis that is structured in rather different terms than the crisis experienced when affliction is understood in a different frame of reference.

People in Europe and North America no longer commonly attribute misfortunes to the agency of neighbors, relatives, or colleagues thought to be acting through evil witch power. It is not surprising, then, that theological education in the West fails to substantively consider the theological and pastoral issues involved with witch ideologies. But since such patterns are common across major swaths of the globe, it is high time for this topic to move to the center of theological and missiological attention.10

Notes

1. In this article “witch” refers to anyone, male or female, accused of maliciously having harmed another through evil occult power.
3. Ibid., 54–101.
6. Michael Brown, Una paz incierta: Historia y Cultura de las Comunidades Aguarunas Frente al Impacto de la Carretera Marginal (Lima, Peru: CAAAP, 1984), 197. Brown reports that in Jane Ross’s study of the less acculturated but closely related Achuar, fully 59 percent of male deaths were due to homicide.
7. For an analysis of the negative social consequences of this diagnostic system, see Michael Brown’s “Dark Side of the Shaman,” Natural History 11 (November 1989): 8–10.
8. To date, Aguaruna pastors do not claim the power to name and deal with witches, as sometimes happens elsewhere and which raises another whole set of issues. See my article “The Value of Anthropology for Missiological Engagements with Context: The Case of Witch Accusations,” Missiology (forthcoming).
10. Within selected immigrant communities such patterns are increasingly present in Europe and North America as well.

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Beyond the Fence: Confronting Witchcraft Accusations in the Papua New Guinea Highlands

Philip Gibbs

Sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices are common in Papua New Guinea (PNG), yet differ considerably throughout the country. This article addresses witchcraft-related accusations and violence in the PNG Highlands. I take up a case from the Enga Province, illustrating the complexities of issues raised by people in an Enga faith community. How can I as a missionary for over forty years in this region accompany the Christian community as they try to respond to an outbreak of witchcraft-related violence in their area?

Highlands Sanguma

Witchcraft in the PNG Highlands, called *sanguma,* involves a malevolent power that is said to take the form of a creature such as a rat, bat, frog, or flying fox, with the power to kill or harm people. The spirit-creature lives within the body of its host, and even without the conscious approval of its host, the spirit-creature can take another form and roam around, eating human flesh, with the ability to produce disease and death. Malevolent power that is said to take the form of a creature such as a rat, bat, frog, or flying fox, with the power to kill or harm, is called the *sanguma.*

A Case in the Enga Province

There have been several cases in the Enga Province in recent years in which women have been killed (usually burned) or brutally tortured after being accused of practicing witchcraft. In this article I will follow one case in an area where I was formerly a parish priest. The Christian community admitted confusion over the issue, and I found myself presented with several choices. Should I treat witchcraft with skepticism, or should I take people’s beliefs seriously? How much should I as an outsider intervene with a scientific viewpoint and ideals based on modern principles of human rights? How should I deal with issues of moral causal ontology in which misfortune is due to one’s own wrongdoing, or of interpersonal causal ontology, in which malicious persons are understood to cause the misfortune? To what degree should I entertain the reality of demonic powers and theologies of spiritual warfare? As an anthropologist, theologian, and former parish priest, I felt I should intervene, but I was uncertain how to do so in a way that would benefit the Christian community and the accused.

In 2013 a young man died from unspecified causes in Wabag hospital (in Enga Province). Some people said that during his funeral, while people were mourning and his body had not yet been buried, word went around that the dead man had called by mobile phone and named a woman, saying that she had taken his heart and that this had caused his death. Male relatives of the deceased seized two women and proceeded to torture them with heated iron rods and bush knives, demanding to know where they had put his heart and telling them to put it back. The women were brutally assaulted but could not comply with the men’s requests. One woman died from her injuries. The other, terribly burned, managed to escape, walking the next day to where she received assistance to get to a hospital in another province. She was seven months pregnant and her baby died, suffering burns while in the uterus.

The survivor was Maria, whom I met in another province shortly after she had been discharged after five months in hospital. Despite the dangers of returning home, she was looking for help. Maria was seven months pregnant and her baby died, suffering burns while in the uterus.
forward to being reunited with her husband and children, and she wanted to have her innocence declared publically through a court hearing. I decided to go and meet with the church leaders in her home community. They were alarmed and raised several concerns.

**Concerns of the Community**

Concerns raised by the community included the following:

- They feared further violence and being blamed for being a supporter of the accused.
- They worried, too, that Maria had admitted (under torture) to being a witch, so why try to support such an evil person?
- They were confused, saying that they were Christians, yet they admitted that they believed in witchcraft.

I consider these three points in turn.

**Fear of further violence.** What if Maria returned and something would go wrong—for example, if someone would get sick and die? In such an instance Maria might be accused again, and then those who had helped her return would also be blamed. Some said that we should get “permission” first from those who had tortured her. Then there would be less likelihood of others being blamed.

Not everyone had been against Maria. Some said that they had tried to help her but were accosted by men armed with axes and bush knives and that they abandoned attempts to help, lest they too be badly injured or even killed. Remembering such violence and the torture were over 40 percent of her body, people did not want to risk a repeat episode. Why return and risk further violence? Could she not remain elsewhere and let remembrance of the whole incident gradually fade away?

**Why support a person who has admitted to being a witch?** In many cases I hear people saying that the accused person admitted to being a witch. For example, in the case of Kepari Leniata, a young woman burned alive in February 2013 in Mount Hagen (Western Highlands), most people I have spoken with tell me that they believe she truly was a witch because she had admitted it, and two women from Simbu had corroborated this evidence, saying that they had seen her cook and consume the heart she had stolen from a young man.

In response to such claims, I ask whether the confession was made while the accused was being tortured. In most cases it appears that confession was extracted under extreme torture. People say that they have to torture the truth out of the accused. How reliable is confession under torture? As Nick Schwartz notes in his book *Thinking Critically about Sorcery and Witchcraft,* some people confess their guilt, hoping that their assailants will simply kill them and thus relieve them of the hell of prolonged torture.

David Bosch, writing on the experience of witchcraft in Africa, asks why people admit to doing things that they could not have done, even in their wildest imagination. He argues that people interiorize the vision and values of their culture and are unable to break out into alternative frameworks. He sounds a warning that “any campaign against witches always results in strengthening people’s fear of witches and consequently their acceptance of the theory.”

Even before a confession, there is a tendency in PNG to presume that the accused is guilty. If a diviner points to a person, that person is automatically presumed guilty. Such persons, once they have been accused, tortured, or expelled from the community, have little chance of successfully defending their innocence. When Catholic sisters came to intervene in the case of a woman being tortured near Mendi in the Southern Highlands Province in 2012, some people called out, “Sanguma i kam” (witches are coming). Fortunately, even though they were frightened, the sisters were not deterred by such accusations. For most people, however, it is a terrifying thought that, if they defend the accused, people might point to them—and then how would they prove their innocence?

Even if a formerly accused person were to return, claiming innocence and appearing quite “normal,” this would still be insufficient for some. A health worker gave the example of sleepwalking. He said that persons sleepwalking are not conscious of what they are doing and might have no recall of what they did while sleepwalking. Analogously, the sanguma spirit is believed to leave the body of its host when he or she is sleeping. Later, when such persons awake, they will have no idea what malicious acts the sanguma spirit might have performed while outside of their body.

**Confusion over belief in Christianity and in witchcraft.** Many Christians admitted that they were confused. The group directly involved in the torture are unchurched, but the surrounding community is predominantly Catholic. They renew their baptismal promises every year during the Easter ceremonies, agreeing to “reject Satan and all his works and empty promises.” In doing so, they reinforce their belief in good and evil and the way good and evil can be personified—good personified in Jesus Christ,
and evil personified in Satan. Like most Papua New Guineans, they believe in the spiritual, supernatural, or nonempirical realm. Outsiders might call it a magical worldview.

The church leaders requested a two-day workshop to clarify issues. In November 2013 I facilitated the workshop for about fifty people from the parish. Several topics were shared during the workshop: points from history on witchcraft in Europe, some linguistic clarifications, issues of cultural identity, and lessons from Scripture.

Participants were alarmed to hear that, before the Enlightenment in Europe, thousands of accused witches had been killed there. This historical information was new to them. The reality of witchcraft was not questioned, but the extent of the horror in Europe between 1450 and 1770 brought the response, “We certainly don’t want that to happen here!”

We clarified linguistic terms. Enga people have a traditional belief in yama, which amounts to the personification of the malicious effects of envy. For example, if someone carrying pork or another valued food item meets a person on the way home and is not willing to share, then the resultant ill-feeling (conscious or unconscious) can result in illness or another misfortune for the person or the family of the one carrying the food. People say that experienced elders or a ritual expert might see or hear signs of yama (such as a whistling noise), and as a consequence they might recite a spell telling the person with yama to come with a recognizable sign, such as clay rubbed around his or her eyes, so as to be given food or some other valuable that had been put aside as an enticement.9 Some people in Enga today are reinterpreting yama in terms of sanguma sorcery. This is dangerous, since yama beliefs have traditionally not been associated with the violent torture and killing related to sanguma. It was important to clarify this point so that people could be clearer in their terminology. The debate on language also led to discussion on cultural identity. Are there ways they can prevent customary beliefs of a neighboring culture group from diffusing into their own?

We selected Bible passages, particularly from the Gospels, and noted how Jesus had dealt mercifully with persons possessed by evil spirits, such as in the healing of what appears to be a boy suffering from epilepsy (Matt. 17:14–21). Participants reported that such passages helped them realize how a Christian response should seek healing and not destructive violence. Also, from a Gospel perspective, could it be that evil lies with the accusers rather than the accused?

Study of healing stories in the Christian Gospels led to the issue of belief and decision-making. Participants put it in terms of a fence. If a fence around a garden is strong and intact, then a pig cannot get inside to destroy the garden. Similarly, they could have a “thought fence” to regulate their minds, which could keep them from being troubled by the stories circulating. There are two possibilities here. The fence could separate real from unreal, thus allowing a person to say that they do not believe in the power of sorcery. The other possibility is to have the fence separate real powers, keeping the power of witchcraft outside the protective fence. Several participants witnessed that they were no longer afraid of sorcery or witchcraft, and this change left them feeling confident and free—in other words, for them, ideas of sorcery were disempowered. Those Christians who continued to entertain such thoughts about witchcraft stories were allowing them inside the fence and so experienced confusion due to conflicting beliefs. Thus it was not so much a matter of believing or not believing in the reality of evil, but of having one’s faith commitment provide a sense of security in the face of evil power.10

A Return Visit

After the workshop, one weekend in November 2013 Maria and her husband came with me to Enga. As she approached the area where she had been tortured, she said she was feeling comfortable, but her body language indicated otherwise, as she pulled the hood of her jacket down over her face. Then, as we drove up in the hills, upon seeing her house across the valley, she pointed and spoke just one word, “Home.” There was a moving nostalgia about the expression, for she knew it was still too dangerous to go there. She spent the night elsewhere with her married daughter.

The next day she and her husband attended Sunday mass at the local parish church. At the end of mass a leader addressed the congregation of about 500 people, noting her presence. Afterward, the majority of adults came to her warmly with hugs and many tears. Admittedly these churchgoers had had little to do directly with her accusation and torture. Notably, several people present who had been implicated in the accusations and torture did not come to greet her, but kept their distance. Later that afternoon we traveled several hundred kilometers to another province, where she is currently living. Maria reflected as we drove, saying that her accusers must have been jealous of her because she had a good house and garden and enjoyed a happy marriage. Judging from other cases I have encountered, jealousy seems to be a common motive leading to accusations of a person being a witch.

Some weeks later I spoke with several of those who had tortured Maria. They still were convinced that the charges against Maria were correct and that she was responsible for the deaths of three persons. First, she had killed the young man through sanguma witchcraft. Second, in her fear after being accused she had named another woman, thereby accusing her (the one who eventually died) of being a witch. She was therefore responsible for the death of this other woman. Third, since Maria would not put back the heart of the deceased, she had to be tortured in an effort to make her do so. In the process, her unborn baby was killed, so she was responsible for that death as well. Moreover, the men claimed that Maria could possibly be responsible for a fourth serious problem and that there would be trouble and even violence if she returned intending to stay. As far as they were concerned, the only prudent solution was for Maria to forgive and forget—and to stay away.

The men explained their view of the torture. “The reason for torturing Maria was not to kill her. It was not done as a game or for fun. She was tortured when other people who were living in Mount Hagen or Simbu said that she must have placed the heart in a cool place under a waterfall and she would eat it after...
the burial of the deceased.” They were hoping that, with the return of his heart, the deceased would be saved and return to life.

**Christian Community and Witchcraft Accusations**

This account of Maria’s return and the response of the men who had accused her illustrate a number of issues relevant to a missiological response to witchcraft. The men who tortured Maria are not just young men with a blood lust or high on marijuana. They are people caught up in conflicting beliefs about life and death. According to the logic of Melanesian cultural tradition, misfortune is caused by someone else who must be identified. Moreover, if the situation is one of life and death, then it is urgent that the person responsible be found out, in order to force her (or him) to reverse the effects of the alleged sorcery. It is so urgent, in fact, that people are prepared to torture “the truth” out of the accused.

How is one to respond as a Christian in this scenario? Participants in the workshop suggested the image of the fence that keeps them safe in a world where unleashed pigs would cause destruction to the garden inside. The image appeals to those for whom personal faith commitment provides a sense of security.

The image is helpful, but I find shortcomings with it because gaps in a personal “fence” (i.e., a personal weakness of faith) could easily promote a moral causal ontology in which misfortune is ascribed to one’s own wrongdoing. Prosperity theology promotes notions of the better off being blessed by God, and the poor and marginalized suffering because of their sinfulness. There is similarity in the logic of such notions with the practice of demonizing other human beings as evil. We must be wary of interpreting suffering, illness, and death as God’s curse, or in terms of the demonic.

In the PNG context an interpersonal or communal understanding of the causes of evil is more appropriate. Disciplines such as anthropology explain outbreaks of witchcraft accusations in terms of frustration following social disintegration and modernization. Social science treats witchcraft in terms of social processes. Christians refer to sin. Theologians call it the problem of evil. One can view the fence from a communal perspective. But this can lead to abuse if the faithful view themselves as a community virtuously united against a single evil scapegoat.

Conscious of always being a visitor in their presence, I think it is important to listen to people. Still, I challenged them to think beyond the fence. Christians may shelter behind a fence of security, but does not the witness of the Gospels urge us to help people change their interpretive framework, to turn from returning evil for evil, and to take responsibility personally or communally for what is going wrong in society—outside the fence? Misfortune need not come from Satan; it can arise from our own injustice. The Gospel teaches us to help the weakest and most vulnerable members of society—the orphans and widows, who are often the very target for witchcraft accusations. Leaving ontological questions about reality aside, we cannot ignore that there is a commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” Is not the Christian community urged to find alternatives to the violence associated with witchcraft accusations? People have terms in their own language for envy and jealousy. Can we not name envy for what it is? Would this mean deliverance from selfishness rather than spiritual warfare?

Most people prefer the security of the fence, but some have responded in ways that go beyond faith as security. Following the workshop and Maria’s visit, some people in the parish have committed themselves to making sure that witchcraft accusations and torture will not recur in their area. Health workers are expending extra effort to offer a biomedical explanation for illness. The local Legion of Mary group has invited several women suspected of being witches into their Legion group, where they will be protected. Others promise to remind the community that violence has legal consequences and that they will support Maria if she takes her assailants to court. The context here is that of the community trying to find ways to protect potential victims, while interacting with the invisible forces associated with the fundamental issue of insecurity and the uncertainties of life.

**Notes**


2. The term is similar to the term “sangoma” used in Africa for diviners or traditional healers. See P. Maurice McCallum, “‘Sanguma’—Tracking Down a Word,” *Catalyst* 36, no. 2 (2006): 183–207.

3. In recent times people have come to view the spirit creature also in other forms, even as a helicopter or a computer virus (Bishop Anton Bal in an address to a clergy conference in Mount Hagen, July 24, 2013).


5. The term “victim” can be used in different senses. Most local people refer to the victim as the person made ill or killed by the sanguma. Most outsiders refer to the victim as the person accused of being a witch (sanguma).

6. Talk of this new type of sorcery puts the blame on women, saying that Enga women who had gone to Simbu to buy magic for restraining unfaithful husbands had mistakenly brought back sanguma as well.


9. There is an expression for this presentation in Enga: *yama ngenge yukiing* (literally: pulling out the yama teeth).

10. The issue of security, including “spiritual security,” is an important point raised in Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005).

11. Interview with male relative at Tieliposa, March 22, 2014.


Healing Communities: Contextualizing Responses to Witch Accusations

Steven D. H. Rasmussen, with Hannah Rasmussen

Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. —Hosea 4:4, 6

When I returned to the church I had attended for a decade in Tanzania, I preached on witchcraft. I knew that Deborah, the woman sitting next to me, had ministered as a pastor’s wife for forty-nine years. I did not know she was suspected of being a witch.

Just two months earlier outside Deborah’s home, a crowd of young men with clubs, machetes, and stones surrounded her, suspected of being a witch.

A young neighbor woman, Ellen, crawled in the dust toward her, begging, “Stop strangling me!”

Deborah raised her hand to God and said, “If I am a witch, may I die.”

A Fatal Epidemic

Witchcraft accusations are a fatal epidemic in Tanzania, leading to an average of ten murders per week. Among the Sukuma people of northwest Tanzania, a witch (mchawi in Swahili) is someone people accuse of using witchcraft (uchawi) to harm others through secret, evil means. Sick neighbors and family members readily voice suspicion that someone has harmed or bewitched them. Accusations turn to threats to “treat” the problem. If a suspected witch is fortunate, he or she is beaten, or bewitched them. Accusations turn to threats to “treat” the supposed witch. When I researched witchcraft accusations in northwestern Tanzania, I discovered that local pastors had had no training on how to address witchcraft accusations in their congregations. In the “Search IBMR” database (www.omsc.org/searchibmr/index.php), an important resource in missions and world Christianity, I located no articles on sorcery or witchcraft in sixty years. According to Andrew Walls, “Witchcraft is beyond the reach of Western theology. [Westerners said and say] ‘It doesn’t exist. It is an imaginary crime.’... I have seen no pastoral theology book that tells you what to do if someone comes to you and says, ‘I am a witch. I kill people.’” Yet African theologian Laurenti Magesa writes, “Witchcraft and polygamy... are the most prevalent and intractable challenges to the Church today. Of the two, witchcraft is obviously the most widespread even in African Christian communities and at various levels of the Church’s structure.”

Pastors should be bringing healing to their communities, but their lack of context-specific understanding can be disastrous. If someone is ill, misdiagnosis leads to the wrong treatment. If someone is ill, misdiagnosis leads to the wrong treatment. A diagnosis that blames another person for someone’s illness can be deadly for the accused—the supposed witch. When I researched witchcraft accusations in northwestern Tanzania, I discovered that local pastors had had no training on how to address witchcraft accusations in their congregations. In the “Search IBMR” database (www.omsc.org/searchibmr/index.php), an important resource in missions and world Christianity, I located no articles on sorcery or witchcraft in sixty years. According to Andrew Walls, “Witchcraft is beyond the reach of Western theology. [Westerners said and say] ‘It doesn’t exist. It is an imaginary crime.’... I have seen no pastoral theology book that tells you what to do if someone comes to you and says, ‘I am a witch. I kill people.’” Yet African theologian Laurenti Magesa writes, “Witchcraft and polygamy... are the most prevalent and intractable challenges to the Church today. Of the two, witchcraft is obviously the most widespread even in African Christian communities and at various levels of the Church’s structure.”

Discovering Relational Pathology

During our first three years in Tanzania, my family was sick forty times—and then we stopped counting. Along with culture shock, I had hepatitis A, malaria, and panic attacks. We buried a stillborn daughter. I thought God had called me here to serve as principal of a Pentecostal Bible school—then why the pain? I taught on Job. I discovered that virtually all the ministers I taught had lost children. John Mwanzalima, a pastor and school administrator and my next-door neighbor, supported me through this time. At yet another funeral for a friend’s child, he said, “This is normal trouble. We have all experienced this.”

Whereas Western people tend to underemphasize the relational facets of life, northwestern Tanzanians in general see relationships as the key to everything. They therefore seek relational explanations and cures also for their suffering. In May 1996, nine hundred people drowned when a ferry sank in Lake Victoria. Tanzanians accused the president of having sacrificed people for political power. I did not understand this mentality. In growing up, I thought of witches as just neighborhood kids in Halloween costumes. My Scandinavian American parents preached in Pentecostal churches, but they did not blame witches or cast out demons. As I learned a new culture and language, taught in Swahili, and developed friendships with Tanzanian church leaders such as John Mwanzalima, I increasingly wanted to know how these people explained sickness and death. When I was a student at Trinity International University in Illinois, Paul Hiebert, Tite Tiéno, and Robert Priest taught me to analyze worldviews. I read a study of 752 illness episodes in 68 cultures. In 15 percent of the cases, people believed that biomedical causes were involved. In another 15 percent they blamed the sick person for a moral failure. But 42 percent blamed someone else’s envy for causing their illness.
or anger. I learned that “for most peoples of the world, there are no faultless deaths.”

What did Tanzanians believe? In the classes I taught at Lake Victoria Christian College, I changed from a lecturer to a listener. For three years I interviewed people in Swahili about their experience of sickness and death. I participated in daily life, church services, exorcisms, and funerals, recording over 100,000 words of field notes. The stories from my research consistently showed that both life’s successes and its serious suffering depended on relationships. The people assumed that cases of malaria, for instance, happened for a reason; they would ask, “Who sent the mosquito?” While sometimes people blamed demons or ancestor spirits, usually they accused a relative or neighbor of bewitching them through invisible means. Mwanzalima told me that every time someone is seriously sick or dies, the relatives ask who caused it, speculating about the identity of the witch.

Healers Who Harm

While I was conducting my research, Mwanzalima’s own sister-in-law was hacked to death with a machete after her husband died. People believed that she was a witch and had caused his death, because she had argued with him before he died. In addition, people knew that she had had three previous husbands, each of whom had died. To avenge her latest husband’s death, his relatives hired machete assassins. Most likely, these relatives consulted a neotraditional healer (mganga wa kinyeji, literally local healer), who identified Mwanzalima’s sister-in-law as the witch (michawil) who had caused this death. The distinction between and the relationship tying together these two roles are key for understanding witch accusations. A healer is a public figure who claims to be able to discover the causes of misfortunes through divination and to treat them. The divination often identifies some other person, a witch, as the cause. Healers’ treatments include herbs, charms, and rituals understood to have social, spiritual, and physical effects. Neotraditional healers are available and popular. In fact, a Tanzanian scholar estimates that Tanzania has between 50 and 125 times more traditional healers than biomedical doctors (for the continent as a whole, he writes that “about 80 percent of the population . . . relies on traditional medicine as their primary health care”).

Koen Stroeken, a medical anthropologist, tries to explain the social and psychological process in neotraditional healing: Sick people among the Sukuma of northwest Tanzania assume serious illness has a relational root. Perhaps the ancestors or the community are inflicting disease upon them as punishment for an unknown offense. They worry that perhaps people think they are proud or have not shared—two of the worst possible offenses in Sukuma culture. For instance, if someone puts a tin roof on his house when everyone else in the village has only a thatch roof, he might fear that envious neighbors will bewitch him. Sick people feel shame for their misdeeds, but are not sure what they did wrong or how to fix the problem.

In order to understand the divination process—in effect, their “medical examination”—Stroeken became a Sukuma healer. He says that during the patient-healer consultation it is the ancestors who speak through the mouth of the healer or communicate through the healer’s analysis of a sacrificed chicken. Healers identify with the patient’s anxiety that the whole community is condemning them. Next, the healer tries to identify incidents that connect this sense of shame to one offended ancestor or an individual, a witch. In half the cases, Stroeken found that “the oracles identify a witch.” Usually the person named as a witch is a relative of the patient, but it could be a neighbor, a lover, or anyone else in a significant relationship with the patient. The healer minimizes the patient’s offense by emphasizing how evil it is for the witch to inflict illness on another person. By transferring the patient’s shame to someone else and trading uncertainty for a specific cause, healers are able to make the patient feel better. But in doing so they have seriously hurt someone else by labeling her or him as a witch. As the patient tells others of the diagnosis and treatment, the accusation against the newfound witch spreads throughout the community.

Deborah’s Case

Deborah’s relational problems began when her daughter-in-law, Neema, moved in with Deborah’s son, Marko, before they married. Deborah and her husband, a pastor, initially did not approve. It did not help that Neema was from a different country and tribe. The family eventually accepted Neema when she became pregnant and married Marko. The couple moved next door to Deborah and her husband, and Deborah and Neema became close. Later, however, Neema began consulting neotraditional healers, angering her religious in-laws, and their relationship disintegrated. Marko was unable to reconcile his wife and his parents. Neema reacted with anger at his interference, and the two stopped sleeping together. Eventually she moved back to her own family in her native country, and Marko, taking a second wife, moved away.

After some time, Neema came back to live with her in-laws. Her eleven-year-old son was frequently sick. He sometimes lost consciousness, and local pastors thought he was demon possessed. Neema began to visit healers again, seeking a solution and an explanation for her suffering. Deborah told her not to bring these spiritual influences upon their household, recommending prayer or hospital treatment instead.

The healer undoubtedly knew that the two women did not get along and probably suggested that Deborah was the cause of Neema’s suffering, because Neema soon began telling the neighbors that Deborah was a witch. At a wedding they both attended, Neema warned the bride not to open Deborah’s gift, saying, “It has a python inside.” Neema told neighbors that Deborah kept a python in a cupboard but refused to let anyone see it or kill it. Then Ellen, one of Neema’s friends, became sick, and she began wailing, “Deborah, Deborah, why are you trying to kill me?” Ellen’s husband, frantic for a cure, called his relatives and hired young men to kill the witch—Deborah.

As the young men with machetes surrounded Deborah, a village leader intervened, crying out, “Don’t touch that woman!” The police grabbed her and put her in jail to protect her from vigilante “justice.” Early the next morning her other son arrived to take her from the village to safety in the city. The village relaxed, having treated the problem, though with costly side effects.

A Tanzanian scholar has estimated that Tanzania has between 50 and 125 times more traditional healers than biomedical doctors.
**Treatment Options**

As I sat next to Deborah, I knew nothing of her story. But I did know that many Tanzanians feared and blamed witches. When I began preaching about witchcraft, I wonder what Deborah expected me to say.

For my part, I had several options available. I could have approached witchcraft as a Western anthropologist, using my research just to describe the situation or to write an ethnography. Then I could have gotten a position teaching at an American university rather than intervening locally. Or I could have argued for an American worldview, that sickness is not caused by the envy people see but by germs invisible to the naked eye. I could have compared this incident to witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts, and throughout Europe. I could even have claimed that during the Enlightenment Westerners progressed beyond believing in “superstitions” and “magic.”

But claiming superiority over Africans is not only self-serving, it also immediately breaks any relational credibility. For instance, after the 2007 election violence in Kenya, the International Criminal Court of the Hague called Uhuru Kenyatta to trial—and unwittingly helped him win the 2013 election. According to the New York Times, “Uhuru and Ruto were skillful at mobilizing their communities by capitalizing on Kenya’s painful colonial history and the universal human tendency to dislike being lectured.”

Likewise, when an outsider labels East Africans as criminals who violate a witch’s human rights, their efforts may backfire or at least make locals hesitant to work with them. At a seminar I facilitated in Tanzania, one of my students, now a radio announcer, quoted God’s law from Exodus 22:18: “The UN has its constitution, and Tanzania has its constitution, which talk about human rights. But we have ours, which we must obey. It says, ‘you shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.’”

I could have ignored the issue, as do many missionary-founded churches in northwestern Tanzania. Catholic, mainline, and standard evangelical churches such as the Africa Inland

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**Noteworthy**

Announcing

“Theological and Philosophical Responses to Syncretism” will be the focus for the Lund Mission Studies Open Seminar 2015, to be held March 23–24 at Lund University, Lund, Sweden. The intent of the seminar is twofold: to elaborate the consequences of syncretism (1) for the Christian faith and (2) for philosophical and empirical research into Christianity. Information can be found at www.teol.lu.se/forskning/konferenser-och-symposier/tprs-2015.

“Colonial Christian Missions and Their Legacies” is the theme of an international conference to be held April 27–29, 2015, at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. The conference will explore the memorialization, articulation, and representation of histories of Christian missions within post-colonial and not-yet-postcolonial contexts. For information, go to http://australianstudies.ku.dk/staff/claire_mclisky/postdoctoral_project. Assistance with travel costs is available for postgraduate students and early-career researchers.

The Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, will host an international conference entitled “Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical Theology in Africa,” June 3–5, 2015. The conference will examine both current debates surrounding ecumenical theology in Africa and practical divides—denominational, theological, and contextual. For information, e-mail Heather Griffiths, hgriffiths@uwc.ac.za. Registration will close on May 15, 2015.

The 2015 consultation of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of the Missionary Movement and World Christianity, to be held June 25–27 at Yale Divinity School, will address the theme “Religion and Religions in the History of Missions and World Christianity.” This annual event is sponsored by the Centre for the Study of World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, U.K., and by Yale Divinity School and the Overseas Ministries Study Center, both in New Haven, Connecticut. For further information, see http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/Yale-Edinburgh.

The 2015 annual meeting of the Association of Professors of Mission (APM) will be held June 18–19, at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. The meeting will consider the titles that educational institutions worldwide use for their mission studies programs as a window onto how educators understand their relationships to the missio Dei. Potential presenters are invited to submit a title for their paper along with a 150–200 word abstract and a 30-word biography to APM president Nelson Jennings at jennings@omsc.org by February 13, 2015.

“Missio-logoi: The Many Languages of Mission” will be the theme for the 2015 American Society of Missiology (ASM) annual meeting, set for June 19–21 at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. The conference will include a symposium on publishing in the field of missiology. Confirmed keynote speakers include Kirsteen Kim (Leeds Trinity University, U.K.), Terry Muck (Louisville Institute), and Lamin Sanneh (Yale University). For the call for papers and more information on the conference, see the ASM website, asmweb.org.

A conference entitled “African Christian Biography: Narratives, Beliefs, and Boundaries” will be held October 29–31, 2015, in Boston, Massachusetts. Hosted by Jonathan Bonk, M. L. Danell, and Dana L. Robert (all Boston University), the gathering offers the opportunity to reflect on the progress made by the first twenty years of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography (www.dacb.org) and to identify new directions in the use of biography and autobiography for the study of African Christianity. Potential presenters should submit a topic description and brief vita to Michéle Siggi, dacb@bu.edu, by February 27, 2015. The Center for Global Christianity and Mission at Boston University School of Theology is offering subsidies to enable the participation of presenters. For further details, see www.dacb.org/what-is-new.html.

**Personalia**

Elected. David Platt, as president of the International Mission Board (IMB), on August 27, 2014, by board trustees. IMB, which works with the churches of the Southern Baptist
Church have tended to tell people that belief in witchcraft is superstition: “Do not believe it, talk about it, or seek treatment from healers.” Implicit in some of these statements is an imported cessationist theology, a claim that we have progressed beyond miracles to rational examination of Scripture. People who attend these churches nevertheless talk about witchcraft every day; they just avoid the subject when in church. Many interpret the silence to mean that Christ cannot handle their sicknesses, spirits, or witches. Therefore, they continue to address them using non-Christian methods. In these churches, even pastors or their families usually call a neotraditional healer when they are deathly sick.

On the opposite extreme, I could have preached within the local worldview, telling amazing stories about witches and spirits from the pulpit that would make people suspect their neighbors and fear their family. Some spiritual leaders do exacerbate the problem in this way. A retired pastor friend in his seventies went to comfort his widow, she secretly told me not to trust the new pastor because he had caused her husband’s death. Other church members use Christian language like a charm to ward off witchcraft. Instead of using a chicken’s blood for protection, they pray for the blood of Jesus to cover them.13

I could have preached, as many African Pentecostals do, that witchcraft exists, but that Jesus the healer is more powerful than witches, healers, and spirits. In every worship service Pentecostals in our Tanzanian church sing, “There is no God like you,” to affirm that God’s power conquers all powers of darkness, specifically including Satan, evil spirits, and witches. Pentecostal pastors attribute the power of neotraditional healers to demons, not ancestors. Compared with other denominations, Pentecostals are more likely to pray fervently for healing and problems had been caused by the pastor who succeeded him as a means to get his position. The old pastor dismissed this. After all, he had discipled this younger pastor like a son since his salvation as a child. Later, however, the pastor died. When I went to comfort his widow, she secretly told me not to trust the new pastor because he had caused her husband’s death. Other church members use Christian language like a charm to ward off witchcraft. Instead of using a chicken’s blood for protection, they pray for the blood of Jesus to cover them.13

Convention, is the largest denominational missionary-sending body among American evangelicals. Platt, 36, who was serving as pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, Alabama, took up his new office on his appointment. He succeeded Tom Elliff, who had served as president of IMB since March 2011.

Died. Sebastian Karotemprel, SDB, 83, Indian Catholic missiologist, scholar, institution builder, and ecumenical advocate, July 20, 2014, in Shillong, India. Former dean and president of Sacred Heart Theological College in Shillong, where he taught for more than thirty years, Karotemprel also taught missiology at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, 1992–2001. The author or editor of twenty-nine books, he served two terms on the Pontifical International Theological Commission, was the founding editor of the journal Mission Today (formerly Indian Missiological Review) in 1978, established a major theological library at the seminary, and was responsible for developing the seven-storied Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures in Shillong, an anthropological museum of northeastern peoples and cultures. Karotemprel served on the executive committee of the International Association for Mission Studies (1985–88), was president of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists (1999–2000), was secretary of the Office of Evangelization for the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (1988–98), and was a member of the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church.

Died. Arne Benjamin Sovik, 96, Lutheran missionary, administrator, scholar, and author, September 16, 2014, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Born to missionary parents in China, Sovik later returned to China as a missionary, leaving again in 1947. Sovik received a Ph.D. from Yale in 1952 and went to Taiwan for three years. In 1955 he began work at the world mission program of the Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland; his twenty-five years in Geneva were interrupted by four years heading the world mission offices of the Lutheran Church in America in New York City. Following retirement in 1984, Sovik undertook work for the evangelization of Chinese in France, lectured for short terms at a seminary in Indonesia, and edited a newsletter about China.

Died. Johannes (“Jannie”) G. J. Swart, 51, associate professor of world mission and evangelism at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary since 2013, on September 8, 2014, in Pittsburgh, from an apparent heart attack while playing Frisbee with students on the first day of classes. A Dutch Reformed pastor from South Africa, he came to Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he earned a Ph.D., then served as pastor of a Presbyterian Church in Oil City, Pennsylvania.


Died. Isaac Zokoué, 70, theologian, educator, pastor, and peacemaker, September 11, 2014, Bangui, Central African Republic. Zokoué received his doctorate in theology from the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Strasbourg, France. He made a vital contribution to the establishment and running of the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB), formerly known as the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST), in Bangui, Central African Republic, including fourteen years as president of the seminary, following which he oversaw the creation and direction of its doctoral program. Zokoué was prominent in leading national reconciliation conferences and dialogues in his home country.
to share testimonies of supernatural healing and victory over witchcraft as a result.

For instance, a very sick young woman came to Mwanzalima’s house. She sometimes lost consciousness and a strange voice spoke out of her, claiming to be Makata, a genie-spirit (jinn in Swahili from Arabic djinn). Makata said that the lover of the woman’s boyfriend had purchased it during a visit to a neotraditional healer and had sent it to afflict her. To the leaders of the church, this was a spiritual problem with a spiritual solution: they prayed over her for months, inviting me to join in telling the demon to leave. I also reminded her of her identity in Christ. This combined treatment gave her confidence to refuse the demonic voice and freed her from her sickness. It did not harm the boyfriend’s lover, which probably disappointed the demon. The church healed the woman’s physical, psychological, and spiritual problem. But the social epidemic of envy and witchcraft accusations in the community remained unchecked.

A Contextualized Diagnosis

None of these treatment options deals with the side effect of vulnerable community members being persecuted. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiéno say that simply saying either Yes or No to local realities results in a “split-level Christianity.” Rather, they urge that we should respond using “critical contextualization.” This group process begins with careful study of the local situation: they prayed over her for months, inviting me to join in telling the demon to leave. I also reminded her of her identity in Christ. This combined treatment gave her confidence to refuse the demonic voice and freed her from her sickness. It did not harm the boyfriend’s lover, which probably disappointed the demon. The church healed the woman’s physical, psychological, and spiritual problem. But the social epidemic of envy and witchcraft accusations in the community remained unchecked.

We began by discussing the reality of persecution. We gave a voice to those accused of witchcraft by listening to them tell their stories.

We believe our problems are caused by witches. How do we know witches cause harm? We have heard thousands of stories. But is this biblical? In Scripture I see cases where spirits and demons cause suffering, but no example of an evil person causing harm through invisible means—which is what we mean by witch (machawi). The word “witch” (machawi) is used in some Bible translations, but the stories show them to be public figures like a neotraditional healer (mganga). This mistranslation even applies to the verse we sometimes use to justify killing suspected witches, Exodus 22:18, which says “you shall not permit a female sorcerer (machawi) to live.”

But let’s keep reading. Exodus 22:21–24 says, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.” God will judge us and even kill us with the machete if we mistreat widows, orphans, or outsiders. These are the people most often persecuted as suspected witches—accused, banished, beaten, and killed. While Scripture does not teach that witches cause harm, it clearly teaches that we should defend the vulnerable. When we accuse such people we aren’t battling Satan. We’re serving the interests of the ultimate Accuser (the meaning of “Satan”). Is it possible that our problems are not caused by witches, but by God’s judgment for mistreating widows?

The day after this sermon we began a four-day critical contextualization discussion on how to respond to those suspected of being witches. Deborah joined others giving their stories of accusation and persecution as suspected witches. Listening to such unheard stories is one way to shift people’s perspectives. Normally, no one believes a woman suspected of being a witch—unless she is giving a forced confession! If she denies being a witch, the village ignores her denial and chases her out of town or kills her without appeal. We then examined the Bible and Tanzanian law. The conference brought together pastors from the region who were from Catholic, Mennonite, Church of Christ, Africa Inland Church, and Pentecostal backgrounds. Every one of these pastors believed that witches cause harm, and originally many of them believed that killing witches was biblical. They left the conference with an understanding that God loves everyone and commands the church to love them, too. They discovered that God especially loves widows, the poor, orphans and outsiders—the people who are usually persecuted as witches. Participants in this seminar in turn taught four similar seminars in various regions of northwest Tanzania at the end of 2013. They plan to teach more in 2015.

Grassroots conversations must be complemented by global discussions. Christians of various worldviews need to challenge and sharpen one another. My 2008 dissertation sparked an interest in the people evaluating it, Tite Tiéno and Robert Priest. A conference that we organized, held in March 2013, brought together fifty Christian scholars from Africa and North America who have written about witchcraft or want to learn more. To avoid getting bogged down in metaphysical discussions about the existence of witchcraft, we began by discussing the reality of persecution. We gave a voice to those accused of witchcraft by listening to them tell their stories in the documentary film The Witches of Gambaga. Drawing on the many disciplinary perspectives represented within the group, we examined real cases in small and large group discussions. The participants left with plans to conduct research and present the results during a second conference, to be held at Africa International University in 2016. Samuel Kunhiyop and I are also writing a book, “What about Witches?”, intended for African pastors.

Hope for Healing

Our experiences and the stories we tell ourselves shape how we interpret the world. Understandably, persons who have heard thousands of stories of witchcraft will likely suspect that a witch is the source of their problems. To them, disciplining or removing witches will seem the best treatment plan, despite its cruel side effects. To address the root cause, we must change the diagnosis. New experiences and stories can change people’s understanding
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of what causes specific illnesses or at least help them to respond differently to accusations and persecution of vulnerable people. A student of mine, Joshua Lusato, states, “When I used to talk with Dr. Rasmussen about witchcraft in Tanzania, I thought he was too skeptical. I was sure that at least 90 percent of those accused of being witches really had harmed someone through witchcraft.” I challenged him to return to Tanzania to research the social consequences of witchcraft beliefs.

Lusato’s research provided new experiences and stories that changed his perspective. He found that during the years 2004–11, Mwanza Region police records show an average of sixty-four murders per year in which the motive on record is that the victim was suspected of witchcraft. Eighty percent of the victims were women and most were older people. A suspected killer of the witch was identified in only 10 percent of the cases. Lusato’s wife did a similar study, and found that only 1 percent of the cases had gone to trial. Beyond these statistics are the many more killings that are unreported or do not specifically state “suspected witch” as the motive. In one village he visited Lusato discovered that six older people had been killed as suspected witches in the past eighteen months. Only one of them was listed in the police records. At the conference in Kenya and the seminar in Tanzania, Lusato said, “After doing my own research, I believe that if there is such a thing as witchcraft, 99 percent of these people could attack her again at any time.

Within the churches, when the local spiritual-relational explanation for congregants’ suffering causes others to suffer, pastors need to act as the true healers, developing a new spiritual answer, but also treating the community’s relational tensions. John Jusu, a colleague at Africa International University, has taken this insight to heart. He had observed and participated in the ostracism, persecution, and even killing of accused widows and old women in his home village. After studying deeply what Scripture says about the poor and then talking to the suspected witches, he does not believe they really were witches. He now cares for and defends sixteen widows and over 100 orphans in that village. The level of suspicion of witchcraft against some of these has now diminished simply because they are cared for and accepted as part of a family. He also wisely confronts accusations of witchcraft.

After my sermon, Deborah told me why she had appreciated it. I asked if I could hear her story over lunch. Since this was her first visit to this church since being forced from her village, it seemed God had sent her. She agreed to share her story the next day in our seminar. Pastors who were part of the seminar counseled Deborah, Neema, and neighbors of the family. But a year and a half later Deborah’s accusers have not been brought to justice. Deborah’s children helped her and her husband move to another village because they fear that someone in the village could attack her again at any time.

Through research, in seminars, and even by reading this issue of the INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH, more and more people are beginning to listen to the stories of the accused. I find hope in that fact. Perhaps we are God’s answer to Deborah’s cry.

Notes
1. During June and July, 2013, I (Steven) conducted multiple interviews with “Deborah” (a pseudonym), with her son, and with pastors who have known the family for decades. The pastors also visited the village to investigate this incident and bring reconciliation. Other accounts referred to below (also pseudonymous) are drawn from my doctoral dissertation and the data collected for it. See Steven D. H. Rasmussen, “Illness and Death Experiences in Northwestern Tanzania: An Investigation of Discourses, Practices, Beliefs, and Social Outcomes, Especially Related to Witchcraft, Used in a Critical Contextualization and Education Process with Pentecostal Ministers” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity International University, 2008).
2. According to Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2009 (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Legal and Human Rights Centre, 2010), 21, during the five-year period 2005–2009, a total of 2,585 people were murdered because they were believed to be witches; www.humanrights.or.tz/downloads/tanzania-human-rights-report-2009.pdf.
3. Andrew F. Walls, “A Consultation on Faculty Development and Doctoral Training for Theological Institutions in Africa” (author’s notes, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, Nairobi, Kenya, August 8, 2007).
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 194.
11. Ibid., 166–74.
14. Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénoun, Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 15–29. The critical contextualization process has similarities to “the pastoral circle.” The pastoral circle steps include (1) insertion to listen to local voices, (2) social analysis, (3) theological reflection, and (4) pastoral action. It becomes a circle because, as with critical contextualization, the process is meant to be repeated, working toward increasing truth and transformation. See, for example, Frans Jozef Servaas Wijzen, Peter J. Henriot, and Rodrigo Mejia, eds., The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation (Nairobi: Paulines, 2005).
16. My argument from Exodus 22:21–24 is adapted from a sermon preached in 1649 at the end of an earlier epidemic of witch hunting (quoted in Alan Macfarlane, “Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex,” in Witchcraft, Confessions and Accusations, ed. Mary Douglas [London: Tavistock, 1970], 92, 94; www.alanmacfarlane.com/FILES/witch_asa_1.htm). Did the shift in seventeenth-century preaching contribute to the shift in actions toward suspected witches, or did it result from the shift? My hope is that a change in pastors’ preaching, counseling, and praying today could improve the situations in their communities.
Toward a Christian Response to Witchcraft in Northern Ghana

Jon P. Kirby

The hot afternoon sun is beating down in Ngani, northern Ghana. It is Christmas Day and some fifty elderly women are gathered in the compound of the Catholic Church. They are clearly enjoying themselves, tapping out traditional rhythms on various homemade instruments and dancing single file in a circle. Some chant a mournful refrain while the song leader improvises stanzas about their life. Calabashes of sorghum beer are passed around. It is their annual Christmas party. One would hardly suspect that these women have all been accused of witchcraft and will live out their days in the “witch camp” across the street from the church. Today they will have a full meal, and they will laugh, dance, and sing—a dramatic contrast to the hopeless grind of their lives every other day of the year. For one day a year they are human again.1

Although they are feared by the townsfolk, their confinement needs no walls or guards, for attempting to leave or doing any harm will break their oath to the earth spirit, which will bring instant death. Their mud huts and leaky roofs offer little protection from the torrential rains. The knee-high walls of their compounds deny them privacy and human dignity. Their life lacks the most basic needs: food, water, shelter, and clothing, but most of all, human recognition, companionship, and love. Because of the African formula for identity, “I am because we are,” social rejection means they are denied their very identity as human beings and children of God.

“Why can’t you do something for these poor women?” a friend of mine accusingly asks Fr. Joseph, the pastor. He shrugs. “What more can I do? I can offer only the most basic help, like bringing them water from the river in my pickup, helping to plaster the walls when their huts are about to fall, and giving them some grass thatching before their roofs cave in. I give them medicine when they are sick and some food now and then, but anything else will be taken from them. In small ways, like this party, I try to show them God’s love. How can I give them freedom when outcasts, and helping an accused witch is itself antisocial witchcraft. The clues to finding an appropriate Christian response lie beneath the surface in their traditional worldview and in their response to problems. In this article I probe some of the deeper ethnohistorical underpinnings of the witch camps in search of directions for a more contextualized Christian response. Although the specific features of the Ghanaian situation may differ from those found in other African contexts, this type of foundational analysis is needed in each setting.

The Seen and the Unseen Worlds

In the African world all things are interconnected in a great chain of life that participates in relationships extending in two dimensions: horizontally, among the living in the visible, material world, and vertically, between this world and the invisible world. Though distinct, these dimensions are viewed as part of the same overall reality. In northern Ghana, one routinely sees large kapok trees growing near compounds. These trees are “clothed” with a strip of traditionally woven white cotton cloth because a diviner has revealed to them that their life has a bad or a good destiny. If he has a bad destiny, he can change it to a good one through spiritual help. Life continues until the person dies, and if he has a good destiny, he becomes an ancestor; if a bad destiny, he becomes a spirit of the wild. A spirit of the wild

Before a new child is born, the spirit [ancestral or tutelary spirit] tells God all that will happen during its lifetime. God gives his approval, and the child is born with its special destiny. The person will have good fortune or bad in life. This shows if he has a good or a bad destiny. If he has a bad destiny, he can change it to a good one through spiritual help. Life continues until the person dies, and if he has a good destiny, he becomes an ancestor; if a bad destiny, he becomes a spirit of the wild.
Witchcraft involves much more than individual "witches" and their victims. In its most pernicious form it involves whole communities.

relate to various agents of life and follow a hierarchical order of greater to lesser life extending from God, the source of life at the broadest transterritorial level, through the created earth spirits and divinities with less life at the territorial level, then to ancestors at the familial level, and finally to tutelary spirits with the least life at the individual level. The life-negating forces of witchcraft are normally associated with problems at the more restricted individual or personal level, but they also affect the broader familial and territorial levels. Indeed, the individual expressions may be only symptoms of an extensive malaise, for in its broadest conceptualization, it is any antilife force. These antilife forces manifest themselves differently at each level, but the term "witchcraft" can be applied to any of them.

Earth Shrines and Witchcraft

Life-negating acts at the level of the family—such as a youth attacking or cursing an elder—are witchcraft because they disrupt the harmony and integrity of family life in both its horizontal and vertical dimensions, causing a "spoiled house" and resulting in a loss of vitality and the untimely deaths of its members. At the community or territorial level, acts that threaten the horizontal social and political life of people, such as illicit sex in the bush, homicide, or war, are witchcraft because they bring about a state of ritual pollution, or "spoiled earth," in which life-negating forces prevail. Even worse ritual contamination was thought to result from spilling a witch's blood. Early sources speak of witches in the south being executed through strangulation and drowning to avoid this blood-contamination. In the north they were (and still are) beaten or stoned to death to avoid having their blood touch the ground. When the vitality and fertility of the earth are killed, only pain and suffering are harvested. Children and animals die, crops fail, and people fall victim to unlikely accidents and other misfortunes. War, in particular, causes this perilous state of pollution and creates an urgent need for special rituals of restoration. As one informant told Robert Rattray, "The land is a bitter thing, it will cast out, finish your house [if you refuse to purify it]." To redress this situation and revive the earth, the elders, chiefs, and people must rely on the earth priest (ten'daana). Harmonious relations can be restored only by a ritual of purification called "burying the blood" or "smoothing of the land." Relations in one dimension affect the other; when a break occurs in one dimension, both need mending. Both vertical and horizontal mediation is needed.

Although witchcraft can refer to antilife forces at any of these levels, the greatest threat is always to the community. Earth shrines, which are the center of a community's life-force, are the key junctures for the maintenance and renewal of relations between the seen and unseen worlds, and they are thus the primary locus for the control of witchcraft. All witch camps, such as those at Ngani and Gambaga, are located within the parameters of an earth shrine that is in the custody of an earth priest.

A History of Antilife

The rise in accusations in the north cannot be understood without considering the region's historical accumulation of antilife forces, especially communal divisiveness, at the horizontal level. The kingdom of Dagbon—where the five witch camps in northern Ghana are located—is the most powerful centralized chiefly state in northern Ghana. Its people, the Dagomba, are ruled by a king, the Ya Na, and his subchiefs. They coexist with and exercise control over the Konkomba, a nonchiefly people, whom they previously enslaved. The Konkombas' subservience to the Dagomba as owners and the Konkomba as slaves. The chiefs maintained political power over the Konkomba and made ritual roles subordinate to the political. The horizontal (seen) relations were thereby broken and the vertical (unseen) dimensions blocked. The Dagomba and Konkomba were permanently separated by their difference in status, and although ritually subjects of the same earth spirits, their access to the spirit world was subverted.

An Antilife State

After Ghana's independence in the late 1950s, political patronage in successive governments widened the split. In 1979 a new constitution vested in the Dagomba and other traditional chiefs the control of the northern lands on behalf of all northern peoples. This action effectively alienated the Konkomba from their hereditary lands. They reacted in a series of local conflicts,
but the government continued to uphold the authority of the chiefs. In 1992 a major referendum to allow nonchiefly groups such as the Konkomba to have their own chiefs was initiated without success. This led to the devastating 1994 civil war, which engulfed most of the north, from which, after twenty years, the north has yet to recover.

War breeds witchery. Witchcraft involves much more than individual “witches” and their victims. In its most pernicious form it involves whole communities. A Christian response, in order to be effective at the level of individual accusations, must bring “life” to these communities. The church must be a source of “life” not only for individuals but also for the state of Dagbon, especially by healing the breech between the chiefly and nonchiefly groups.

Vincent Boi-Nai, the Catholic bishop of Yendi diocese, has an intuitive grasp of these essentials. Over the last fifteen years he has fostered peace and reconciliation vertically and horizontally—vertically through regular ritual activities such as masses for peace and reconciliation and by ecumenical prayer services that bring together Christians, Muslims, and traditional believers of both the chiefly and nonchiefly tribes; horizontally through activities aimed at facilitating intercultural dialogue, friendship, and trust in all the communities of eastern Dagbon. Boi-Nai’s efforts and those of his priests have met with some success but have also been stymied by politically motivated religious divisions, to which we now turn.

Religious Division

During the colonial era the development of the north had been purposely retarded by the British, who saw the region as a convenient labor pool for the rich cocoa farms and gold mines of the south. Missionaries were excluded, and schooling was limited to children of chiefs. But already in the early 1900s the Missionaries of Africa, called the “White Fathers,” began to establish churches and schools in the areas bordering Burkina Faso. By the 1950s they were establishing schools and literacy programs all across the north, including in the towns and villages of the Konkomba. By the 1960s other Christian groups joined in, leading to literacy programs and Bible translations in the so-called minority languages. By the late 1970s the nonchiefly peoples, as they phrased it, “got their eyes opened”; a new awareness of their minority languages. By the late 1970s the nonchiefly peoples, as they phrased it, “got their eyes opened”; a new awareness of their ethnic identity, lack of political representation, and denial of civil rights and dignity led to a series of ethnic conflicts.

Chiefly politicians soon became wary of the conscientizing effect of Christian missions. By the end of the 1980s, when an economic crisis necessitated alliances with oil-rich Gulf states—which the government leveraged by inflating the number of northern Muslims—the new political rhetoric began to recast the old oppositions in religious terms. Although the number of Christians was about the same in each group, the nonchiefly groups became associated with Christianity, and the chiefly groups with Islam. The resultant “aid” included roadside mosques, scholarships to fundamentalist schools, and modern weapons that were used with devastating effect in the 1994 war. Worst of all, the war was portrayed as a religious conflict, thereby obscuring the real issues and leading to the present state of institutionalized religious division.

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Chiefs and Earth Priests

Strained horizontal relations disrupt the vertical dimension, and vice versa. The political and religious hostility in eastern Dagbon between the chiefly and nonchiefly peoples also disturbed relations in the spirit world, leaving both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions in a constant state of ritual pollution. The witch camps are not the problem; they are part of a dysfunctional repair system that aims at restoring a harmonious unity. The camps are of two types—those in eastern Dagbon, like Ngani, and the camp in western Dagbon, at Gambaga—and have very different functions.

In western Dagbon, where there are no Konkomba, the chiefs are also the earth priests. They thereby combine the two roles needed for unified mediation. As earth priests, they administer a ritual “washing of the stomach” to nullify antilife forces and reestablish vertical relations with the unseen world. As chiefs, they provide the civil authority needed for building trust horizontally in order to send those accused as witches back to their communities.

But their authority is not always heeded. Accusations are affected by the relative social influence of the accusers versus the accused. A strong accuser, for example, can insist on another trial by ordeal to which a weak accused must submit. In the end, one’s communal influence determines the outcome. Furthermore, accusations are made in the heat of the moment, and people need time to cool off before trust can be restored. When the community is adamant or the accuser has great influence, the accused are sent for a time to the special camp at Gambaga, where they await reintegration. Here the system is able to function moderately well by keeping accusations in check and offering some protection for the weak, who are always those most at risk. But even where the system works, it is in need of life-giving grace.

In eastern Dagbon, where both groups reside, the situation is entirely different. In Ngani the accused can never return home, but at Gambaga many will eventually be reintegrated. The Gambaga Outcasts Project has successfully helped more than fifty to return; in contrast, if accused women at Ngani go home, they will be killed. At Ngani both the tribes and the roles have been separated. The Dagomba chief and his people are on one side of town; the Konkomba with their earth priest are on the other. The chief mediates among the Dagomba only in the seen world, and the Konkomba earth priest mediates for his people only in the unseen. These divisions are aggravated by many other changes that have occurred, affecting everything from the economy to gender relations.

The Weight of History

The history of slavery and oppression in northern Ghana has led to a series of interethnic conflicts, culminating in a civil war with religious overtones. The legacy of slavery continues to breed disunity throughout the north through the unequal statuses that were fixed during the colonial era and in the government’s persistent denial of the rights of nonchiefly peoples. Conditions have now worsened with increased infra-ethnic rivalry between the two major Dagomba clans in a dispute over their chieftaincy. These tensions and anomalies have led to an antilife eruption of individual accusations. Witch camps are increasing in size, and new camps are being formed. The camp at Naboli, which is only for Konkomba witches, was established in 2008. An undercurrent of witchery now threatens the security and quality of life for everyone in northern Ghana.

The camps in Dagbon are faulty attempts to deal with the problem of evil. They are only symptoms of a deeper problem: the peoples’ world is broken, and they are no longer able to repair it. The traditional forms of mediation are obstructed by the continued separation of the two ethnic groups and their mediatory
roles. This division prevents the unitary mediation that, vis-à-vis their shared worldview, is needed to reestablish a harmonious, life-sustaining environment for all. Politically and religiously, they live in an imbalanced state that will not get better by itself.

Tensions between people groups are not usually seen as playing a key role in witchcraft accusations, but in this case they are crucial. From both a traditional and a Christian perspective, their state of anomie is alienation from God, the source of life. Our primary response as Christians, then, must be to restore relations in both the seen (with the people) and unseen (with God) axes in life-giving ways. In the light of this analysis, Bishop Boi-Nai is bringing new life through his rituals and peacebuilding. Fr. Joseph, in small but significant ways—as the accused witches laugh, dance, and sing—brings life to those accused. And the Presbyterian Church is following the lead of the Spirit by bolstering the traditional roles of the Gambaga earth priest/chief to set up his power. From both a traditional and a Christian perspective, their shared worldview, is needed to reestablish a harmonious, life-sustaining environment for all. Politically and religiously, they live in an imbalanced state that will not get better by itself.

Conclusion

Christian responses to African problems need to make better sense to the people than the traditional ones and thereby be good news in their world. Rather than simply condemning the traditional world along with the way it understands its problems and goes about solving them, the church needs to get its hands dirty, enter in, and begin to heed the much-maligned beliefs and rituals of this world. It needs to understand these antilife structures in terms of the institutions of injustice, disunity, and violence in which the people have been immersed, along with the historical processes that have produced them. The ways in which Christians address the antilife atmosphere of witchcraft can become more real, more integral to their worlds, by following the clues offered in the traditional though often faultless responses of the people.

Notes


2. The Internet offers dozens of recent articles, films, and blogs on the topic of witchcraft in Ghana.

3. By pursuing sensationalism, promoting highly individualistic Western values over communalist values, and emphasizing independence over solidarity, the media have misdirected the public and diverted attention from deeper issues. For the Presbyterian Church’s responses to the witch camp at Gambaga, see African Christianity Rising by James Ault, http://jamesault.com/documentaries/africa-project.


5. Paul Gifford argues that charismatic Christianity in southern Ghana has taken on dimensions of traditional religion, including witchcraft, spiritual causality, and destiny; see his Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004), 83–90.

6. Contemporary authors are beginning to account for the durability of “irrational beliefs” such as witchcraft by expanding the parameters of traditional Western disciplines to include Ghanaian perspectives and meanings. See references in Kirby, “Ghana’s Witches.”


8. See Margaret Joyce Field, Search for Security: An Ethno-psychiatric Study of Rural Ghana (New York: Norton, 1960), 87, for the importance of such protection.


10. On life and antilife in connection with witchcraft, see Birgit Meyer, Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, for the International African Institute, 1999), 86.


13. Rattray, Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland, 1:258.

14. There are no shrines to God, but when the people need help for a transterриториal “God problem,” they go to the Malams (itinerant Muslim teachers, expert in the Quran and adept at making amulets and “spiritual medicine,” who usually apply quranic suras to African problems).


17. “The shrine knows its master” is the phrase the Konkomba use to designate their custodianship of earth shrines.

18. In 2002 Shu Gong and I co-facilitated a weeklong workshop that used sociodrama and culture-drama techniques in which ten Dagomba and ten Konkomba leaders reenacted conflict situations but in reversed roles. The workshop led to greater understanding and respect for one another and was a significant step toward reconciliation. See Jon P. Kirby, Culture-Drama and Peacebuilding: A Cobra Is in Our Granary: A Culture-Drama Workbook (Tamale, Ghana: TICCS Publications, 2002); Kirby, “Peacebuilding in Northern Ghana”; Jon P. Kirby and Shu Gong, “Reconciling Culture-Based Conflicts with Culture-Drama,” in Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy, ed. Eva Levent (New York: Springer, 2010), 207–33.


20. Despite these associations, at the time there were actually more Christians among the chiefly groups than among the nonchiefs.


Witchcraft Accusations and Christianity in Africa

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray, “Deliver us from evil.” Such rescue from evil and its consequences is critical for anyone wishing to live by God’s promises in the Bible. For the churches in Africa, evil preeminently includes witchcraft. In Africa, successful Christian ministry (i.e., ministry with significant personal relevance and impact) is impossible unless one takes into account the supernatural evil implied by the word “witchcraft.” Grasping the power and influence of evil, including witchcraft, is critical, not only for realistic pastoral care, but also for understanding African responses to the Gospel throughout Christian mission history. For example, the spectacular growth of African Independent/Initiated Churches (AICs) in the early twentieth century is linked, in particular, to the inability of Western missions to come to terms with the reality of supernatural evil, especially witchcraft, and to articulate a Christian pastoral response to it. Historic Western mission Christianity has generally been perceived to be powerless when it comes to dealing with supernatural evil. Those who are spiritually afflicted and troubled have therefore turned to alternate resources outside the sphere of mission churches—traditional witchdoctors, medicine cults, charismatic prophets, or a combination of these—in search of diagnosis, explanations, and solutions to problems ranging from ill health to infertility to failing economic fortunes.

A century after the emergence of AICs, witchcraft and belief in its destructive power remain resilient in African life and thought. Evil of supernatural provenance requires—and in AICs has called forth—powerful prayers of intervention. These churches deal with witchcraft in the context of activities of prophecy and spiritual warfare. Indeed, the single most important contribution made by indigenous churches toward the renewal of Christianity in Africa has been the integration of charismatic experiences, particularly prophecy, healing, and deliverance, into church life. The pneumatic churches, including here Africa’s independent Pentecostal and charismatic churches, as well as the classical AICs, for whom dealing with supernatural evil is a major pastoral focus, combine biblical notions with traditional witchcraft, medicine cults, medicine cults, or a combination of these—in search of diagnosis, explanations, and solutions to problems ranging from ill health to infertility to failing economic fortunes.

Despite witchcraft’s association with the power of evil, terms and expressions associated with witchcraft can be used positively. Still, the phenomenon is not viewed neutrally; on the whole, its morally ambiguous status is weighted on the side of evil. For example, in the Wimbam area of northwest Cameroon, the word tafi is related to bru and tafa. These all, according to Elias Bongmba, refer to the ability to do extraordinary things, but tafa discourse and practice involve a search for the cause of misfortune. When used positively, the expressions anyen and bayie, or the English witchcraft, normally refer to “genius.” In its more serious usage, however, anyen or bayie refers to a person’s ability to use some supernatural powers. For example, in much of Africa AIDS is understood to be caused by witchcraft. Witchcraft, in the words of Basel Mission church historian Hans Debrunner, is “the idea of some supernatural power of which [human beings] become possessed, and which is used exclusively for evil and antisocial purposes.” This understanding resonates with the biblical material on witchcraft activities (Exod. 22:18, Deut. 18:10, Ezek. 13:17–23, Mark 1:21–28, Luke 9:37–43).

In Africa, belief in the presence and work of evil powers, especially witches, is pervasive; most African traditions conceive of the universe as alive with spirit powers, a place in which evil is hyperactive. Evil itself can be of natural or supernatural origin, and usually a causal distinction is made between physical disease and spiritual disease. A relationship exists between the two causalities, however, for misfortune that emanates from natural causes could be made worse by inimical spiritual powers such as witches. Since it belongs to the realm of the supernatural, witchcraft works in the same manner as sorcery or occult powers, which are themselves basically forces of destruction. Aylward Shorter, who served as a missionary in Africa, states succinctly why witchcraft accusations thrive on the continent.

[They serve as] mechanisms of competition in closed communities [which have] clear boundaries but vague internal structures. . . . [In them] conformity is the yardstick of who is, or who is not, “with us.” The misfit, the innovator, the eccentric, the outsider, the rival quickly becomes [a] threat to the system. . . . New factors and new roles are appearing in traditional human life which fuel social tensions and competition. . . . That is why witchcraft explanations are applicable to urban situations where job competition and inter-ethnic rivalry [are] acute.

The Twi peoples of Ghana understand bayie, which Westerners have translated as witchcraft, as the ability to cause harm to others by use of supernatural powers either alone or in league with other persons of similar orientation. Witches, it is believed, fly in the night and engage in mystical cannibalism. They besiege homes and spiritually suck the blood of victims, which results in the onset of diseases. Witches make people poor by spiritually “eating” their wealth, which means that certain types of poverty are believed to be inflicted supernaturally. Family ties and those on whom one intimately depends are depicted as potential sources of evil, generating apprehensiveness. Sickness and troubles are attributed to envy on the part of relatives and their spiritually powerful allies. In parts of West Africa, witchcraft is popularly referred to as “African electronics,” an indication of its ubiquity. The implications for Africans’ sense of community have been profound.

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supernatural power to harm others spiritually. Victims may be afflicted with a disease or a negative habit that makes it difficult for them to function constructively; they may even be killed.8

**Witchcraft, Early Prophetism, and AICs**

The AICs are noted for their creation of ritual contexts for dealing with supernatural evil, which, in the minds of indigenous recipients of the Gospel, manifests itself in failed pregnancies, poverty, moral deviance, lack of general progress in life, negative emotions, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and general ill-health. Specific ailments such as sickle cell disease, epilepsy, and recently Ebola and HIV/AIDS are also widely perceived as caused by witchcraft. Thus in African Christian history, the medical facilities established by missionaries were relegated to dealing with common minor diseases and ailments such as malaria, coughs, and headaches perceived to be of natural causality. For dealing with supposed supernatural sources of affliction, however, people would commonly bypass these medical facilities to consult with traditional medical practitioners, seeking herbal preparations and other “sacramental” substances infused with the needed spiritual energy. When medical treatment or diagnosis failed to lead to healing, victims and their families typically interpreted the condition as a spiritual disease and then sought the appropriate spiritual center for help.

Harold Turner, who made the study of primal new religious movements a lifelong academic pursuit, lists belief in witchcraft as a key feature in the worldviews that gave rise to independent Christian, or, as he calls them, “prophet-healing” movements in non-Western societies.9 Turner points out that belief in a hierarchy of beings—a pantheon that includes the high God, malevolent divinities made up of lesser gods, earth-born occult powers such as wizards and witches, and benevolent ancestors—is also an element of the primal imagination. By entering into relationship with the benevolent spirit-world, people could receive protection from evil forces such as the powers of witchcraft.10 In the traditional context such protection came through diviners. With the rise of the independent church movement, however, the prophets leading them became Christian alternatives to solutions previously available through traditional religious ritual activity. The soteriological emphases of the AICs included release from sin and supernatural spiritual bondage. These emphases were combined with a dynamic pneumatology in which the Spirit of God was present to heal, deliver, protect, and empower his children.11

The arguments so far indicate an important fact: that in African philosophical thought, witchcraft is real. In support of his own graces of healing and exorcism, Emmanuel Milingo notes that, although in recent times the ministry of deliverance has been played down, the pastoral practice of the Catholic Church has always accepted the power of spirits as real forces in human affairs. These powers of evil, he writes, “are ultimately destructive and enslaving; it is important to recognize them rather than deny them, and to learn to apply the power of the Holy Spirit in healing, so that sick people will not be driven to seek help from an alien and dangerous source.”12 In the Christian mindset, witchcraft is synonymous with demonic activity, and therefore the witchcraft is seen as being people demonized by the devil, or Satan. In most cases the mission denominations, however, dismissed witchcraft as a psychological delusion and a figment of the unscientific indigenous worldview. But beyond translating the Scriptures into the vernacular, negotiating nearly impassible terrains to preach the Gospel, and dealing with the devastating effects of malaria lay the single most important challenge facing mission pastoral ministry, which was the indigenous people’s ardent belief in the power of witchcraft.

**Witchcraft, Mission, and Public Imagination**

Through recordings of exorcisms and the production of films that reinforce conceptions of evil present in current public discourse and imagination, African Initiated Christianity of the pneumatic type plays an important role in perpetuating witchcraft beliefs. The exorcisms and films fall within the realm of spiritual warfare in which Christians are taught to resist the evil.

In street art Sasabonsam, the personification of evil in the religious culture of the Akans of Ghana, is usually painted as a huge, dark, hairy, ugly animal creature. His eyes are bloodshot, he has unusually long claws, and he lives on tall trees in very deep forests. His location in the deep forest suggests a surrealistic and frightful environment. African farmers and hunters return from the forest with stories of encounters with either Sasabonsam himself or some of his cohorts, dwarfs who terrorize people to destroy them. Sasabonsam can also enter the bodies of other animals, making the African forest a place filled with mysterious powers. Some discourses on evil hold that witches and wizards are human agents of Sasabonsam.

In places where unseen powers are believed to be active also in the natural order, hunters and farmers who are attacked by wild beasts may well blame a spiritual agency at work in these creatures. In most traditional African societies extraordinary performance, achievement, or skill, especially in competitive situations, is deemed to require supernatural enablement. Very wealthy people therefore easily come under suspicion of having gained their wealth through blood rituals. When such people have deformities or when any of their close relatives are deformed or disabled in any way, the deformity may be explained in terms of their having visited a shrine, where they exchanged their own or someone else’s normal body for material wealth. In contrast, an exceptionally intelligent student, talented sports personality, or successful musician may be referred to positively as being a **bayie** or **anyen**, simply in appreciation of that person’s extraordinary gifts, talents, or abilities. This positive usage has not been part of the Christian response to witchcraft.

Witchcraft has had implications for Christian mission because many people in Africa, both traditionalists and Christians, process misfortune through a logic that assumes its reality.13 E. A. Asamoah (Ghana) and Gerhardus Oosthuizen (South Africa), among other African scholars, have bemoaned Western missionaries’ denial of witchcraft beliefs as being irrational and backward. No amount of denial on the part of the church, Asamoah maintains, can eliminate belief in supernatural powers from the minds of African Christians. Denial often produces only a hypocritical state of internal conflict for the believers. In official church circles they may pretend that they do not believe in witchcraft, but privately they resort to practices that assume witchcraft.14

Though African Christians are beneficiaries of Western mis-
Christianity and theological education, they have reservations about the type of Christianity they have received. At the level of practical life, they realize that mission Christianity has not engaged constructively with the primal worldview, especially when it comes to traditional notions of spiritual causality. In that light Oosthuizen observes that, because of their deeply Westernized and intellectualized dispositions, missionaries typically have ignored witchcraft, sorcery, and the reality of demons. More recently, religious anthropologist Birgit Meyer has come to the same conclusion, stating that Western Christian missionaries interpreted witchcraft as an activity of Satan but dismissed its negative influence as outmoded superstition. The situation was no better among certain of the African elite who trained to serve as clergy alongside Western counterparts in the historic mission denominations. The failure to engage constructively with the phenomenon of witchcraft meant that these leaders were unprepared to deal effectively with the anxieties, fears, and insecurities that African converts faced regarding witchcraft.

Witchcraft is reinforced in people’s minds both by Christian preaching and by its coverage in the media, where stories abound of the lynching of suspected witches. Accusations of witchcraft, as Ter Haar rightly notes, are made primarily against women and children. Many of the women are old and depressed, and the children are usually from extremely deprived backgrounds or are orphans without responsible guardians. If mothers die during childbirth, it is not uncommon for a surviving child to be accused of having caused the death through witchcraft.

Witchcraft, Christian Media, and Conversion

Accounts of conversion from witchcraft circulate widely through popular religious books such as Snatched from Satan’s Claws. In this book Evangelist Mukendi of the Democratic Republic of Congo is said to tell his personal story of preconversion visits to the supernatural domains of witchcraft. For converts like Mukendi, the vital decisions that affect ordinary lives occur in this supernatural realm. Nigerian Emmanuel Eni’s Delivered from the Powers of Darkness has the same story line. Eni’s testimony includes his participation in a spiritual underworld through which he ruined lives by making pacts with the devil. In modern African Christian discourses on evil and the power of Jesus in unmasking and dealing with these powers, distinctions between Satan and witches have been all but erased. Guided by these beliefs that resonate with traditional ideas of causality, new Pentecostal/charismatic prosperity—preaching churches, like the AICs before them, create ritual contexts of healing and deliverance to deal with the fears and insecurities of the faithful in search of help.

Witchcraft beliefs are reinforced by ongoing media stories, rumors, and perceptions. The 1992 Nigerian video film Living in Bondage, for example, is infused with a neo-Pentecostalist rhetoric of deliverance. In the video, a petty trader named Andy follows a colleague’s suggestion that he obtain some money making medicine. At the shrine, he is expected to exchange the life of his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but then Andy’s wealth begins to disappear when his mother-in-law, his new bride for the instant wealth he seeks. He does so, but when it comes to traditional notions of spiritual causality. In that light Oosthuizen observes that, because of their deeply Westernized and intellectualized dispositions, missionaries typically have ignored witchcraft, sorcery, and the reality of demons. More recently, religious anthropologist Birgit Meyer has come to the same conclusion, stating that Western Christian missionaries interpreted witchcraft as an activity of Satan but dismissed its negative influence as outmoded superstition. The situation was no better among certain of the African elite who trained to serve as clergy alongside Western counterparts in the historic mission denominations. The failure to engage constructively with the phenomenon of witchcraft meant that these leaders were unprepared to deal effectively with the anxieties, fears, and insecurities that African converts faced regarding witchcraft.

Witchcraft and the Prosperity Gospel

The emergence of the prosperity gospel and the popularity it has achieved are a major challenge facing the church in Africa today. Prosperity gospel teaches that God has met all human needs of health and wealth through the suffering and death of Christ. Believers are therefore encouraged to claim these blessings— including insulation from disease, poverty, and sin—by making positive confessions and sowing seeds of tithes and offerings. In an African context in which etiology and diagnoses speak of supernatural agency as the cause of misfortunes, witchcraft is easily invoked to explain the shortfalls of the prosperity gospel. These shortfalls are evident in the fact that, for the majority of those who have imbibed this gospel, poverty and sickness are everyday realities.

The emphasis on health, wealth, promotion, advance, privilege, and power in the gospel of prosperity necessarily implies that those who preach it have a weak theology of pain and suffering. Rather than address the systemic socioeconomic failures brought on African countries and their people by greedy and corrupt leaders, pastors and people alike accept witches and demons as convenient causes of negative life experiences. Explaining poverty in terms of witch activities has led to a situation in which Pentecostal/charismatic healing camps receive not only people accused of witchcraft but also perceived victims looking for divine intervention in their plight. The accusers and the accused turn to the same well in seeking help.

Witchcraft and Spiritual Warfare

In African church life today, especially in its more Pentecostal/charismatic streams, the discourse on witchcraft and the fight against it take place within the context of what has come to be known in contemporary Christianity as spiritual warfare. The term “spiritual warfare” as used in conservative evangelicalism refers to resisting the activities of evil powers through authoritative prayer in order to free victims of those powers from supernatural possession and oppression. Witchcraft has become synonymous with demonology, a Christian reinterpretation of a traditional religious idea. In Africa, whole ministries called “intercessors” are specifically dedicated to the perennial war against demons working against the continent and its member nations. Usually no distinctions are made between the sort of evils perpetrated by witches and those by demons as portrayed in the Bible.

In the 1990s, Redeeming the Land: Interceding for the Nations, by Nigerian charismatic preacher Emeka Nwanpun, articulated the worldview that encapsulates intercessory work for nations against the powers of destruction assigned to them by the devil. The inspiration for a “warfare prayer” mentality comes from
Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10–12).

Interest in spiritual warfare is by no means unique to African Christianity. Partly inspired by European and North American conservative evangelical theologians and evangelists such as Derek Prince, Don Basham, Kurt Koch, Mark Bubeck, and John Wimber, it represents a global movement. Books by Peter Wagner, such as Engaging the Enemy and Warfare Prayer, and by Charles Kraft have been highly influential. Rebecca Brown’s He Set the Captives Free and Prepare for War became so popular in Africa that Nigerian publishers of popular Christian literature broke copyright laws and produced cut-rate editions for distribution throughout the continent. These publications reinforced belief in the workings of demons and evil spiritual powers, of which witchcraft was the most well known. When African Christians read books on the Christian life as spiritual conflict, it is a short step to go from biblical demons to local witches.

According to Charles Kraft, Scripture clearly portrays human life as lived in a context of continual warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. If John could write that “the whole world lies under the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19), then, according to Kraft, we should accept the need for warfare on the part of God’s forces to defeat the enemy.

In civil life, war is associated with the military. With a belief that Christians must engage in spiritual warfare as a backdrop, African pneumatic movements often use militarized language and images to portray their mission. One of the first AICs in West Africa is the Musama Disco Christo Church, a so-called heavenly army that means “The Army of the Cross of Christ Church.” In the early 1990s, Pastor Eastwood Anaba of the Fountain Gate Chapel International in Ghana and an important voice in contemporary African Pentecostalism wrote God’s End-Time Militia: Winning the War Within and Without. In an introduction to a revised edition, Anaba declares, “The voice of the Lord in these end-times is distinct and loud. It leaves us in no doubt concerning what we ought to do as a church. It is loud enough to wake up all those who are in deep slumber on the battlefield. There is a call to war. . . . We are realizing that Christianity is not a game but a titanic conflict against the forces of darkness.”

The book’s cover is designed in military camouflage colors.

Anaba’s book is one of many popular publications on spiritual warfare in contemporary African Christianity. Emeka Nwankpa, mentioned earlier, writes that Jesus Christ has delegated power to born-again Christians, not only over the influence of the devil in the lives of people, but also in spiritual warfare to redeem the land. The leaders of these churches routinely include forms of militarization as part of their public image. Spiritual warfare summits and conferences are heavily advertised in the public sphere, with images showing the lead speakers in actual military outfits. Advertisements for Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the founder of a charismatic church in Ghana, frequently show him wielding a sword, suggesting his power over negative spiritual forces, and he is constantly referred to as an “apostle of strategic warfare prayer.”

Warfare language fits well with the African understanding of witchcraft. At Pentecostal/charismatic prayer vigils and church services, witches are resisted in prayer as demons who afflict God’s people. This movement deals with enemies not by praying for them but by invoking fire from God to burn them. Repeating denunciations (following the leader) of witches in one’s family is therefore an important part of contemporary Pentecostal services in Africa. African Christians are not necessarily oblivious to the fact that certain problems are caused by people in authority and decision makers. Natural explanations are apparent for many of the problems that people face. Nevertheless, even the most mundane problems, from food shortages to corruption, are seen as having their deepest explanations in the actions of powerful figures who manipulate spiritual realities. Fear of supernatural evil and desire for protection from witchcraft are the reason why many people constantly seek power that will effectively protect them.

The search for solutions to spiritual problems has generated a plethora of healing camps and prayer services in both Pentecostal/charismatic and historic mission churches. Prophets specializing in healing, deliverance, and exorcism operate to set people free from bondage; and particular difficulties, including the inability of human reproductive systems to function properly, may be identified as associated with witchcraft. Healing and deliverance centers are heavily patronized by women in search of the “fruit of the womb,” that is, the gift of children.

Witchcraft accusations often emerge when things go wrong in life without any rational explanation. The conclusion reached is usually that the problem lies within existing relationships. Thus at prayer services the power of God is constantly invoked to deal with real, perceived, and imaginary enemies responsible for one’s problems in life. Psalm 35—“Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me”—is much loved for the imprecatory manner in which it calls on the God of Israel to fight one’s battles for him or her by bringing the enemy to ruin, shame, and disgrace.

African Christians are definitely aware of the material reasons for the socioeconomic and personal quagmires in which the continent and its peoples find themselves. At church and prayer services across the continent, prayers are raised asking God to deliver the continent from its difficulties. In October 2014, the metropolitan archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Accra publicly endorsed a call—issued by Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the archbishop of Ghana’s Action Chapel International, a contemporary Pentecostal and prosperity preaching church—to prayer against the “Ebola Demon.” In the West African countries of Ghana and Nigeria, national thanksgiving services endorsed by their governments are held, and intercessions for political leaders and public officeholders are constant features of these religious gatherings. In the run-up to Ghana’s 2004 democratic elections, for example, the recurring theme of the various services was to ask for God’s intervention so as to avoid the chaos that had characterized the political systems and transitions of countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Spiritual warfare is an important underlying theological theme of these national prayer services.

Conclusion

Drawing on a selection from Jesus of the Deep Forest, the prayers of Afua Kuma, an ordinary Ghanaian Pentecostal woman, Kwame Bediako notes that in African Christianity Jesus Christ has been received as one with superior power, able to reduce Sasabonsam to a mere mouse.
he has caught Sasabonsam and twisted off its head.

Sasabonsam is huge, while the mmoatia, short creatures or dwarfs, exist in African folklore as mysterious figures with spiritual powers that come from Sasabonsam. They are believed to be tiny with their feet pointing backward, which is to say that they are weird and ugly, and they “wait for the unwary hunter in the pitch darkness of the night.” 35 The word “Sasabonsam” came into Christian vocabulary as the name for Satan via the translators of the Akan Bible. In Jesus of the Deep Forest, Jesus is presented as conqueror of the world of evil because he has “twisted off the head” of Sasabonsam.36 We see here African Christians responding to the denial of witchcraft through local religious innovation.

In his early study Witchcraft in Ghana, Debrunner makes the telling observation that, by accepting the reality of witchcraft and claiming the power not only to protect against it but also to heal from it, the AICs came into being as theological critiques of the historic Western mission denominations.37 In twenty-first-century Africa, witchcraft and how to deal with its effects on human life and activity continue to be important issues, drawing people into indigenous Christian communities. This movement says much about the resilient nature of primal worldviews in African life and thought. African expressions of Christianity have always been informed not simply by biblical ideas of Satan, demons, and evil spirits, but also by traditional worldviews regarding the sources and causes of evil such as witchcraft.

Notes

2. Ibid., 45.
4. See, for instance, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Conquering Satan, Demons, Principalities, and Powers: Ghanaian Traditional and Christian Perspectives on Religion, Evil, and Deliverance,” in Coping with Evil in Religion and Culture, ed. Nelly can Doorn-Harder and Lourens Minnema (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 85–103. Though wizards are also present in African societies, witchcraft generally involves only females. For convenience, I use the word “witch” to refer to both male and female versions of witchcraft.
8. For earlier work underscoring the importance of witchcraft for mission in Africa, see Robert S. Rattray, Ashanti (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923); Malcolm C. McLeod, “A Survey of the Literature on Witchcraft in Ghana (Excluding the Northern Region), with Particular Reference to the Akans” (B.Litt. diss., Exeter College, Oxford Univ., 1965).
10. See Kwame Bediako, Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1995), 94.
19. For example, see Douglas Akwasi Owusu, The Spectator (November 21, 2009), an account in an important Ghanaian weekend paper of a session at Ebenezer Healing Church to exorcise the spirit of witchcraft from an eleven-year-old girl.

21. The Cape Town Commitment (Cape Town, S.A.: Lausanne, 2010), 64, forthrightly denounces the prosperity gospel as unable to offer lasting solutions or deliverance from poverty.
23. Onyinah, in Pentecostal Escherm, has coined the term “witchdemocracy” to refer to this religious amalgamation of phenomena related to evil. See also Stabell, “Modernity of Witchcraft,” 462.
27. Rebecca Brown, Prepare for War (Springdale, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1987) and He Came to Set the Captives Free (Springdale, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1992).
31. Nwankpa, Redeeming the Land, 10.
32. Ellis and ter Haar, Worlds of Power, 92, 95.
35. Bediako, Jesus in Africa, 10.
36. Ibid.
37. Debrunner, Witchcraft in Ghana, 2.
Christianity 2015: Religious Diversity and Personal Contact

This two-page report is the thirty-first in an annual series in the IBMR that lays out in summary form an annual update of significant religious statistics. The series began three years after the publication of the first edition of David Barrett’s World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE; Oxford Univ. Press, 1982). The WCE itself was expanded into a second edition in 2001 (Oxford Univ. Press) and accompanied by an analytic volume, World Christian Trends (WCT; William Carey Library, 2001). In 2003 the World Christian Database (WCD; later published by Brill) was launched, updating most of the statistics in the WCE and WCT. The Atlas of Global Christianity (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009) was based on these data and was featured throughout 2010. The World’s Religions in Figures, by Todd Johnson and Brian Grim (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), covers the methodology of counting religionists around the world. In mid-2014 Brian Grim, Todd Johnson, Vegard Skirbekk, and Gina Zurlo produced the first of a series of annuals titled Yearbook of International Religious Demography (Brill).

Redesign

This year we have redesigned the annual statistical table, deleting many previous categories and adding some new ones. Categories cut include rural dwellers, nonliterates, church attenders, councils of churches, and several evangelism variables. Notably, the “Great Commission Christians” concept has been retired. This category, introduced in the early 1990s, was used by many agencies to express ecumenism in mission. While tracking Christians within each tradition who are active in mission and evangelism is valid, we have not found a way to corroborate these particular estimates with surveys and poll data. We break down the Independent Christian category into six subcategories by region (lines 29–34). In every case, global figures are derived by adding together data on 234 countries.

Religious Diversity

A new category this year is Religious Diversity (line 8), a composite measure of how diverse the religious makeup of individual countries is. This measure is adapted from the field of economics (market share studies). The least possible diversity is represented by 0 and the most by 1. The world as a whole is considerably more diverse in 2015 than it was in 1900, but diversity is now on a slight decline. While many countries in the Western world are becoming more diverse through secularization and immigration, others are becoming less diverse. In 2015 the most diverse countries are South Korea at 0.82 and China at 0.81, while the world as a whole (all countries’ individual contributions) is at 0.45. The least diverse country is Afghanistan at 0.00 (99.8 percent Muslim). See The World’s Religions in Figures, chapter 3, for method and details.

Post-Christendom

Another new measure is the percentage of Christians who live in countries that are 80 percent or more Christian (line 25). In 1900 it was 95.0 percent, by 1970 it had fallen to 76.0 percent, and by 2015 it had further declined to 52.4 percent. This phenomenon is related to religious diversity; most majority-Christian countries are becoming less Christian through secularization and immigration.

Personal Contact

Christians make up one-third of the world’s population (line 22). It therefore might be expected that a significant number of non-Christians would have some kind of personal contact (line 50) with a Christian. This is not the case, however, since Christians are not evenly distributed globally. Some countries have large Christian majorities, while in others Christians constitute small minorities. Within a country, or even a city, adherents of different religions can be isolated from each other in many ways, including geographically, ethnically, socially, and economically.

In order to estimate the number of non-Christians who have personal contact with a Christian, a formula has been developed and applied to each ethnolinguistic people group (see “Methodological Notes” in the Atlas of Global Christianity; also posted in the footnotes online). Thus, for every non-Christian population in the world, there is an indication of Christian presence and contact. Summing weighted values for each country, region, and continent produces a global total. Although these numbers are estimates, they offer a preliminary assessment of a critical shortfall. Overall, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians. In each case, more than 86 percent of these religionists globally do not personally know a Christian (or, as line 50 reports, only 14 percent of all non-Christians know a Christian).

2050

Since 2025 is now only ten years away, we have expanded the table to include estimates for 2050. The United Nations Population Division projects population figures for every country of the world from 1950 to 2100, allowing us to base our projections for religion on their population figures. While these projections should be treated with caution, they do point to some important trends. Of particular interest: by 2050, world population (line 1) will cross the 9 billion mark, and Christians (line 23) will number 3.3 billion, or 36 percent (line 22). Note that this percentage is now on the rise after falling for nearly a century. This can be explained partly by the fact that the growth of Christianity in the Global South is now outpacing losses in the Global North. Pentecostals (line 38) will likely exceed 1 billion. Finally, the unevangelized (line 67) will rise to 2.6 billion, or 27.3 percent (line 68) of the world’s population.

Counting Pentecostals and Martyrs

This past year we published the following articles related to counting Pentecostals (line 38) and martyrs (line 24):

## Status of Global Christianity, 2015, in the Context of 1900–2050

### GLOBAL POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Adult population (over 15)</th>
<th>Adults, % literate</th>
<th>Major Christians</th>
<th>Religionists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,619,625,000</td>
<td>3,691,173,000</td>
<td>6,127,700</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>7,324,782,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,073,646,000</td>
<td>2,304,100,000</td>
<td>6,280,900</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>5,420,681,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,032,428,000</td>
<td>3,146,984,000</td>
<td>6,157,700</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>811,830,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### GLOBAL RELIGION

- Religious diversity (0–1, 1=most diverse): 0.27
- Christians (total, all kinds): 558,131,000
- Jews: 199,818,000
- Muslims: 1,225,000,000
- Hindus: 6,217,483,000
- Buddhists: 12,956,000
- Chinese folk-religionists: 379,974,000
- Ethnoreligionists: 117,437,000
- New Religionists: 5,996,000
- Slum dwellers: 39,382,000
- Urban poor: 2,060,000
- Urban population (%): 6%
- Christians, % of world population: 30%
- Christians living in countries: 195
- Christian martyrs per year (10-year average): 34,400

### MAJOR CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

- Catholic: 2,466,566,000
- Anglicans: 133,600,000
- Independents: 8,859,000
- African Independents: 40,000
- Asian Independents: 1,906,000
- European Independents: 185,000
- Latin American Independents: 33,000
- Northern American Independents: 6,672,000
- Oceanian Independents: 22,000
- Orthodox: 115,855,000
- Unaffiliated: 36,448,000

### MOVEMENTS WITHIN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

- Evangelicals: 80,912,000
- Pentecostals/Charismatics: 981,000

### GLOBAL CHRISTIAN DISTRIBUTION

- Africa (6 regions): 8,736,000
- Asia (4 regions): 20,774,000
- Europe (11 regions): 368,254,000
- Latin America (3 regions): 60,027,000
- Northern America (1 region): 59,570,000
- Oceania (4 regions): 4,323,000

### CHURCH ORGANIZATION

- Denominations: 1,600
- Congregations: 400,000

### CHRISTIAN MISSION

- National workers: 2,100,000
- Foreign missionaries: 62,000
- Foreign-mission sending agencies: 60,000
- Non-Christians who know a Christian (%): 3.4

### URBAN MISSION

- Global urban population: 232,695,000
- Christian urban population: 199,600,000
- Megacities under 50% Christian: 5
- Non-Christian urban dwellers: 5,200

### CHRISTIAN FINANCE (in US$, per year)

- Personal income of church members: 270 billion
- Giving to Christian causes: 8 billion
- Churches' income: 7 billion
- Parachurch and institutional income: 1 billion
- Ecclesiastical crime: 500 million
- Income of global foreign missions: 200 million

### CHRISTIAN MEDIA

- Books (titles) about Christianity: 300,000
- Christian periodicals (titles): 3,500
- Bibles printed per year: 5,452,600
- Scriptures (including selections) printed per year: 20 million
- Church density: 108 million
- Users of radio/TV/Internet: 0

### WORLD EVANGELIZATION

- Evangelized population: 880,12,000
- Evangelized as % of world population: 54.5
- World evangelization plans since 30 c.e.: 15

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January 2015
My Pilgrimage in Mission

John P. Martin

I was born in New York City on December 28, 1939, as the son of an Irish Catholic immigrant family and became an altar boy server in the sixth grade at Ascension Parish School in Manhattan in 1950. In 1952, while in the eighth grade, I went through a three-step process that became my "vocation story" and led me to become a member of Maryknoll. First, with the total innocence of a twelve-year-old, I rejected the path of the Catholic diocesan priesthood because of a personal quirk I once noticed in the priest coordinator of the altar boys. (It represented no ill will or bad behavior on his part.) Second, soon afterward, presuming to already know all about doing Masses, funerals, weddings, and baptisms, I decided to await "another challenge." (Years later I recovered the memory of these exact words.) And, third, an unlikely classmate introduced me to two priests doing vocation promotion for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in New York City, and I discovered the challenge of my life. I got hooked on becoming a missionary and discovered that I had to enter the seminary, which I did in 1955 in order to become one. This did not seem at all out of place, as I had been contemplating the priesthood as normal within my tradition.

Thus was set up a lifelong dichotomy and tension between my inner fundamental calling to be a missionary, that is, to establish the church overseas, which was my dream, and the ministerial role that I was expected to fulfill as a priest. Because of the overwhelming significance that the Roman Catholic Church gave to the priesthood for any male believer with a "vocation," during my eleven years of formation there seemed to be little or no room for further development of my initial inspiration to become a missionary.

In the summer of 1964 I studied linguistics with the Wycliffe Bible Translators, mostly Southern Baptists, at their Summer Institute of Linguistics. The linguistic skills that I learned were invaluable tools for my missionary adaptation, helping me first of all to learn quickly to speak Spanish well.

Mexico

I was assigned to Mexico in the spring of 1966, and soon a dream came to the surface: as a true missionary, I would be dropped into an area to live with a people who did not know anything about Jesus Christ, so I would begin by just giving testimony into an area to live with a people who did not know anything about Jesus Christ, so I would begin by just giving testimony. After that, I would go on to do Masses, funerals, weddings, and baptisms. This vision was another but rather screeching our ways apart, inch by stressful inch. In the view of the old-timers, I and others like me could not seem to do anything right. This tension became the harbinger of the breakdown of my dream that I would spend the rest of my life in Mexico City's rural migrants.

Bangladesh

It turned out that our central leadership foresaw the need to offer me and many others new challenges for doing mission in other situations and with newer styles of living. At the end of 1974 I grasped onto that offer to be part of an "ecclesial team" of priests, sisters, and lay missionaries among the Muslim people of Bangladesh, then considered the neediest country in the world. This would be a dream come true, since to that point I had not had any community or work experience except with Maryknoll priests.

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in Mexico. Here again my naïveté popped up, as I dreamed of being a missionary among our Muslim sisters and brothers with no involvement with a local church or hierarchy. I was implicitly trying to keep a distance from the priestly ministry as the main way in which to carry out one’s missionary calling.

By December of 1975, a not very ecclesial team of five of us priests landed in Dacca, the capital. Another disappointment! We all had previous mission experience only in Christian countries (Bolivia, Philippines, and Mexico), yet we came together on a vision of ourselves living as brothers and friends among the Muslim population with a strong commitment to our communal lifestyle. Our vision and our community living were new and unique values in the Maryknoll world at the time. We had to deal with the expectations of the local Bengali bishops and priests that we each be assigned to a separate “mission” to do pastoral ministry for the Catholics. Because of the untimely but fortuitous death in 1977 of our archbishop, who had wanted to give us an opening for our mission vision, his temporary replacement was not willing to prevent the archbishop’s wish from being implemented. Thus we were able to start out on this venture of fools for Christ to do mission in a way that none of us had ever done before, with people of a religious tradition that we knew nothing about either. In mid-1977 we rented a small, hot, noisy, uncomfortable house in the town of Tangail in the north-central part of the country.

We did have a vision of friendship and brotherhood, but we were too ignorant to have anything like a plan. So each of us tried our hand at relating to whomever we could, however that might develop. Within our first week there, I took a ride by bicycle rickshaw out of town to visit a nearby “Muslim university” founded by a renowned freedom fighter and religious leader, Moulana Bhashani. I put “university” in quotes, for it was short on whatever one might expect to find there, being only a cluster of small schools around a mosque and madrasa for teaching children to memorize the Quran. Despite the warnings of the Bengali priests and the veteran missionaries that you can never make friends with a Muslim, on my first visit, Masud Khan, the director, and I became friends with our first eyeing of one another. Our visits often saw him reading the Quran and explaining it to me in his enviable combination of intense fervor and a social conscience. After a year of occasional visits, he floated the idea of my going to live there with them as a Christian in residence. It seemed like a marvelous idea, but internal problems with the staff over other matters sabotaged it.

When I found myself spending more time at home than my companions, I continued a trend from my Mexican period of openness to building family ties, this time with the family from whom we rented our house. Their boys were in and out of our house all the time. I started getting invited into their home in back of ours, where the mother and two older daughters lived their life secluded from the view of men outside the family. Eventually I was able to enter spontaneously as a member of the family, for I called myself to all “Jon bhai,” which translates as Brother John.

When the neighborhood boys saw the canceled stamps on my letters and asked for them, at first I just gave them away. Then I decided to make them work for them by writing me a short essay in Bengali about a stamp’s image. They loved the idea; the word spread around; and soon about a dozen boys were in the “club,” each sporting his homemade album. It pleased me to see them searching for information about the foreign stamps for their essays.

Thus I added another personal role to that of our twofold community vision, namely, “neighbor.” It fit me so well and has stuck with me to live and to preach as a way of giving Christian testimony. I learned something new for myself from those Bengalis that I carried over in my later years of ministry back in my beloved Mexico. To live with a vision as brother, friend, and neighbor seemed to me quite sufficient and elementary as a motivation or rationale for being a missionary and witness for Christ. These concepts have helped to lessen my need to be “doing things for others” in order to sense personal satisfaction in my missionary presence among the people, first in Bangladesh and even later back in Mexico doing pastoral work. Doing things for others, which I did plentifully, became a more integral response on my part out of my basic missionary motivation.

Upon our arrival in early December 1975, I had the most traumatic experience of culture shock of my life, in part because of my vaunted vulnerability as my basic attitude toward people in a new cultural situation. For several years I suffered through bouts of physical sickness and psychic depression.

Visits to India

Four years later I found myself traveling to a most unusual place in India, given my focus on a presence among Muslims: the Christian-Hindu Ashram of Father Bede Griffiths outside of Trichy in the state of Tamil Nadu. I had assimilated something of the repugnance of the Muslims for traits of the Hindu tradition, such as making images of their deities. Father Bede had left his monastery in England for India as a Benedictine monk in 1955 to follow the dream of an indigenous type of Christian contemplative life. His ashram became a center of attraction for many pilgrims, young and not so young people, disenchanted Christians and Jews, in those decades of the 1960s and beyond, who were searching for spiritual values in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufi Islam. He also did a grand service to the Christian churches of India by challenging them to open up new approaches, besides total isolation, to the sincere believers all around them.

In December 1979 Father Bede was the midwife for two wonderful revelations for me. First, he gave me a way to understand the deep psychic and spiritual dimensions of my culture-shock experience as a shift from living on the masculine side of my personality to the feminine, thus challenging me to greater balance and equilibrium in my life. (My heterosexual orientation was not affected.) And the expansive spiritual environment of the ashram sowed a new seed in my heart: to be a brother not just to Muslims, but to all peoples.

In the succeeding years I made pilgrimages to several holy places in India belonging to the Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions, just to hang out and be still, to listen and to meditate, to read their Scriptures, and to join their rites. In December 1981, upon finishing my commitment of six years in Bangladesh, I made monthlong pilgrimages to half a dozen places for the same purposes.

United States

I did not know it until months later back in the United States when the aura had dissipated, but I began ever so slowly to emerge from that special time and space that the Spirit had created around me and in me during that long pilgrimage. Some people’s responses to my story were “Wow!” as they helped me to grasp its meaning. Then came the challenge of getting used to living in this country again, a place where I had never worked in my life, but now as an adult at age forty-four I engaged in reverse mission, sharing the fruits of my sixteen years in Mexico, Bangladesh, and India with folks in this country. It took me a year and a half of transi-
tion time and a series of retreats and other experiences before I was ready to accept an assignment to our house in Los Angeles. Knowing that my culture shock in Bangladesh was due in part to a shoddy transition out of Mexico, I learned once and for all to be aware of these transitional times.

All told, I worked for seven years with much satisfaction, creativity, and personal growth at the task of being a “mission promoter” for Maryknoll in Los Angeles, Chicago, and Jacksonville, Florida, in a wide variety of situations, conferences, church collections, vocational promotion, and so forth, for I was highly motivated to share the fruits of my overseas living with people here at home. I had been uniquely enriched beyond measure by those years and those peoples of several cultures and religious traditions. The missionary dimension of my life, the challenge I accepted at twelve years of age, was alive and very well in my heart and spirit and could not be contained, as it was not mine to cling to, but rather to give away.

There are some Pharaohs that are not Egyptian, and my run-in with one of my department heads left me in a black hole in our community organization. Looking for a way to get back to India, in 1989 I took some courses in world religions at Harvard Divinity School. This experience challenged me to get a master’s degree with a focus on Hinduism and Islam. It made me conscious of how little I really knew about either one. But it helped in the long run to get a multiple entry visa for India, where I was permitted by my Maryknoll leadership to remain from 1991 through 1994.

India

I chose to live in Calcutta, since I already knew Bengali. I hoped to find an ashram community in West Bengal to enhance my contemplative lifestyle, and I looked forward to doing social outreach with the folks in nearby villages. It really was a great proposal that my superiors accepted willingly.

Nevertheless, I found it impossible to fulfill, except for speaking Bengali. I ended up living in Shantiniketan, 100 miles northwest of Calcutta, which is home of the world-famous Visva-Bharati University, founded by Rabindranath Tagore. I rented a flat from a Hindu Brahmin family, though I enhanced my contemplative lifestyle more as a hermit than in community. Once again I was invited to live as brother, friend, and neighbor to the people in town, with no proposed outreach on my part. My fluency in Bengali did help a lot to make it easy to get on with the people without much hesitation.

Then a funny thing happened on the way out of my hermitage, when I started getting bubbly inspirations to get back to Mexico, to my adopted family, and to priestly ministry. Well into my third year there I was strongly convinced that this would be my future path, somewhat surprised that these three years seemed to be all that the Spirit was giving me a rope for. They had sufficed for many encounters with foreign pilgrims at ashrams and travelers on the road, with Indians in many parts of the country, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim; for innumerable hours of writing my reflections; for good, simple social times with my neighbors; and for much reading about the historical riches of South Asia.

Mexico Again

Faithful to my awareness of the need for a transition, I spent two years active in mission promotion in the United States before, in January 1997, returning to live and work in Merida, Yucatán, Mexico; it felt as if I was going home again. I was given the pastoral care of a corner of a huge urban parish under our Maryknoll care. I was not prepared, though, for the dysfunctional dynamics of that highly marginalized community. Much alcoholism, many broken families, low educational prospects, and high unemployment were signs that the “high” society’s concept of the neighborhood—that is, as a place where undesirable elements such as the cemetery, slaughter house, red light district, dirty garages, and bus station were concentrated—had been interiorized. I was able to frequent the home of my adopted family and visit many old friends, for I had maintained my communication with these folks over the intervening twenty-two years by letters and visits on vacation. The difference between then and now in my priestly ministry was enormous, for I had been subtly working on reconciling those two vocations to be missionary and priest. I had left behind the anxiety and inner tensions of yesteryear; the conflicts of those days with my companions were mostly gone. The inner spiritual resources from those years of purification and growth made themselves evident in the words and actions that I used in my pastoral care. I found it easier to spend my energy and my time in a more compassionate fashion with people. I was eminently available, and it did not bother me. My sermons were more biblical and applicable to their lives. The formation of the laypeople in community responsibility was my chief goal, and it worked.

During the eight years of this pastoral ministry, I committed myself to accompanying hundreds of couples in the Marriage Encounter movement through retreats that I qualified to give nationally. Counting on the friendships I started back in 1966, I offered to teach these old friends the rudiments of contemplative prayer through Father Thomas Keating’s “Contemplative Outreach,” eventually giving many retreats each year, forming several weekly prayer groups, and training many people to take over after me.

After leaving the pastoral ministry, I next worked on my longtime dream of leaving behind some specifically missionary work. Pastoral ministry left folks with many good memories of the priestly care of our missionaries but with scant focus on doing mission. The question often came to me of how much of the adulation was due just to our being American and how much to our being missionary. In 2006 I launched a community of Maryknoll Affiliates, a small local group of people interested in assimilating our missionary spirituality under four rubrics: community life, spirituality, global vision, and action in the community. At that time there were more than fifty active groups in the United States, but fewer than a dozen in other countries. It was impressive to see the enthusiasm of this group for being part of our worldwide missionary movement.

I have to admit that I was (indirectly) responsible for the closing of all missionary activity by Maryknollers after their sixty-nine years in Mexico. Because I had opted to ask for a year’s sabbatical during 2012, our leaders in Latin America decided that the three remaining older, retired priests had to move to our retirement facility in the Unites States. On the one hand, we could leave with a clear conscience because of the dedicated labor of the scores of our priests, brothers, sisters, and lay missionaries who had worked in a majority of the states of the country since 1943 in a wide variety of ministries. We were able to support the creation of a Mexican national missionary society, the Guadalupe Missioners, in 1949. On the other hand, I could leave to follow my dream of continuing to share the fruits of my many rich experiences of a cross-cultural and interreligious nature through writing my memoirs. This writing continues to the present.

Dreams really do come true, provided you do not expect to see them in Technicolor accompanied by Dolby sound tracks. They may look more like worn but cherished photos.
Dr. Sue Russell
Associate Professor of Mission and Contextual Studies

“I am excited to be a part of a global-minded community that both equips and learns from current and future mission leaders.”

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The Legacy of Frank Arthur Keller

Kevin Xiyi Yao

In the late nineteenth century, China’s Hunan Province was considered one of the country’s toughest mission fields. With its deeply entrenched Confucianism and widespread xenophobia, Hunan was a source of notorious anti-Christian literature and a hotbed of antimissionary activity. Nevertheless, Western missionaries were drawn magnetically by the province’s central location and huge unreached population. A few missionaries attempted to enter the province as early as the 1860s, and the China Inland Mission (CIM) was especially aggressive in trailblazing there. But Hunan Province fiercely and successfully resisted the entry of missionaries until the dawn of the twentieth century, when Frank A. Keller, a CIM medical missionary, was among the missionary pioneers who opened the doors of Hunan.

Keller was born on May 26, 1862, in Fort Plain, New York. He received a B.A. from Yale University in 1892 and undertook medical studies at Albany Medical School, in New York, graduating with an M.D. in 1896. During his student years he became deeply involved in the Student Volunteer Movement, serving as its traveling secretary for 1892–93. Upon completion of his studies, he joined CIM and arrived in China in 1897. After a short period of language training, he was assigned to Hunan Province, the field to which he devoted his entire life.

Early Ministry in Hunan

Keller’s ministry in Hunan had a bumpy start. After arriving in October 1898, he was twice driven out by local anti-Christian mobs. But he refused to give up, making his way to Changsha, the provincial capital, in June 1901. Other Western missionaries had made a number of attempts to enter that city, but all had failed. In 1898, for example, B. H. Alexander of the Christian and Missionary Alliance was able to evangelize in the city, but he had to live outside the city wall. Keller’s medical skills, however, gained him entrance. In June, 1901, two Chinese soldiers guarding the city were wounded in a drill, and Keller stepped forward to bind up their wounds. This action earned the trust of the local officials, who later allowed Keller to settle in the city permanently. By this means he was instrumental in gaining entry to the city for CIM and other mission agencies.

Keller married Elizabeth Tilley in 1902, and the new couple launched a series of ministries from their home base in Changsha. In June 1905 a notable event occurred in their home. On June 2 they welcomed CIM founder J. Hudson Taylor into their home, during what was his first visit to Changsha, but the very next day he suddenly died.

Though Keller came to China as a medical missionary and focused on this ministry in the early years of his career, the center of his various ministries from beginning to end was evangelism. He served as an itinerant missionary, concentrating on the urban centers of Hunan Province and sharing the Gospel through street preaching and handing out tracts. He depended heavily on local assistants; at least two Chinese evangelists, named Li and Yang, played important roles in Keller’s early mission outreach.

During these early years in Hunan, Keller developed a supporting network of powerful backers in North America. They included Lyman Stewart (1840–1923), cofounder of Union Oil. A major supporter of several key fundamentalist projects in North America, Stewart provided most of the funds Keller needed for his mission projects. Keller used the money to hire Chinese assistants and to purchase printed Gospel materials from various mission publishing houses and Bible societies. Lyman’s brother, Milton Stewart, also became a staunch supporter of Keller, mainly through his active and influential Milton Stewart Evangelistic Trust Fund.

Houseboat Ministry

In 1909 Keller’s ministry underwent a major change. In those days foreign tobacco companies sometimes sent out their sale clerks on steamboats to distribute cigarette samples to residents. Some came to Changsha. Keller was deeply troubled by their zeal and techniques. He later recalled: “As we saw their strenuous work and heard of their far-reaching plans, and thought of the thousands and thousands of towns and villages whose millions of people had never heard of Christ, or even seen a copy of God’s Word, who would soon be smoking cigarettes, our hearts were filled with burning shame and at the same time throbbed with a great ambition, to be equally comprehensive in plan, wise in method, and prompt in action for the King.” No evidence can be given that he completely abandoned his medical practice thereafter, but clearly his long-existing passion for evangelism found new expression. By this time he was well on his way to a shift of his focus from evangelism through medical practice to evangelism by more direct means such as Bible conferences and theological education.

Taking advantage of the dense network of the rivers in Hunan Province, Keller mobilized local Chinese believers and organized them into itinerant evangelistic bands, sending them out on houseboats. On July 30, 1909, the first band of six evangelists, led by Yang, was launched. The man-powered boat they used was actually a floating mission station with bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, and a larger room for worship and study. The boat stopped by the villages and towns along the river.
Under Keller’s leadership, the ministry grew rapidly. By 1912 the number of evangelists increased to twenty-four, who were divided into several teams to cover more and larger districts of the province. The following year the number grew to twenty-eight. From 1911 to 1916 the teams visited a total of 363,767 households and distributed 17,837 copies of the New Testament. From the beginning Keller was clear that “the immediate objective of the work is to assist the missions working in Hunan in speedy and thorough evangelization of the twenty-two millions of people living in this province.” He thus insisted that the evangelistic teams enter a district “only on the invitation of the missionary in charge.”

Keller made persistent efforts to ensure that teams were indigenous. Even though they reported to Keller and the mission headquarters, “the direct conduct of each party is entrusted absolutely to its trained Chinese leader.” For this reason he emphasized the training of Chinese believers, and gradually the houseboat ministry took on a growing dimension of theological training. The first trip had already included Bible studies for the team members in their daily schedule. Each day, before starting their evangelistic activities at 10:00 A.M., they prayed and studied the Scriptures. After returning from their work around 4:00 or 5:00 P.M., they took time in the evening to study and to share their experiences of the day. Later, courses on the Bible, theology, church history, homiletics, and even sacred music were added. While serving as evangelists, students could finish the curriculum in two years. In addition to being mobile bases for evangelism, the houseboats thus functioned as floating Bible schools.

For the houseboat ministry, however, Keller relied heavily on financial support from America. The Milton Stewart Evangelistic Trust Fund and Mary W. Stewart, widow of Milton Stewart, were the major financial backers of this ministry, continuing until 1934. In the years that followed, this dependency on American money remained, which explains the financial hardship Keller’s ministry experienced during the Great Depression.

Nanyoh Bible Conference

Even while launching the houseboat ministry, Keller turned his eyes to another area for evangelism: Nanyoh (now Nanyue). Located about 130 miles south of Changsha, Nanyoh is one of the five sacred mountains of China and a very significant site for Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Every fall thousands of pilgrims from all over the country would flock to the mountain. The peak was the true summit of the mountain, but ultimately it chose Changsha as the location for a new theological school.

Keller mobilized local Chinese believers and organized them into itinerant evangelistic bands, sending them out on houseboats.

Hunan Bible Institute

The establishment of Hunan Bible Institute (HBI) was undoubtedly the culmination of Keller’s missionary career. He was always keenly aware of the necessity for training national church leaders, and the training components of the houseboat ministry and the Nanyoh Bible Conference were testimony to his commitment to theological training. At one point he even planned to develop the conference in Nanyoh into a permanent Bible training institution, but ultimately he chose Changsha as the location for a new theological school.

The Hunan Bible School (HBS; later Hunan Bible Institute) was officially launched in 1916. In that year Lyman Stewart decided to take over full responsibility for the support of Keller’s work in Hunan Province. This decision led Keller in 1916 to place his existing ministries and the newly proposed Hunan Bible School together under the supervision of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola), which also was funded by Lyman Stewart. For these reasons HBS/HBI was often referred to as “the Evangelistic Department of Biola,” “Biola in China,” or “the China Branch of Biola.”

The years from 1916 to the early 1930s were the golden years of HBI’s history. A donation of $355,000 from Milton Stewart enabled a twelve-acre, state-of-the-art campus to be completed in 1923. The HBI campus located about 130 miles south of Changsha, Nanyoh is one of the five sacred mountains of China and a very significant site for Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Every fall thousands of pilgrims from all over the country would flock to the mountain. The peak was the true summit of the mountain, but ultimately he chose Changsha as the location for a new theological school.
in 1927. The institute served churches from more than twenty denominations all over the country, but the new campus was so modern and so splendid that one has to wonder whether the Chinese church could ever have afforded to maintain it. Keller’s leadership stimulated a long period of stable growth of the student body; enrollment grew from 39 students in 1919 to 117 in 1922. In the years 1918–29, a total of 239 students graduated from HBI.

Throughout these years Keller was indeed the soul of the HBI community. As the longtime superintendent, he was revered by HBI faculty and staff. His wife, Elizabeth, was also involved in ministering to female students. During these years Keller was committed to indigenization of the faculty. Under his supervision in the late 1920s and early 1930s, HBI successfully recruited an outstanding Chinese faculty and placed Chinese church leaders in charge of many departments of the school. By 1931, twelve out of the sixteen faculty and staff were Chinese.

HBI’s chronic financial dependence upon the American churches skewed the balance of power.

Until the mid-1930s Chinese remained the majority of the faculty. They were responsible not only for caring for most of the classroom teaching load but also for the operation of most of the departments, ranging from correspondence courses to logistics. In fact, in the 1930s HBI boasted one of the most prominent and influential Chinese faculties among all the evangelical theological schools in China. This faculty included Chen Chonggui (Marcus Chen, 1884–1964) and Cheng Jigui (T. C. Cheng, 1882–1946). The former was a popular speaker at revival meetings across the country and edited an influential nationwide journal entitled Budao Zazhi (Evangelism). The latter was instrumental in translating the Scofield Reference Bible into Chinese and introducing dispensationalism to the Chinese church via a hugely popular correspondence course. Through the efforts of these Chinese faculty members, HBI quickly earned the trust of the Chinese evangelical churches, and it became a stronghold of evangelical theological education in China in the 1930s and 1940s.

Despite its achievements in raising up a prominent Chinese faculty, however, HBI made little headway toward becoming self-supporting, and it failed to implement self-government fully during Keller’s tenure. As the founder and superintendent, Keller enjoyed enormous prestige at HBI, holding the community together through his personal charisma. He did not seem to feel an urgent need to set up an effective administrative structure or local decision-making procedures. Instead, he and Charles Robert, a longtime HBI faculty member and the treasurer, constituted the real center of power at HBI. Oddly enough, the institute remained under the final authority of the Biola board in the United States and thus was never able to establish its own board in China. The Chinese faculty and staff of HBI might be brilliant and might direct their own departments and ministries, but their voice was insignificant in deciding the overall direction of the school or in arriving at decisions on crucial matters.

Another unfortunate factor, namely, HBI’s chronic financial dependence upon the American churches, further skewed the balance of power. Keller’s donor network was the essential lifeline of the school. For its part, Biola was responsible for collecting the donations and distributing them to HBI. In the early 1920s Biola passed on $30,000–$40,000 to HBI annually. Until the mid-1930s HBI students did not have to pay tuition. Keller’s apparent failure to intentionally and persistently encourage the Chinese church to contribute more was a signal weakness of the school.

Originally Keller modeled HBI on a Bible school, but later he made consistent efforts to upgrade its academic standards. By the early 1930s HBI had a full curriculum in place, tailored for students from various educational backgrounds. High school graduates would be enrolled in a two-year program, junior high school graduates in a three-year program. Others would first enter a preparatory program. A bachelor’s degree was the terminal degree. In 1933 the name of the school was officially changed from Hunan Bible School to Hunan Bible Institute. But Keller had no intention of turning HBI into an academic ivory tower. For him, the school’s purpose was to serve the Chinese church, and therefore practical training was just as important as academic training. As a result, he worked to ensure that the houseboat ministry and the Bible Conference continued to be vital parts of HBI’s ministry. From 1931 to 1935 the number of houseboats sent out annually stood between six and eight. From attendance of 200 in 1922, the enrollment of the Nanyoh Bible Conference grew to 350 in 1924. After 1926 the annual Bible Conference moved to Changsha, where it continued for another decade or so though on a much smaller scale. In addition, with Keller’s encouragement, HBI faculty and students initiated a number of local evangelistic outreaches such as newspaper advertising evangelism and prison and hospital ministries. HBI was a complex of ministries, not just a theological school, and in the 1920s and 1930s it stood out as a powerhouse of nationwide evangelism in China.

Between 1935 and 1937, however, HBI came close to shipwreck because of its twisted administrative structure. As Frank Keller prepared to retire, tension between the Chinese faculty and the Biola board over the succession plan began to intensify. When Charles Robert was identified as the person most likely to be appointed by the board—over a number of more prestigious and popular Chinese professors—most of the Chinese faculty and staff rose up in protest. In June of 1935 they joined hands with some Chinese church leaders in Changsha to form a new board and declared a takeover of HBI, which lasted for a year. Then the Biola board asked Keller to reorganize the Changsha board, effectively ending Chinese independence. Consequently, HBI lost most of its prominent Chinese faculty. Heartbroken, Keller called this controversy “a tragedy.” The eruption of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 made the school’s normal operation impossible, and it did not enroll new students until the fall of 1947.

In 1937 Keller officially retired, and Robert was appointed the new superintendent the following year. But for three years Keller continued to live in Changsha, leaving for Los Angeles in 1940. He died on July 24, 1945, in Los Angeles. During the turbulent war years, HBI was under Charles Robert’s leadership. With its educational operation suspended, the campus was often turned into a refugee and medical center. HBI recovered quickly in the wake of the war, but under the Communist regime, it eventually had to shut its doors in the early 1950s.

Conclusion

In his own time Frank Keller was not one of the most famous Western missionaries in China, but the course of his ministry was definitely unique. He did not articulate his theological views systematically, but in the 1920s and 1930s his passion for evangelism...
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and his exclusivist attitude toward non-Christian religions put him in the conservative camp. He was a practitioner by nature and content with a low-key, non-self-promoting approach to ministry. This fact explains why he accomplished as much as any of the contemporary conservative mission leaders in China but did not gain much fame beyond the HBI and Biola communities.

In his lifelong attempts to indigenize the ministries he initiated, Keller’s record is mixed. He largely succeeded in raising the level of Chinese participation and creativity, but he fell well short of helping HBI become self-supporting and self-governing. This fact explains why he accomplished as much as any and his exclusivist attitude toward non-Christian religions put him in the conservative camp. He was a practitioner by nature and content with a low-key, non-self-promoting approach to ministry. This fact explains why he accomplished as much as any of the contemporary conservative mission leaders in China but did not gain much fame beyond the HBI and Biola communities.

In his lifelong attempts to indigenize the ministries he initiated, Keller’s record is mixed. He largely succeeded in raising the level of Chinese participation and creativity, but he fell well short of helping HBI become self-supporting and self-governing. This fact explains why he accomplished as much as any of the contemporary conservative mission leaders in China but did not gain much fame beyond the HBI and Biola communities. While liberal missionaries, with their ambitious and costly establishment of institutions, might more readily be guilty in this regard, evangelical missionaries were not immune from such missteps—as Keller’s failure and HBI’s “tragedy” testify.

In case, it is beyond doubt that Frank Keller exerted a shaping influence upon evangelical Christianity in China through HBI and related ministries. He also played a pivotal role in connecting Chinese evangelical churches with the international evangelical movement via such prominent conservative figures as the Stewart brothers and such influential institutions as Biola. His immense achievements did not earn him national or international recognition during his lifetime, but the imprint of his legacy can still be seen in the theology and ministry of the church in China today.

Notes


3. The King’s Business


See Afloat in Hunan, China


6. Ibid., 117.


8. Ibid., 354.

9. Ibid., 353.

10. Keller estimated the cost for one boat and its equipment to be $3,500. See Afloat in Hunan, China, 41.

11. Mary W. Stewart to the Board of Directors, Bible Institute of Los Angeles, April 7, 1934, “BIOLA in China,” 452–55.


15. Frank Keller to Ralph Smith, October 9, 1909, “BIOLA in China,” 70.

Assembly of the International Association for Mission Studies, 2016—Call for Papers

“Conversions and Transformations: Missiological Approaches to Religious Change” is the theme of the fourteenth assembly of the International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), which will take place August 11–17, 2016, in Seoul, South Korea.

The 2016 IAMS assembly will be an opportunity for critical and constructive dialogue on issues of transformation and conversion across scholarly disciplines, Christian traditions, and practical contexts. All papers will be presented within one of the IAMS Study Groups:

- BISAM: Biblical Studies and Mission
- DABOH: Documentation, Archives, Bibliography, and Oral History
- Healing/Pneumatology
- Gender in Mission
- Religious Freedom and Mission
- Theology of Mission
- Interreligious Issues

Prospective presenters should submit their proposed topic and a 250-word abstract by August 25, 2015. Papers accepted by the organizers must be no more than 2,000 words long and are due by May 31, 2016. After the assembly, expanded versions of conference papers can be submitted to Mission Studies, the IAMS journal, for consideration for publication.

Further details, including criteria for accepted papers and information on how to submit proposals, can be found on the IAMS website, http://missionstudies.org. Queries can also be sent to secretary@missionstudies.org.
This book on the theme of Christian witness in Muslim settings contains contributions from some twenty missiologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists. It spans a huge range of mission involvement spread over several continents, and there is much practical wisdom to be found here. We need to remember that these were addresses presented to a mixed conference, and therefore we should not demand too much academic rigor from them.

The chapters concentrate heavily on the questions of effective evangelism, conversion, and discipleship, but there is little here about the social, economic, and political dimensions of Christian mission. Given the disciplines of many of the contributors, there is a somewhat uncritical use of the social sciences and their jargon, without a sufficient amount of theological rigor being brought both to the use of the social sciences and to the description of various missionary situations in which the contributors find themselves.

A glaring omission is ecclesiology. Individual stories are well told and groups described, but often with little information regarding how the authors view the significance of the church for mission, in both its local manifestation and its universal nature. A few of the contributors are from a Muslim background, one of whom does mention the church as being significant for converts as they transfer from one community to another.

As so often today, the phenomenon of conversion is considered from anthropological and sociological perspectives, but we need more on conversion’s spiritual and theological aspects, as well as the priority of the missio Dei in this and other areas of mission. The issue of continuity and discontinuity is a complex one and needs to be examined in all of its aspects, with both the positive (as praeparatio evangelica) and the negative (the lingering on of the undesirable) meriting due attention. It is indeed useful, as in one of the contributions, to tabulate both what has attracted converts to the new faith (a sense of God’s love, security, freedom, guidance, and so forth) and what has turned them away from their old way of life (such as empty ritual, inflexible law and customs, and distance from the divine).

In the entirely laudable project of seeking to communicate the Gospel in an Islamic milieu, there is always the lurking danger of lapsing into a dhimmi mentality which assumes the validity and priority of an Islamic worldview and value system. Some of the great heroes of the faith, mentioned by the only Roman Catholic contributor, made huge sacrifices for Christ and evoked the admiration of numerous Muslims and Christians. The difficult question, however, is to what extent they accepted the prohibitions of Islam on freedom of expression, belief, and the right to change one’s belief. The same question can be asked of many missionary projects today: To what extent are they simply accommodating themselves to a dhimmi framework? And is campaigning for greater freedom simply a waste of energy?

Given that the connection of Islam to Muslim-majority cultures is particularly strong, does there not need to be, nevertheless, a proper distinction between religion and culture? Should not this be so, even if many cultural practices and values are derived from a particular religious tradition? The problem with identifying culture entirely with religion is that contextualization can begin to look very much like capitulation. The issue becomes sharply focused in the debate about “insiders,” or followers of Jesus within Muslim communities who maintain their Muslim identity. To what extent has there been conversion if people continue to participate in the salat (ritual prayer), make the shahada (the Muslim profession of faith), derive their knowledge of Jesus and devotion to him mainly from the Qur’an and the Hadith, and so on?

Other questions concern the relation of communities of such followers (if they are in communities) to other local churches and the worldwide church. Also, how are persons and cultures to be transformed by the Gospel if the status quo ante is largely maintained? There remain serious questions about whether such communities or persons will be allowed to survive within the Dar al-Islam (House of Islam).

We must remember that evangelists and missionaries stand within the apostolic tradition and are not semidetached from it or outside it altogether. This means, for instance, not making up elements of contextualization but using the rich and varied sources of Christian tradition—for example, in patterns of worship, liturgy, the public reading of the Scriptures, and forms of private devotion. In Islamic contexts, we are particularly fortunate that so much has been taken from Eastern Christian traditions and can be reappropriated without violence to the integrity of the Gospel. The problem sometimes is that Western Christian missionaries, and even Westernized indigenous Christians, are unaware of this rich heritage waiting on their doorstep or are suspicious of it. In some places, Islam is an import into an existing Christian culture; elsewhere, both Christianity and Islam have come from outside. Whatever the case, rich resources for inculturation are available because of the historic interaction between Muslims and Christians. Let us use them!

The book represents a brave attempt at assessing the many opportunities and problems for Christian witness in Muslim contexts. I hope it is only the beginning and that some of the issues raised in this review essay will be tackled at the next conference and in any publications that result from it.

Michael Nazir-Ali, a citizen of both Pakistan and the United Kingdom, is president of the Oxford Centre for Training, Research, Advocacy and Dialogue (OXTRAD) and formerly was bishop of Rochester (U.K.) and Raiwind (Pakistan) and general secretary of the Church Mission Society.

—oxtrad@gmail.com
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<td><strong>(excluding Mexico)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>(including Mexico and Caribbean)</strong></td>
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From *The CARA Report* 20, no. 1 (Summer 2014): 8; used by permission.
What does it mean to study humanity from both scientific and theological perspectives? How might Christian theology inform the work of anthropological ethnography and theory? Might such integrative work yield results that are valuable for the purpose of solving human problems? This conference will bring together scholars from anthropology, theology, and Christian ministry to discuss common interests and potential collaboration on topics such as the significance of humanity’s divine image for human personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity’s destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that purpose and hope play in human thought and practice.

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Contact Dr. Eloise Meneses at emeneses@eastern.edu
Book Reviews

The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India.


This study in comparative sociology, driven by “anthropological theory” and fashionable tropes of “discourse analysis,” makes vast and sweeping historical claims about complexities of Indian and Chinese cultures. In so doing, it attempts to refute the notion that elements of modernity within these cultures are imitations derived from the West. Rather, it argues that ancient traditions of these societies have been transformed in distinctive and unique ways.

Peter van der Veer, director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, in Göttingen, and distinguished professor at Utrecht University, begins by exploring how, out of nineteenth-century imperial history, Western concepts of spirituality and secularity, as also of religion and magic, were utilized to epitomize traditions of China and India. He then attempts to show how modern notions of religion and magic were grafted into the respective nation-making projects of nationalist intellectuals within China and India in ways that were quite distinctive. Thus, while religion played a central role within nationalisms of India, religion was viewed as such an obstacle to progress in China that it had to be strictly controlled and marginalized. In pursuit of this argument, van der Veer addresses different understandings of art, compares yoga with qi gong, looks at concepts of secularism and of conversion within Christian histories, differentiates between constructions of religion in India and campaigns against superstition in China, and juxtaposes Muslim Kashmir and Muslim Xinjiang.

As a prominent champion of comparative studies in religion and society, the author stresses the importance of deeper understandings of what is spiritual and what is secular within these two major civilizations. In pursuing this theme, where ideology can parade in the garb of theory, veracity is ever and always seen as conditional and contingent, if not contrived. Comparative analysis of culture ends in intellectual construction and invention. The “conditional idea” is made to represent “real presences” in a house of cards that is largely abstract. Thus, despite sometimes brilliant insights, forays grounded in actual historical events reveal little about those events that has not already been known for some time. What may be new within this study lies in the way already-known events can be remodeled. Vocabulary for such analysis, borrowed from current fashions of literary criticism, sociology, and anthropology, invokes the lineage of Max Weber and genuflects before the rhetoric of Edward Said and his disciples.

Interactions between four select concepts—religion and magic, secularity and spirituality—are connected, defined, and then redefined in respect to relations of power within imperial and national institutions. Yet, for scholars interested in the history of Christian missions, there is not much new to be learned from such rhetorical exercises, however dazzling they may seem.

Robert Eric Frykenberg

Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed?: Questions for the Future of Ecumenism.


This masterly and impassioned analysis of the current state of the conciliar ecumenical movement is the product of many decades of leadership within the movement in North America and globally. Kinnamon writes out of personal experience while drawing on an amazingly rich tapestry of ecumenical relations, at points inviting ecumenical colleagues to contribute directly to the text of his book. He is far from optimistic for the ecumenical future but nevertheless maintains a clear vision of the centrality of ecumenism to biblical ecclesiology, combining this conviction with a lucid strategy for renewal.

As Kinnamon confesses, the book is full of lists (4), which provide helpful summary analysis of each issue addressed, as well as pointers to further research. Originally delivered as speeches, the chapters range widely from peace issues to Christian-Jewish relations and from justice to ecclesiology. After an introductory chapter the book falls into two main sections, the first reviewing the commitment of the ecumenical movement to such issues as peace, justice, and the environment, while the second deals with major challenges such as relationships with Catholic and Orthodox churches and the “add on” approach to ecumenism within some denominations. The concluding chapters present an agenda for ecumenical renewal.

Themes that Kinnamon returns to often are the tension between “cheap unity” (59) and “passionate disagreement—without breaking fellowship” (61), the value of diversity (84), the need to actualize within the churches the substantive agreements already reached (44), the role of the laity and local congregations (154), the failure of evangelicals and postdenominational churches to engage ecumenically (129), the need for ecumenical formation (134), and the severe financial constraints facing ecumenical structures (126).

On the basis of Kinnamon’s analysis, one is tempted to respond to the book’s title, Can [this] Renewal Movement Be Renewed?, with a fairly definite No—but only because Kinnamon presents a narrow view of ecumenism, that of conciliar ecumenism focused on North America. In a book subtitled Questions for the Future of Ecumenism, it is surprising, for example, to find no reference at all to the Global Christian Forum, the amazingly ecumenical work of the Bible societies, and denominational mission agencies that increasingly work ecumenically. Although there is a very brief reference
to ecumenical communities (154), major ecumenical movements such as the Global Day of Prayer, the Alpha Course, and Micah Challenge are ignored, as is the more formal cooperation we see internationally, for example, between Presbyterians, Catholics, and Anglicans heroically working for peace in South Sudan or between evangelical and Orthodox leaders focused on mission through the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative.

Kinnamon reminds us that “the ecumenical movement began as a lay [youth] enterprise—in the mission fields” (154). What, sadly, he fails to present is the hope, indeed the actuality, that renewed ecumenism will not be led by conciliar structures but by a network (127) of globally minded youth who draw creatively on the multifaceted Christian tradition and a rich pallet of global theologies. This renewal movement can be—is being—renewed.

—Mark Oxbrow

Mark Oxbrow, international director of Faith2Share, a global network of mission agencies of various ecclesial traditions, is also facilitator of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative for collaboration in mission, former assistant general secretary of the Church Mission Society (1988–2008), and an Anglican priest based in Oxford, U.K.

**Bible in Mission.**


There can be little question as to the centrality of the Bible to Christian faith in general and Christian mission in particular. *Bible in Mission* documents the wide range of ways that the Bible has been a foundation, motivation, and instrument of mission. Appearing as the eighteenth volume in the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, celebrating the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, *Bible in Mission* has a “transversal” focus, seeking to reflect the great confessional, geographic, historical, and hermeneutical diversity of the global church. This volume is not a textbook or systematic treatise, but rather a collection of essays displaying a broad array of perspectives on this important but often overlooked subject.

The text begins with three introductory chapters, of which Tim Carriker’s “The Bible as Text for Mission” provides an especially helpful overview. The remaining twenty-six chapters are divided into two sections. Section 1, “The Bible in Mission in the World and in the Church,” presents various religious contexts and confessional approaches to the topic in broad fashion. Section 2 offers specific case studies divided into four geographic regions. It moves the discussion from theory to the experience of real people in real places, illustrating how the Bible has been read, translated, or communicated in different contexts, with different audiences and with different theological convictions. For example, chapters present environmentalist, feminist, liberationist, and evangelical approaches to the Bible and mission. Readers will discover ways in which the Bible relates to the HIV crisis, poverty, evangelism, children, and youth. Concerns range from personal spiritual growth to social transformation. Contributions also vary stylistically: some are more descriptive or historical in nature, and others advocate for a particular approach; some are research based, while

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others are more anecdotal. This section provides both inspiration and information in a fascinating and sometimes surprising exploration of the subject.

The variety of perspectives and themes is at once the strength and the weakness of this volume. The wide range of theological orientations, contexts, and styles exposes the reader to a colorful and horizon-expanding sampling of how the relationship of Bible and mission can be understood. But this diversity also makes for rather bumpy reading as the reader moves from chapter to chapter. The editors have clearly chosen diversity over thematic continuity. Overall, Bible in Mission offers a valuable collection of essays that will enlighten, and potentially challenge, any reader who is passionate about God’s mission and the Word of God.

—Craig Ott

Craig Ott, professor of mission and intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, is director of its Ph.D. program in intercultural studies.
To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity.


Pentecostalism has changed the face of world Christianity, most visibly in the non-Western world. The attention given in recent scholarship to Pentecostal Christianity and its various versions of charismatic renewal is testimony to the growth and influence of a movement that, until half a century ago, was on the margins of world Christianity. To the Ends of the Earth, part of the Oxford Series on World Christianity (edited by Lamin Sanneh), is a welcome addition to Allan Anderson’s already impressive collection of writings on Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism is distinguished from Roman Catholicism and historic Protestantism by its emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit as normative in church life and worship. “The experience of the Spirit and belief in world evangelization are hallmarks of Pentecostalism,” Anderson writes, along with the belief of Pentecostals that they are “called to be witnesses for Jesus Christ in the farthest reaches of the globe in obedience to Christ’s commission” (1). This thought informs the title of the book as Anderson presents stories from across the world showing how—even within Western contexts, where Christianity is on the decline—Pentecostal forms are keeping the hope of the faith alive. In nine chapters the book covers history, as well as missiological and theological issues that have turned Pentecostal/charismatic Christianity into a world religious force. Various chapters deal with missions and migration, women and family, the Bible and community, and the ideology of evangelicalism everywhere. The range of themes quite fairly, although in chapter 5, on the use of the Bible, he could have gone a little beyond the older African Independent Churches. Prosperity preaching, which has become important in contemporary Pentecostalism, could also have been analyzed more extensively. Nevertheless, this is a useful volume that will serve seminaries and university departments looking for a broad study of the history, nature, and mission of Pentecostalism as a form of world Christianity.

—J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, a contributing editor, is Baëta-Grau Professor of African Christianity and Pentecostal Theology, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana.

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Owning the Earth: The Transforming History of Land Ownership.


Owning the Earth, while not a book about missions, reveals an underappreciated link between colonial history and mission history: the desire to own land. In twenty-three chapters divided into six sections, Andro Linklater surveys the growth of the idea of private property in England and America, compares this view with the alternatives being pursued elsewhere in Europe and China, and strives to account for how Western civilization took shape. It is a tale well told.

Linklater begins in 1583 with the first British attempts to conceive of how land in the New World would be owned. First, the British had to ignore the fact that the land was already held by First Nations/Native American peoples. Second, the models they worked with reflected the struggle for land ownership in the British Isles between the kings, the nobles, and individuals on the land. Linklater claims that, in the recent English past, “the liberties enshrined in the common law and in statutes from Magna Carta onwards—freedom from taxation without representation, recourse to the supreme authority of the legal system, the necessity of trial by jury, the existence of habeas corpus—had all emerged from the landowners’ basic need for security of tenure” (43). Thus, rather than taking politics or economics as basic to society, Linklater argues that all rests on land tenure.

The type of capitalism that developed in Britain was thus different from Continental (e.g., Dutch or French) capitalism, and certainly different from other forms of feudalism and serfdom (e.g., Polish or Russian). This difference was critical, Linklater argues, because “the history of the next two centuries would make it universally obvious that a private property society could harness resources that were not available to societies organized in other ways” (108).

Linklater ranges widely in his consideration of the opportunities and the dangers arising from a clear concept of private property. When inventions or even ideas are protected by patents (i.e., turned into private property), then the relationship between public good and public good teeters off-balance. When private property slips over into monopoly, then society suffers because the means of progress are taken off the table for most people.

Linklater takes the reader through the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Cold War, the mortgage collapse of 2008, and the Arab Spring, using his measure of whether a concept of private property is operative and how this factor is balanced with social justice (i.e., the needs of society) as a way of evaluating various movements and governments. Yet the central theme of the book is the future: “The task of feeding nine billion people in the middle of the twenty-first century will create such a mass of urgent and seemingly insoluble problems, it might seem perverse to suggest that the most important is how the land is owned. But that will be the key to solving all the others” (393).

Where is the concern here for missionaries and mission agencies? First, the study reveals the complicity of missionaries in support of and participation in the land grabs of the past. Second, the study wrestles with the issue of how to balance individual needs with social justice, which is surely a missionary concern. Finally, mission agencies might examine their own conceptions of ownership and their practices in securing land, even for “sacred” purposes.

Michael A. Rynkiewich

Michael A. Rynkiewich is retired as professor of anthropology from the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.

Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from the Ground Up.


Grassroots Asian Theology presents a vibrant picture of the people of God in the Global South, especially among the grassroots branches of Christianity. Simon Chan, professor of systematic theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore, brings Asian grassroots Pentecostalism as an authentic “flavor” into global ecumenical Christianity, challenging the issue of “how theology ought to be done” in an Asian context (8).

With theological articulation seriously and creatively derived from several historic Christian theological traditions, including Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, Chan lays out a number of very interesting theological premises. Carefully grounding his premises in Scripture, in tradition, and in ecclesial experience, he contrasts Eastern and Western ways of thinking, ending with the Asian family perspective as an appropriate and distinctive approach for Asian theology (43–46). He also draws extensively from a broad and diverse Asian religious cultural context, including a “middle zone” (discussed by Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiéou) in Asian folk religions to provide rationale for the grassroots Pentecostal-charismatic movements in Asia (30–35). In the chapter “God in Asian Contexts,” he favors the triune family as an analogy for the relationship of the persons within the Trinity (47–68). In the next chapter, Chan discusses humans as relational beings, not individuals, with sins seen in light of shame (useful in Asia’s culture of honor and shame, in contrast with the Western culture of guilt), which fractures the harmony of the community (69–90). Christ is seen as both high priest and ancestor; he is our “greatest ancestor” in this household of faith. Salvation is therefore the restoration to a right position in the family of God, where people are called the “holy brothers” (91–127). The Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and between the church and Christ (129–56). Finally, church life is a family life, or the communion of saints (both the living and the deceased), who are joined in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (157–202).

In places, readers may not agree with Chan or may need further discussion and exploration—for example, regarding the controversial practice of ancestral veneration (113–17, 188–97). Nevertheless, Grassroots Asian Theology draws our attention to Asian Christianity, where grassroots charismatic-Pentecostalism has significantly contributed to the efforts of the global church toward theological contextualization.

KimSon Nguyen

KimSon Nguyen is a Ph.D. student in the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.
Two Women: Anyentyuwe and Ekâkise.


Publication of Two Women: Anyentyuwe and Ekâkise brings out of obscurity this controversial and until now unpublished 1911 manuscript, written by missionary doctor Robert Hamill Nassau, who served in the late nineteenth century in what is now Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and coastal Cameroon. At the time it was written, the editor at the American Tract Society begged Nassau to suppress the account, fearing that it “would injure the cause of mission” (xix). A century later, editor Henry Bucher presents the work in its original form, while enriching it with a wealth of research notes, helpful maps, photos, three indexes, and suggestions for further reading in historical and contemporary scholarship.

Two Women, a biographical work, details the lives of two young African women, Anyentyuwe and Ekâkise, who were educated by the mission and members of the local church community. Both eventually fell into moral error, resulting in church discipline and excommunication.

Anyentyuwe, born into a wealthy family in what is now Libreville, Gabon, was educated and raised at the mission. Later orphaned, she became a default “servant” to the mission. In her twenties she was raped by another mission worker, resulting in pregnancy. A refined and educated young woman with an illegitimate child, Anyentyuwe was turned out of the mission and entered into a series of long-term liaisons with wealthy foreign men, which further damaged her reputation, though the liaisons provided some financial and domestic stability. The widowed Robert Nassau eventually hired Anyentyuwe as a governess to his young daughter, moving her to their remote interior mission station and touching off scandalous rumors regarding their relationship.

Ekâkise was similarly educated at the Cameroon mission but was sold by her extended family to a man with multiple wives. A child-bride at ten and a mother at fifteen, Ekâkise protested the unhappy and abusive marriage but received no sympathy from church leaders. As with Anyentyuwe, her extramarital liaisons resulted in excommunication. Nassau’s intervention and financial assistance (paying her bride-price to free her from her marital contract) only exacerbated the tensions in the community.

These two controversies, decades apart, injured Nassau’s reputation and resulted in his recall from the mission field. The manuscript is Nassau’s “apologia” (xxii), defending his own actions and those of the two women, while openly critiquing the local culture, church leadership, and the foreign missionary community for their failure to support such women in crisis.

Bucher offers the reader rich historical and cultural context without taking sides in the issue. He also gives due credit to Robert Nassau’s sister Isabella, who was influential in the lives of both women (xii). This work has great value for the student of African mission history, particularly those interested in women’s roles and status, gender issues, and sexuality.

—Mary Cloutier

Mary Cloutier served seven years in Gabon as a Christian and Missionary Alliance missionary, teaching at Bethel Bible Institute, Libreville. She recently completed a Ph.D. in intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

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Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts.


Beyond Literate Western Models is a fascinating attempt to contextualize theological education in oral contexts for effective world evangelization. Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy have assembled fifteen papers, along with some of the more insightful responses from a 2012 consultation on orality held at the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois. The four sections of the volume address pertinent issues, including local culture, methodology, and forms and methods of theological education among oral preference learners.

The book begins by discussing the importance of preparing students from formal theological institutions to train local people to tell Bible stories effectively. It makes the crucial suggestion that an interdisciplinary approach be used in oral contexts. Also important is the role of context in informal settings of theological education. The book discusses the differences between Western approaches to adult learning and those of West Africa, where under the influence of local culture learning takes place communally. Some helpful grassroots experiences are used as examples. The book gives some creative suggestions for effective theological education among oral-preference learners, including the use of context-based questions, such as, “Why are the people not interested in reading?” and “How might one collaborate with oral leaders and co-opt their in-put?” (153).

In the World Interior of Capital: For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization.


Peter Sloterdijk, an important contemporary philosopher, published In the World Interior of Capital (original German ed., 2005) as a summary and reflection on his lengthy trilogy Sphären (Spheres). In this book, in forty-two short chapters, Sloterdijk offers his iconoclastic reflections on globalization.

The image Sloterdijk uses to illustrate our globalized world is the Crystal Palace, the famous large-scale enclosure for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London. Today we live in an elaborate “crystal palace,” which also functions as a hothouse, rather than under the open sky. The palace is the invisible construction of global capital itself, which works unseen to shape our world and our understanding of ourselves in it. This palace, which has floors to designate the unequal status of humans who live within it, stands as “a planetary palace of consumption” (12).

Most of the book consists of Sloterdijk’s analysis of how this global crystal palace came about, based on the European expansion and conquest of the globe. He connects political and economic events to philosophical ideas and develops a general logic for understanding what is going on; he avoids the celebration of multiculturalism, differences, and local narratives by postmodern scholars. Sloterdijk pays particular attention to the role of cartography, because it provides an image of the world as a sphere; this “roundness of theory shaped Western consciousness from the Greeks until the end of modernity. He also focuses on the crucial role of Christian mission in the constitution of the modern world.

Today, Sloterdijk claims, we are passing into a new way of thinking. Rather than being a round sphere, today’s crystal palace absorbs the outside world into its complex crystalline structure. It is an enclosure, but it is not a sphere. Sloterdijk uses a somewhat cynical tone to describe what is happening with thought and life today, but he does not simply celebrate or lament it. He gives us tools to understand the world, and at the end of the book he cautiously suggests that “being extended in one’s own place is a good habit of being” (263), in contrast with the modernist pretensions to universality. At the same time, this being in one’s own place should not become an excuse for ignoring what is happening elsewhere.

This long-overdue pioneering work paves the way for more freedom and creativity in theological education among oral-preference learners. This is certainly important in the Global South, but not only there. The book could have given more attention to oral-preference learners among literates in the West. More important, the book fails to recognize the need to encourage the emergence of authentic local Christian theology. The task of contextualizing theological education (and mission) in oral contexts also needs to listen to voices of the local people in their struggle for justice, peace, and human dignity. In short, the holistic nature of the Gospel of Christ needs to be emphasized. For that reason, for a project such as this, more attention should be given to the local context in formulating theological or misiological questions, prioritizing issues, and finding answers to the questions.

—Jangkholam Haokip

Jangkholam Haokip is assistant professor of theology, Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India.

The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions.


The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom, the eleventh volume in the series “The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000–1500,” adds significantly to the history of missions in Asia. Divided into three parts, the volume comprises essays covering the “long and complex history of the Asian mission of the High
Middle Ages” (xvii). The essays focus on the development of the Latin-speaking missionary movement outside its immediate European context, providing a comprehensive discussion of the multifaceted context in which the Asian mission came into existence, developed, and withered. The contributors use a diverse body of primary sources, both written and material.

The essays in part 1, “Crusades and the Mission,” discuss the evolution of missions in the context of the Crusade movement. Major themes are conversion and the Crusaders as agents of conversion. Joan Flori discusses the motivations and the idealized perceptions of the Crusaders and questions whether conversion was their primary goal. Along similar lines, Elizabeth Siberry demonstrates that there were indeed two distinct camps: Crusaders (warriors) and missionaries (nonmilitary promoters of Christianity).

Whereas part 1 discusses the interaction of Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, part 2, “Discovering Asia,” introduces the development of Latin-speaking missions further east through the themes of exploration, travel, and trade. Part 3, “The Missions with the Mongols,” treats the missionary movement during the “established” period of the Mongol Empire. In particular, the appraisal of relationships between the Mongols and Christianity, including the role of diplomacy and trade in chapters 13–16, is most instructive.

This volume will be a great resource for scholars interested in missionary movements, as it brings together the product of research that is otherwise found only in scattered monographs and periodicals.

Barakatullo Ashurov is an independent researcher in Central Asia. He received his doctoral degree from SOAS, University of London; his research focuses on medieval Christianity in Central Asia and Iran.

Nuestra Fe: A Latin American Church History Sourcebook.


In their introduction, the Gonzálezes note that, from the famous 1511 homily of Fray Antonio de Montesinos, in which he condemned the colonists of Hispaniola for their mistreatment of the Indians, a pattern was set in Latin America that has continued until our own time. One group of Christians would invoke their Christian faith to justify abuse and exploitation, while another group would cite the same faith to insist, in the name of justice, on a radical transformation of society.

The book’s nine chapters contain primary sources covering the five centuries of Latin American church history. The first four deal with the colonial period and illustrate how Christianity was used both to support and to condemn the exploitation of Native Americans and African slaves. A few of the documents also show how Indians viewed Christianity. Others treat the suppression of the Jesuits, while still others are concerned with the Inquisition’s persecution of Jews who had converted to Christianity but then supposedly reverted secretly to their old religion.

Chapter 5 covers the new order of church-state relations that emerged following independence. Included here is the Roman Catholic Church’s response to the new liberal forces that came to dominate Latin America in the last half of the nineteenth century. Chapters 6 and 7 treat the animosity between Catholics and Jews.

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and Protestants that developed in the postcolonial period and lasted until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. These chapters were for me the most interesting section of the book. Here the documents expose a Catholic hierarchy clinging to the conservative past and fearing the so-called modernism that Pope Pius IX condemned in 1864 in his Syllabus of Errors. They likewise reveal a Protestantism imported by Europeans and North Americans who saw Latin American culture as backward and who seemed oblivious to the oppressive policies of the liberal politicians who supported them.

Chapter 8 focuses on the Catholic Church after Vatican II, with its intercine battles over liberation theology and the “preferential option for the poor” of the Medellín bishops’ conference. Chapter 9 treats the new challenges Pentecostalism and Afro-Caribbean religion pose for both Catholicism and liberal Protestantism.

The Gonzálezes are to be commended for their excellent choice of document selection. Their book should prove especially valuable to undergraduate and graduate students of Latin American history. A bonus feature is the questions the authors include for readers of the texts to ponder. The only disappointing feature of the book is the absence of an index and a bibliography, which would have proven valuable for guiding readers who want to delve deeper into the study of Latin American religious history.

—Edward T. Brett

Edward T. Brett is professor emeritus of history, La Roche College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions.


In True and Holy, Leo Lefebure discusses interreligious dialogue, hermeneutics, and interfaith relations. Christianity’s interactions with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are prefaced by analysis of the interplay of interreligious and intrareligious dialogue, as well as a review of hermeneutics from the early church fathers to the present. The reader is thus prepared to consider in the light of Scripture the wide variety of encounters, both positive and negative, that Christians have had with the four religious traditions under review.

Judaism’s extensive scriptural overlap with Christianity and a commonality of themes and figures of both faiths with Islam have invited direct scriptural juxtapositions through the centuries. Christian commentators unabashedly used Jewish Scriptures to make sense of Islam, even as Jewish theologians challenged Christian thinkers on the validity of their understanding of the First Testament. The relationship of Christianity to Hinduism is more subtle, given the few early Christian records documenting how St. Thomas’s congregations viewed the majority culture scripturally. Gandhi’s use of Christian Scripture, however, to oppose British hegemony shows how the Christian Bible is not reserved for Christians alone to interpret. As a result, the church’s understanding of Jesus owes much to Hindu perspectives.

Buddhism is the main focus of Lefebure’s personal scholarly interests. The relationship of Buddhism to Christianity as viewed through the lens of biblical

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interpretation is not readily obvious to more casual observers or practitioners of Buddhist-Christian interreligious dialogue. Yet Jesus, who spoke of camels passing through the eye of a needle, would not have been a stranger to modes of expression found in Zen.

Lefebure cautions Christians not to reject how Scripture may speak to us through the eyes of the other. His examples are thought-provoking.

—Steven Blackburn

Steven Blackburn, an ordained Congregational-Christian pastor, serves as library director and faculty associate in Semitic Scriptures, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut.

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religions. The authors’ view that the World Council of Churches as a whole embraces “theological liberalism” and “pluralism” (128) is patently incorrect. The authors here pass over missionary statesmen such as Hendrik Kraemer and Lesslie Newbigin, who were an integral part of the ecumenical movement and at the same time vehemently opposed relativism inside its ranks. The authors of the Introduction to Global Missions refer to John Stott but fail to mention that this evangelical leader and drafter of the Lausanne Covenant (1974) was a devoted member of the Anglican Church, one of the founding churches of the World Council of Churches.

The book’s one-sidedness also comes to the fore in the bibliography. The authors pay no attention to publications of Majority World theologians. Moreover, from Gustav Warneck onward, they fail to include even a single source published in continental Europe. The largest missiological series in the world, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity (Bern: Peter Lang), certainly deserves a place in such a volume. Also lacking are mention of contemporary mission handbooks and mission encyclopedias (e.g., by David B. Barrett, 1982, 2001; Jan A. B. Jongeneel, 1995–97; Gerald H. Anderson, 1998; Jonathan Bonk, 2007) and, in particular, David Bosch’s Transforming Mission (1991), the most translated and most widely used missiological textbook.

As a mission scholar in a state university, I am disappointed; as a mission theologian, however, I sincerely recommend this book. After all, it will help its readers to engage in God’s global mission.

—Jan A. B. Jongeneel

Jan A. B. Jongeneel is honorary professor emeritus of mission studies at Utrecht University and an honorary lifetime member of the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS). His magnum opus is Jesus Christ in World History (Peter Lang, 2009).

### Pentecostal Mission and Global Christianity.


This “Pentecostal volume” in the Edinburgh Centenary Series fills a lacuna in mission studies. Whereas the Pentecostal movement as a whole receives full attention in discussions of the current global topography of Christianity, Pentecostal mission itself has been less studied. This comprehensive compilation of global Pentecostal mission portrays the dynamics of Pentecostal mission from diverse geographic and denominational backgrounds. The majority of the authors represent views from the Global South. Yet, with only two female theologians, the range of contributors lacks a gender balance. All of them share Pentecostal convictions, thus giving the volume an insider perspective on global Pentecostal mission.

A historical overview of the century of Pentecostal expansion in diverse sociocultural contexts is followed by organizational surveys of Pentecostal mission practice. In systematic theological terms, the volume describes Pentecostal mission in the pneumatological categories of power, healing, and restoration. The thematic spectrum includes self-reflexive perceptions and outlines themes arising in Pentecostal mission, including ecology, Pentecostal social responsibility, and ecumenism.

The volume does not deny tensions...
that exist between Pentecostal mission and the broader Christian community. It considers emphases on church growth and church planting as a strong Pentecostal asset vis-à-vis the ecumenical focus on mis-
sio Dei. Several chapters, however, reveal an ecumenical consciousness within the Pentecostal movement. For example, the book devotes considerable attention to the theme of church and society, addressing questions of social justice and inter-
religious dialogue and considering the development of Pentecostal theologies of religion. By exploring such areas in global Pentecostal mission, the volume suggests a Pentecostal rapprochement toward the wider ecumenical movement. As the volume delineates hitherto marginalized areas of Pentecostal mission, it opens up fresh directions in Pentecostal studies; its insider perspective, which highlights variations in Pentecostal mission theology, will contribute to discussion of ecumenical praxis. Students as well as practitioners of mission will find much of value here.

—Andreas Heuser

Andreas Heuser is professor of non-European Christianity, with a focus on Africa, in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Basel, Switzerland.


During the past thirty years, expanding scholarship on the history of Christian-
ty in southern Africa has moved the focus of discussion away from African-
European confrontations, which preoc-
cupied scholars during the anticolonial and antiapartheid struggles, toward more complex and nuanced views of the social changes that accompanied those conflicts. In doing so, scholars have often attempted a multidisci-
plinary approach, combining the histo-
rian’s concern for temporal specificity, individual agency, and political change with the anthropologist’s examination of broader cultural influences and differ-
ent ways that people have conceptual-
ized their experiences and surroundings. Though perhaps sometimes discordant in their multiple disciplinary emphases, the resulting studies have nevertheless greatly enriched our understanding of the important role that Christianity played in the evolution of African-Euro-
pean relations during the nineteenth cen-
tury.

Ingie Hovland’s Mission Station Chris-
tianity is a valuable contribution to that growing body of scholarship. Building on the work of anthropologists Jean and

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John Comaroff and historians Norman Etherington, Paul Landau, and Elizabeth Elbourne, Hovland shifts from their study of “missionized” Africans to explore instead the “impact of the encounter on the missionaries themselves” (10). She focuses on small Christian communities founded and led by Lutheran missionaries of the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) during the mid-nineteenth century in the borderland between the British colony of Natal and the Zulu kingdom. Though her interest is apparently inspired in part by her own upbringing as a child of missionaries at one of those communities, Hovland’s study of the “social and material microcosm of the mission station” (20) is guided primarily by the fact that, rather than promoting the development of African-led congregations in African communities, as envisioned by many missionaries elsewhere in southern Africa, the NMS missionaries instead adopted a strategy of building European-run outposts of “Christian civilization” in the midst of “heathen darkness.”

In explaining how and why the NMS mission stations assumed that position, Hovland divides her book into chapters that consider in greater detail various aspects of the communities. After first describing the historical setting of the NMS missions, she examines the physical needs of the missionaries and the influence these needs had on the use of mission spaces. Next is a detailed analysis of “conversion” and the contradiction between Christian egalitarianism and colonial racism. Another chapter describes Zulu perceptions of the mission stations. The section ends with an overview of the main ways that Norwegian missionaries viewed their stations as European-run enterprises located between the British and the Zulu. The book continues with a chapter describing how the Anglo-Zulu wars brought the NMS into closer association with British colonial rule, and a final chapter summarizes how the mission stations shaped—and were shaped by—the missionaries’ “way of working out how to live Christianity in the world and to create an inhabitable Christian space” (233).

While very well-written and well-reasoned, and adding Norwegians to a field of study generally dominated by British missionaries, Mission Station Christianity also threads a somewhat uneven path between anthropology and history. More comprehensive archival research including government records, newspapers, diaries, personal correspondence, and documents from other mission societies is arguably beyond the scope of an anthropological work, but the book’s recurring “Note on Method” interludes suggest that the author’s use of historical primary sources could have been incorporated more effectively. This historian found Hovland’s arguments to be most original and compelling when she moved beyond her dependence on published missionary reports to include other materials (e.g., 60–71, 87–91, 210–16, 220). Overall, however, Mission Station Christianity provides a valuable contribution to the study of mission history and the impact of European colonial conquest on Christianity in Africa.

—Stephen Volz

Stephen Volz is associate professor of history, Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio.

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Dissertation Notices

Birdsall, S. Douglas.
“Conflict and Collaboration: A Narrative History and Analysis of the Interface between the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians, and the AD2000 Movement.”

Cochrane, Steve.
“From Beit Abhe to Angamali: Connections, Functions and Roles of the Church of the East’s Monasteries in Ninth Century Christian-Muslim Relations.”

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To search OMSC’s free online database of 6,300 dissertations in English, compiled in cooperation with Yale Divinity School Library, go to www.internationalbulletin.org/resources.

Sage, Steven Brent.
“Missio Dei and the Local Church: Case Studies in Pursuit of a Missional Ecclesiology for the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).”
D.Miss. Pasadena, Calif.: Fuller Theological Seminary, 2013.
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Immigrant Faith: Patterns of Immigrant Religion in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.  

Fensham, Charles.  
To the Nations of the Earth: A Missional Spirituality.  

Fountain, Daniel E.  
Health for All: The Vanga Story.  

Gravelle, Gilles.  

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The 2011 Triple Disaster in Japan and the Diaspora: Lessons Learned and Ways Forward.  

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The World Is Not Ours to Save: Finding the Freedom to Do Good.  